

**THE BOOK OF ESTHER :
ITS PRACTICAL LESSONS
AND DRAMATIC SCENES**

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The Book of Esther : its practical lessons and dramatic scenes by Alexander Raleigh

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ALEXANDER RALEIGH

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PREFACE.



THE Author of these Lectures has chanced to see of late in some secular prints which he respects, a very disparaging estimate expressed of this Book of Esther. Remembering that he had, not long ago, spent the Sunday evenings of more than two months, not unhappily to himself, and, as he was assured at the time, not without instruction and profit to his people, in lecturing through this Book: recollecting also that he had been asked by not a few of them to put the Lectures into print, partly for the sake of the interesting history, and yet more for the worth of the lessons drawn from it—he has been

induced (and for other reasons as well which need not be stated) to reconsider the case, and to give now to the world, or rather to that very small part of it which will concern itself with the matter, this little volume, which now no one is asking for, but which the Author modestly hopes may not be unwelcome to some who have had favour to his writings, and possibly also to some beyond. The Lectures are what is called "popular"—one hopes in no inferior sense. Still, they were written to be spoken, and not in the writing of them intended to be read. The style therefore is in a few places perhaps a little affluent. But the Author has not applied the pruning-knife, or sought to change the style, for indeed, he means nothing more, nor perhaps could he mean anything greater, by the publication of this little book, than a wider preaching.



CONTENTS.

LECTURE	PAGE
I. THE FEAST	1
II. HOW THE FEAST ENDED	24
III. THE NEW QUEEN	48
IV. HAMAN AND MORDECAI	69
V. DEEPENING TROUBLE	88
VI. THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE	109
VII. THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT	134
VIII. ESTHER'S SECOND BANQUET	155
IX. ESTHER GOING IN TO THE KING TO MAKE REQUEST FOR HER PEOPLE.	180
X. JOY AND GLADNESS, A FEAST AND A GOOD DAY	205
XI. DEFENCE AND VICTORY OF THE JEWS	231



LECTURE I.

THE FEAST.

THIS Book of Esther stands in the canon of Holy Scripture. But it is no secret that its place there has been challenged. Even Luther "expressed a wish that the Book of Esther was not contained in the Bible." This wish of the great Reformer was, no doubt, grounded on those characteristics of the book, negative and positive, which give it a uniqueness not altogether pleasant.

'Tis said, for instance, that it reads like an Oriental story or romance. 'Tis a tale for the traveller's tent ; or for any listening evening group, and by some mistake must have found its way into the sacred record. But it is difficult to see any force in this objection, since this is exactly what it professes to

be—a tale, an eastern tale, and full of eastern imagery, as far at least as the facts of the exterior history go. May not God write any portion of human history, transpiring in any part of the world, if He sees it needful to do so for the instruction of mankind? The questions of real importance are such as these:—How is the history written? What instructions are given in it? What lessons are intended to be drawn by the readers?

“True,” say the objectors, “but there is no sound instruction in the book at all. The personages introduced are not great, are not even good morally. The characters delineated are all of a worldly type; or, if the religious tone is found in any of them, it is unusually low, hardly recognisable as a religious tone at all. An eastern despot putting out his personal will as the supreme law of a vast empire, and at times turning all his power and wealth into means for the gratification of sensual appetites and wicked passions! A malignant prime minister who can plot the destruction of a whole race who have done no wrong, and whom he is bound to protect, because *one* of their number has refused to