

June 6, 2005 – Subject: God the Preserver of Man

DEAR FRIENDS: Mary Baker Eddy gave her students 26 subjects for weekly Bible Lessons, to be covered twice yearly. Flowing through the year in her order of the subjects, we hereby present fresh views of each one by outstanding Christian Scientists. In this way, we hope to partake with you of new unfoldments of her infinite revelation.

Our selection this week is from – The Bible as Our Life by Peggy Brook. Peggy has taken the Book of Esther in three parts titled: I.) Manhood needs womanhood II.) Womanhood puts on manhood and III.) True manhood and womanhood reign supreme.

Here we present part I –

Esther I

Manhood needs womanhood

(Esther 1. 1-2:18)

THE BOOK OF ESTHER is one of the gems of the Bible. The story is well known of how a young Jewish maiden, Esther, under the watchful care of her guardian, Mordecai, became queen of Persia, and thus was able to save her people, the Jewish remnant, from being exterminated in captivity. It is a beautiful, lively tale – cruel in parts when taken literally; interpreted spiritually, however, it has a vital message, particularly pertinent today.

The need for living the spiritual ideal

Essentially practical, the Book of Esther involves specifically the living of the spiritual ideal in the world. The preceding Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are concerned respectively with the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, – the rebuilding of spiritual consciousness through its eternal Christ and its inspired Word. Here in Esther the whole background changes, and the scene is set away from Jerusalem and out in the world, where the spiritual ideal has to be lived by a minority group, amidst misunderstanding and persecution. Literally the action takes place in the kingdom of Ahasuerus, the Persian king, who “reigned from India even unto Ethiopia,” as the first chapter tells us. The majority of the Jewish

people did not return to Jerusalem to rebuild, but remained under Persian rule, and here, through the actions of Mordecai and Esther, we see how this remnant was preserved when in peril of their lives.

Spiritually, this story shows how the development of the spiritual idea is saved from being overwhelmed by worldly beliefs and forces, and this through the active living of spiritual Truth as true manhood and womanhood.

In this age, when it is said that materialism is reaching its peak and causing men to believe in God no longer, it is strengthening to ponder a story where the spiritual idea also appeared in danger of being blotted out, and to identify the spiritual forces that were quietly at work saving the situation. Today, as then, those who have eyes to see can discern the same spiritual forces in operation, and be encouraged by the signs of the times.

We speak of men today as no longer believing in God; yet millions would acknowledge a supreme power outside of themselves, or have an innate belief in the ultimate triumph of that which is truly good. It is the almost superstitious emotions that the word "God" evokes in so many that have caused them to voice their disbelief in God. Interestingly enough, in this Book of Esther, which deals with the preserving of the spiritual idea in a worldly setting, the word "God" does not occur once. It is the only book of the Bible in which "God" is not mentioned. On the other hand, the story shows true Godlikeness or goodness actively lived, rather than spoken about. The lesson to be learned here is surely that "God" is not a name for an abstract, objective force, but is the supreme and infinitely good nature to be loved and lived here and now in men's experience.

The inherent power of "small things"

Another illuminating factor in this story is that the name "Mordecai" means "taught of God, ... little man." One of the recurring themes of the Scriptures is that that which is of God or infinite good, though it may look small to human sense, will nevertheless overcome what appears to be large and powerful material opposition, and reign supreme. This is the significance of the stories of David and Goliath and of the "still small voice" that spoke to Elijah on Mount Horeb after the wind, the earthquake, and the fire had spent themselves. Elisha at Dothan, seeming to be in the minority against a powerful

army, was protected by invisible “horses and chariots of fire.” One lone man, Daniel, relying solely on prayer, was safe in the den of lions. In another vein, the Saviour of mankind, Christ Jesus, did not enter the world arena born in a palace or with influential connections to support his mission. He was born so humbly and lived so simply that probably not a whisper of his birth reached the world of so-called power politics and the learned circles of his day. Yet his advent was later to date the Christian era, and the influence of his life and teachings to permeate our civilization.

It is true, as Paul says, that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called... God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty...that no flesh should glory in his presence.” Zechariah, before him, knew this law, and declared, “For who hath despised the day of small things?”

So this story of Esther serves as an encouragement to all “little men” everywhere who give themselves to being “taught of God,” who listen for the “still small voice” of Truth to instruct them, guide them, and interpret the universe to them. It illustrates the saving power that results from faithfulness to this spiritual ideal and alert and active obedience to its demands. It also shows that this obedience needs womanhood qualities as well as those of manhood; in fact, it emphasizes the need for this balanced consciousness in the living practice of spiritual law.

