

## THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

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THE story of Esther as related in the Bible is familiar to us all. In it we read of a Jewish girl who opportunely became queen of Persia and through her position was enabled to save her people from the machinations of the viceroy Haman, who was plotting to bring about their destruction. This story has about it certain peculiarities which may well puzzle the student.

In the first place, it is far beneath the standard of the other books of the Bible in its ethical conception. (a) Mordecai's advice to Esther to conceal the fact of her being a Jewess is, to say the least, cowardly and not at all in keeping with the conduct of other biblical personages in similar circumstances, such as Jonah and Daniel. (b) The last chapters of the book reek with innocent blood which was shed for no good reason. Esther, as a Jewish woman from whom we would justly expect kindness and pity, insists upon the Jews avenging themselves upon the Gentiles, and in consequence seventy-five thousand people are killed. And when the king asks her again what is her desire, she answers in an unwomanly and inhuman manner that she would have Shushan given over to slaughter for another day. This demand, aside from being immoral, un-Jewish and unwomanly, was dangerous and impolitic; for Esther should have thought of the future when there would be no Jewish queen to protect her people, when the Gentiles, having the upper hand once more, would surely avenge her atrocities. (c) Again, the demand that the ten sons of Haman be executed because of their father's guilt is against the Jewish law as expressed in Deuteronomy, where it is plainly set forth that fathers shall not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor the children for the sins of their fathers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxiv. 17.

From an historical point of view the book again presents numerous incongruities and difficulties. (*a*) Thus it is usually supposed to have been written during the Persian supremacy over Judea, yet no reference whatever is made to any contemporary Jewish event; neither are any Jewish worthies of the time—Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, or the late prophets—mentioned. (*b*) No allusion is made to the people of Judea, to the temple, sacrifices, or any other Jewish institution. (*c*) No truly religious idea is expressed in the book even where there would have been occasion for doing so, as the offering of a prayer or allusion to God's direct intervention. (*d*) In the whole book the name of God is not even mentioned, a phenomenon very unusual in Jewish writing. (*e*) The Book of Esther does not prescribe any religious services or ceremonies for Purim; it simply enjoins that they should "make them (Purim) days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor." (*f*) Jewish contemporary history does not know of the personages of the book: (i) None of the apocryphal writings refer to this miraculous escape of the Jews from destruction. (ii) Ben Sirach, in his enumeration of the Jewish worthies<sup>2</sup> seemed to be ignorant of a Jewish queen of Persia and of a Jewish viceroy. (iii) The feast of Purim is not mentioned by any of the ancient writers, being referred to for the first time in Jewish history by Josephus.<sup>3</sup> (iv) Second Maccabees has the day of Mordecai fall on the 14th of Adar, which would show that there was no agreement as to the name of the festival in Judea.<sup>4</sup>

The book presents glaring incongruities. (*a*) In ii. 5 we are told that Mordecai was one of the captives taken along with Jehoniah (Jehoiakim), King of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar. This incident took place in 596 B. C. But the Esther incident is supposed to have occurred in the twelfth year of the reign of Xerxes; i. e., about one hundred and twenty-two years after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. It is rather hard to believe that Mordecai, at the age of at least one hundred and twenty-five or thirty years, should be called upon to assume the responsibilities of viceroy of Persia. (*b*) Every one about the Persian court knew that Mordecai was the uncle of Esther, for he communicated often with her. He was also called Mordecai the Jew, and was therefore known as belonging to that race. Yet no one seems to have known that

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiasticus xlv-xlix.

<sup>3</sup> Ant. XI, 186.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Mac. xv. 36.

Esther, his niece, was a Jewess. (*c*) We are told further (iii. 6) that Haman determined to kill all the Jews of Persia, because Mordecai, the Jew, would not bow down before him. Yet in another portion of the narrative (vi. 13) Haman's family and friends seem to be ignorant of Mordecai's race. (*d*) Ahasuerus first authorizes Haman to destroy the Jews by giving him the royal signet ring (iii. 10). Later, however, he is much surprised by the information Esther gives him regarding Haman's decree for the destruction of the Jews (vi. 5). (*e*) No Jew in the days of the Persian empire would have dared to disobey the laws of the king and refuse, as did Mordecai in the story, to bow down before the viceroy of the realm. (*f*) The description of the Jews put in the mouth of Haman would hardly fit the Jews at the time of the Persian empire, inasmuch as they were then living only in three places, Egypt, Babylon and Palestine.