The effect of manhood separated from womanhood

Chapter I of the Book of Esther presents King Ahasuerus, seated on his throne in Shushan, holding a feast for all his princes and servants and the nobles in Persia and Media. His purpose was to display the riches of his kingdom and his great power. Ahasuerus is a symbol of the mortal man – man reckoned merely on a human basis. Today too we see men glorying in their achievements and power, and this may be natural and legitimate, but what a difference will come with the increasing recognition of the great spiritual forces impelling man in his progressive achievements. Conscious of the reality and supremacy of these forces, men will begin to experience dominion over themselves and their bodies, as Jesus did, and the progress of mankind will have less sorrow, calamity, and disaster.

Progress is always more painless where there is spiritual awareness.

This quality of spiritual awareness, which recognizes the one spiritual Cause behind all intelligence, substance, and life, is that of womanhood. Womanhood is that innate spiritual sense which intuitively accepts Spirit as All-in-all. The great Exemplar, Christ Jesus, presented the ideal man, – a whole man embracing the qualities of manhood and womanhood. What characterized the manhood of Jesus? In the main, the fact that he was a doer of works. He was always actively about his Father’s business, as he said of himself. In doing the works he expressed intelligence, true reasoning, courage, strength, forthrightness – all manhood qualities. But what of his womanhood? This, surely, was manifest in his never-failing acceptance of the divine origin of his works, – the divine origin of all that he was and all that he did. It was the quality of womanhood that made Jesus so certain of the fact that “I and my Father are one,” and which caused him to declare, “I can of mine own self do nothing” and “The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” This spiritual conviction also brings with it the assurance of the infinite sustenance and protection of all that is good.

To return to the first chapter of Esther, we witness here manhood separated from womanhood – mortal man glorying in his personal achievements, completely regardless of the divine origin of all things. True, there is a symbol of womanhood in this first chapter, for Ahasuerus had a wife, Queen Vashti, but we read in verse 9 that she was holding a separate feast from the king, – a feast for the women of the royal house. Bible commentaries remark that it was a very unusual occurrence for a queen to hold a separate feast from her husband, and one feels that it is introduced to emphasize the effect of manhood separated from womanhood, – to present a picture of the empty build-up of false values without the wedding of true progress to spiritual intuition and conviction.

When King Ahasuerus summoned the queen to come to him, she refused. This much angered him and eventuated in a royal command that Vashti be deposed from being queen. Vashti means “The desired one wish, desire, beauty,” and it is said that Ahasuerus desired her to come to the feast merely because he wanted “to shew the people and the princes her beauty.” Male and female qualities, in a wordly sense, often present a dominating, possessive

character on the one hand and merely outward beauty on the other, which engender unsatisfied desire and constitute no basis for progressive fulfilment. This false sense of male and female can find no real unity, and one senses that Ahasuerus, in deposing the queen, was beginning his awakening to a new conception of womanhood, though unaware of what was destined to fill this vacuum and bring him peace and satisfaction. Many seekers go through this same experience of discarding that which no longer satisfies them, and though this may bring them a “wilderness” period and they may not be able even to visualize the nature of the “promised land,” nevertheless their very yearnings bring them nearer to it.

There later came a time when King Ahasuerus began to feel the need of a queen, even as today men are seeking for satisfaction and peace of mind which ultimately can come only with the recognition of spiritual origin. As the Psalmist wrote, “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.” The king’s servants then sought for young virgins to be brought to the palace; these were put in charge of Hege, the king’s chamberlain and keeper of the women, whose job it was to prepare them to go in to the king for him to choose his bride.

Manhood wisely cherishes womanhood

At this point Esther comes into the picture. She was the ward and cousin of Mordecai, a Jew, who served in the palace, having been carried away captive from Jerusalem when it was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar. Esther was “fair and beautiful.” She had no father nor mother, but was brought up by Mordecai as his own daughter. Esther means “a star.” Her Hebrew name “Hadassah” means “bride.” Mordecai, as we have seen, means “taught of God... little man.”

One is touched spiritually by the picture of Mordecai, a servant in the palace, quietly and faithfully cherishing this fair and beautiful young maid, preparing her for what he seemed to know instinctively was her destiny. Symbolically it speaks of the all-importance of every “little man” who quietly determines to be “taught of God” and to listen to the “still small voice,” and who cherishes and cares for the spiritual ideal, conscious of its great destiny and ultimate power as the Saviour of mankind.