There are also several statements made in the Book of Esther which are contradictory to Persian law and custom,—so much so as to place the writer or writers of the book under suspicion of ignorance of Persia and its institutions. (*a*) For instance, the suggestion given by one of the courtiers of Ahasuerus and the edict in accordance with this suggestion,—that the maidens of all nations be gathered at Shushan in order that from their midst might be selected a successor to Queen Vashti—was against all Persian laws and customs. (*b*) The choice of Esther as queen was in opposition to the law of Avesta and the testimony of Herodotus.<sup>5</sup> (*c*) Persian history knows of no Persian queen named Vashti' or Esther. (*d*) Again, the appointment of two foreigners—Haman the Agagite, and Mordecai the Benjamite—as viceroys of Persia is not compatible with Persian custom; nor does Persian history mention these names. (*e*) Likewise the issuing of decrees in the languages of all the provinces, as recorded in the book (i. 22; iii. 12), was not the customary method of issuing decrees in the Persian realm. The Persian and Babylonian languages were the only ones used in all. (*f*) It would seem from the book that no one could approach the king unsummoned under pain of death; but from what we know of the Persian monarchs, we can infer that they were not so inaccessible. (*g*) Again, that the queen should not be able to see the king, or even send him a message, is a strange custom in any oriental monarchy. (*h*) Persia never was divided into one hundred

<sup>5</sup> The Greek historian says (III, 84) that the Persian queen was selected only from among the seven noblest families of Persia. No other woman could ever become queen.

and twenty-seven states or governments. Herodotus tells us that it was divided into twenty; and the inscriptions, that it was divided into twenty-seven. (i) The king could not issue the laws ascribed to him in Esther without consulting his councillors. He is made first to give an order for a massacre of the Jews of his realm, and then to change the order so that it applied to the Gentiles. This procedure was not in accordance with the laws of the Persians as we know them. (j) The city of Shushan, the capital of the empire seems to side with the Jews, and feel very deeply for them in their trouble,—a state of things which is rather singular in view of the fact that Shushan was inhabited mainly by Persians.

Other peculiarities of the book are: (a) The accumulation of coincidents and contrasts which is characteristic of fiction rather than of actual history. In particular is this seen in the entrance of Haman to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai at the very hour when the latter's good record of service to the monarch is being read. (b) The names of the characters. The names Mordecai and Esther are not Jewish, but rather Babylonian. In fact there is not a Jewish character in the entire book. We may go even a step further and say that with the exception of King Ahasuerus, who is supposedly King Xerxes (485-465 B. C.), the names are all names of gods and goddesses and not of human beings at all. *Vashti* is an old goddess of the Iranians, the forefathers of the Persians and Hindus.<sup>6</sup> *Esther*, again, is Babylonian, identical with *Ishtar*, the goddess of fertility. *Hadassah* (= myrtle-bride), was used as a title for the same goddess *Ishtar* during her ceremony. *Mordecai* is the Babylonian god *Marduk*. *Haman* is identical with *Homan*, god of Elam and the inveterate enemy of *Marduk*, god of Babylon. *Zeresh* is *Gerusha* or *Kirisha*, an Elamite goddess.

From all that was said before, it is clear not only that the story is not based upon facts in Jewish history, but also that the writer was not a Jew. Otherwise there can be no reason assigned for the departure of the Book of Esther from the other biblical compositions and ideas. In all probability the Hebrews translated it from some other language, inserting the names of Jews in order to Judaize it. The question would therefore be: Who wrote this story originally, and what was the nationality of the author? The names of the various characters—*Mordecai*, *Esther*, *Haman*, and *Vashti*—are names of divinities known to us from Babylonian

<sup>6</sup> The name *Vashti* is still a favorite one with the old Gypsies who are supposed to be of the old Iranian stock. See Leland, *The Gypsies*.

history; hence they would seem more appropriate in a Babylonian than in a Jewish story. As a Babylonian story, the book would recount the great victory of Marduk and Ishtar, the gods of Babylon, over their inveterate enemies, Homan and Vashti, the gods of Elam. We know from history that these two nations, Babylon and Elam, were constantly at war with each other.<sup>7</sup> For this reason the majority of scholars are inclined to believe that the Esther story was really a Babylonian composition, telling of the fight of Marduk, the god of Babylon, with Homan, the god of Elam. If we should remove what are obviously interpolations made by the Hebrew translators—such as all references to the Jewish people—we would be even more convinced that the story belongs to Babylon and is a panegyric upon Marduk and his triumph over Homan.

Professor Zimmern accordingly finds a prototype of the Esther story in the Babylonian creation epic. Homan and Vashti, the deities of the hostile Elamites, are the equivalent of Kingu and Tiamat, the powers of darkness; while Marduk and Ishtar are gods of light and order who finally overcome the former two. The seven eunuchs in Esther and the seven viziers are the *annunaki* and *igigi*, the spirits of the upper and the lower worlds, according to Winckler.<sup>8</sup> Ahasuerus represents the *summus deus*, the abiding element, in which the contradictions of nature find their reconciliation.

Professor Jensen finds the prototype of the story in the Gilgamesh epic. We are told that Gilgamesh, the sun-god of Erech and counterpart of the later Marduk, the sun-god of Babylon, is the hero of an expedition against Humbaba (a compound form of the name Human or Humban), King of Elam. Now this Humbaba is the custodian of a lofty cedar that belongs to the goddess Irnina (Ishtar). Humbaba is killed by Gilgamesh, who has on his side a goddess called Kallata (Hadassah or "bride"). With the unification of Babylon under the rule of the city of Babylon, this legend became the national epic, and the exploits of Gilgamesh were transformed to his counterpart, Marduk, the tutelary deity of the city of Babylon. Here, then, we have the nucleus for the story of the Book of Esther. Marduk, with the aid of Hadassah or Esther, overcomes his hereditary enemy Homan, the god of Elam.

To this explanation the objection is offered that the Gilgamesh story lacks the later coloring which the Book of Esther possesses

<sup>7</sup> *History of the Babylonians and Assyrians*, by Professor Goodspeed.

<sup>8</sup> H. Winckler, "Die Istar von Nineve in Egypten," *Mitteilungen d. vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft*, 286-289.

to such a high degree. Gunkel therefore modifies this theory so that the Book of Esther becomes an account of the struggle between Babylon and Persia, which in turn is a reflection of the century-long battle for supremacy between Babylon and Elam, ending with the victory of the former.<sup>9</sup> Hence the prominence given to Esther or Ishtar in the original story, to show that Erech, the city of Ishtar, not Babylon, the city of Marduk, was the leader in the war of emancipation from Elam. The subsequent turning over of her authority to Marduk and the latter's exaltation correspond to the subsequent supremacy of Babylon, Marduk's city, over the whole country.

These explanations, however, do not clear up the matter entirely. For instance, they do not account for Shushan, rather than Babylon, becoming the center of activity. Neither do they explain why Ahasuerus holds the supreme position, deciding the fates of the other gods. In fact, they do not give any reason why Persia is here the supreme power.

In order, therefore, to discover the date of this book, we must turn to the work itself and see what details it provides in regard to the date of its composition. From what was previously said, it is clear that no Jew could have composed this book, which is a panegyric on the Babylonian god Marduk. Neither could its author have been an Elamite or a Persian, neither of whom would be interested in the triumph of the Semitic gods. It must therefore have been a Babylonian who wrote this story. This theory would at once account for the names of the heroes of the book. Again, we can say with certainty that it must have been written after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, in 536 B. C.; for otherwise a Persian king would not have been exalted as the *summus deus*, to decide the fate of the Babylonian and Elamite gods. And the same reason will also prove that the Book of Esther could not have been written after the fall of the Persian empire: for the author is too submissive to Persia, and Alexander the Great or one of his successors would have been represented as the great power of the empire. Hence we can assert positively that this story must have been composed somewhere between the years 536 and 330 B. C.,—the latter being the date of the fall of the Persian empire.

The Book of Esther gives us, however, more particular data concerning the date of its composition. We are told, for instance, that the capital of the empire was at Shushan, and that the empire was divided into one hundred and twenty-seven satrapies. From

<sup>9</sup> Gunkel, H., *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, 1895.

Persian history we know that Darius Hystaspes (522-485 B. C.) was the one who made Shushan the capital of Persia, and divided the empire into satrapies (27). Hence Esther must have been written after these reforms were instituted by Darius.<sup>10</sup> The story must therefore have been written between the years 485 and 330 B. C., before the rise and greatness of Alexander of Macedon.

Before proceeding further with our investigation, it will be necessary to ascertain whether the story was built upon an historical basis or not. Besides the intrinsic interest that this question possesses, it may also help us to determine more particularly the date of composition. If this plot is based on fact, and it tells of a threatened deposition of Marduk, the god of Babylon, by his inveterate enemy Homan, we will have to seek for the historical basis in the Persian treatment of Babylon.

A study of Persian and Babylonian history will disclose the fact that Marduk's supremacy over the Semitic world was actually threatened by the Persian empire several times during Persian control over Babylon. The first time, his power was threatened by Cyrus, who was himself an Elamite from the city of Ashan. When Babylon fell, many expected that the days of glory for Marduk were at an end also;<sup>11</sup> and that now his cult would be supplanted by that of his enemy the Elamite god Homan. It turned out, however, that Cyrus was more of a statesman than a fanatic, and he not only did not depose Marduk from his position of tutelary deity of Babylon, but he even kissed the hand of the Babylonian god and gave him credit for the late victory he had achieved.<sup>12</sup> Had we no other data in the Book of Esther than this, we might be tempted to conclude that the story was based upon this attitude of Cyrus toward Marduk; but in addition to the fact that in Esther the king is already recognized as superior to Marduk, who is simply a viceroy, there are other details of the story which do not agree with actual conditions of the time of Cyrus. Thus Shushan is given as the capital of Persia, whereas, as was stated previously, Shushan did not become the capital until the reign of Darius. And the story can not in any way be made to coincide with the life of Darius; because while he had great trouble with Babylon, which twice rebelled against him,<sup>13</sup> we never find that he was gracious to her and submitted to her god. Probably for the very reason of the

<sup>10</sup> Sir George Rawlinson, *A Manual of Ancient History*, p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah xlvi. 1.