When Mordecai brought Esther to Hege, keeper of the women, she

pleased him immediately, and he gave her the best place in the house of the women. The virgins chosen for the king had to undergo a period of purification, and during this time Mordecai kept a watchful eye on Esther, as he had always done. In the development of spiritual consciousness it is wise to allow our manhood to watch over our womanhood. Mary Baker Eddy put this beautifully in one of her prayers concerning completeness:

"My manhood takes care of my womanhood, defends, protects, and supports her. My joy is defended and protected by my courage. My love is protected and defended by my understanding, by the strength of my scientific understanding, which is omnipotence. I am never undefended."

Esther had to undergo twelve months of preparation in the palace before being brought to the king. May this not symbolize woman thought being humble enough to become acquainted with whatever seems necessary of the human set-up, before entering upon its mission? In any man's lifework, a great desire to fulfil his true mission will always bring into his experience just the surroundings and circumstances that he needs in order to equip him to fulfil his destiny.

The irresistible appeal of true womanhood

A great point is made here of the fact that Mordecai had charged Esther not to reveal her kindred, – not to say that she was a Jewess, – and this charge she was under bonds to keep until very much later in the story, – in fact, until after she had become queen.

There is such a lesson in this detail. Esther had to prove herself by what she was. Today the world is rapidly tiring of labels, and one feels that in every worthwhile adherence it is the living values operating in practice that weigh with men, regardless of what label is given to its body of truths. One is reminded of the birth of Moses in Egypt, when the decree of Pharaoh was in force that every Israelite babe should be slaughtered. Moses' mother hid him and cherished him, and when she was no longer able to hide him, she put him in an ark of bulrushes on the river's edge. Pharaoh's daughter, suddenly finding him, could not resist the appeal of this babe, regardless of the fact that it was a Hebrew child. His innocence and purity spoke for themselves, and she accepted him. In a more developed way, Esther's pure womanhood was to speak for itself and her people.

When Esther's turn came to go in to the king, it is said that she neither required nor desired the extra beautifying that was available to the women. She went in as she was, and immediately the king loved Esther and made her his queen. How simple and how completely free of complications was this natural attraction! And today one will find many who are weary of the unsatisfying nature of materiality and are seeking to wed themselves to spiritual values, responding naturally and warmly to the expression of pure spiritual sense. One feels that Esther took it for granted that she would be loved. She did not expect rejection. Moreover, she did not feel she had to "gild the lily," but needed only to let her natural loveliness speak for itself.

Spiritual sense is the birthright of every man, and the realization of this breaks down barriers so that heart speaks to heart on a spiritual level in a completely natural way. Paul, who was instrumental in bringing many into the awareness of the Christ spirit, wrote to the Corinthians about this natural appeal of spiritual sense, "And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The things of the Spirit do speak to man, because spiritual being is native to everyone.

A story is told of a poetry reading in the home of Sir Henry Irving, the actor, when everyone in turn read through the twenty-third Psalm. Later, Sir Henry was asked why his rendering of the Psalm, though perfectly executed, did not move his listeners, whereas the reading of these words by a little unknown woman in the group touched their very hearts. He replied, "I knew the twenty-third Psalm. She knew the Shepherd." And it is so that spiritual sense, which is at the core of every man's identity, responds to the great reality of Spirit, wherever it is naturally and purely expressed.

Manhood and womanhood one

So Ahasuerus wedded Esther and gave a great feast in celebration, but a different kind of feast from the one with which the book opens. Here he set prisoners free and gave gifts. There is always a release from imprisoning conditions, and an ability to give out and to share

blessing, when manhood weds itself to true womanhood. This wedding comes about when all that is progressive and that speaks of initiative, intelligence, and uncompromising Truth weds itself to a truly meek and pure acceptance of the divine origin of this activity and indeed of all creation, with its consequent assurance of infinite sustenance and protection. The unsatisfied desire to be ceaselessly “getting” and maintaining what one has “got” is refreshingly laid off before the realization of already being the fulfilled and complete reflection of a divine Cause. It is a natural acceptance of “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.”

In this story, as we shall see, it is this union of true manhood and womanhood that is destined to foil and offset all the subtleties of the carnal mind which now enter into the picture through Haman, the chief minister of the king. If men will put on “the whole armour of God” in a living spiritual way, it will enable them “to stand against the wiles of the devil” today, as it has always done and always will do.

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