<sup>12</sup> E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> Sir George Rawlinson. *A Manual of Ancient History*, pp. 89-90.

rebellion of Babylon he made the capital of his empire Shushan which had been the capital of Elam and the rival of Babylon. But the recent investigations of Prof. Eduard Meyer<sup>14</sup> brought to light facts which make it probable that Xerxes I (485-465 B. C.) was the Ahasuerus of Esther and that the plot has an historical basis. We are told by Prof. Meyer that in the first year of his reign Xerxes had a great Babylonian rebellion on his hands. The Babylonians killed the satrap Zopyrus, who was appointed by Darius, and proclaimed their independence of Persia, because the new king had acted impiously and in a spirit of mockery towards their god Marduk. In the bloody punitive war that followed, Babylon was mercilessly chastised, many of her old privileges were taken away, the statue of Marduk was taken captive to Shushan, and probably his temple was destroyed. Babylon's power was now at an end and her spirit entirely broken. Not very long after the suppression of the Babylonian rebellion, Xerxes became involved in a war with Greece. According to Herodotus (VII. 5), Xerxes was not inclined to go to war with the Hellenes; he wished first to reorganize his dominion on a sound basis. It was due only to the persuasion of the Greek Mardonius that he at last consented to declare war. But before going to Europe, he felt the need to reconcile the Semitic peoples of Asia. Although these peoples did not serve the Babylonian god Marduk, but worshiped instead the goddess Ishtar, yet they all considered themselves related to the injured Babylonians. The city itself, it is true, was too weak to give Xerxes any trouble, yet the other Semites were all ready to take her part; for they still remembered the days of her greatness, and even now she was still the religious center of the East. In order not to leave a powerful enemy behind him, Xerxes determined to conciliate the fallen city by restoring her privileges to her, rebuilding her temple, and bringing back the statue of Marduk. He thus obtained the goodwill of the Semitic peoples of Asia and assured himself against an attack from the rear.<sup>15</sup> There was great rejoicing in Babylon over the unexpected good news of the king's conciliatory measures. The city acknowledged gratefully his kindness and celebrated the occasion with festal pomp and solemn worship.

The Babylonian priests, in their exultation, doubtless interpreted this event to mean a personal victory for Marduk over his old foe, Homan, whom they symbolically represented as the king's evil genius. As was their custom the priests therefore embodied

<sup>14</sup> *Geschichte des Altertums*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson Southar, *A Short History of Ancient Peoples*, p. 168.

this victory in a dramatic performance, building their plot about an old nucleus in which Homan, Zeresh, and Vashti on the one hand, contended against Marduk and Ishtar on the other, being eventually defeated by the latter two. A few dramatic devices still remain in evidence in the story, even after its translation into Hebrew and its conversion into a prose account. Among these devices are: (a) the dramatic intensity of the plot; (b) the spectacular presentation; (c) certain technical devices, such as the idea that no one could come before the king unless summoned by him, creating as it does a fine dramatic situation and immediately placing the audience in a state of breathless suspense to know what will happen. (d) Another dramatic device is in the startling coincidence, rarely encountered in reality or even in fiction, of Haman's entering to demand the life of Mordecai at the very instant when the latter's good record is being read to the king. (e) A final dramatic situation is to be found in the scene near the end where Esther tells the king of her anxiety over her people and of Haman's machinations, and the king in anger leaves the room. Haman in the meantime is made to beg his life of the queen, falling, as he does so, upon the couch whereon she is reclining. The king, returning at this moment, finds him in this compromising situation, and this so incenses him that he orders the viceroy executed forthwith, and Mordecai invested with the offices and dignities of the fallen favorite.

Thus it would seem that the plot of the original Esther was based upon an historical event which took place in the days of Xerxes. This conclusion is borne out by the recent discoveries in the excavations, from which it appears that Ahashuarosh and Xerxes are really one and the same.<sup>16</sup>

We know, moreover, that the Babylonians had dramatic presentations in their seven-staired temples, the descent of Ishtar being an example of these performances. And just as to-day the ministers in the churches take hold of an old theme and by a few changes and new interpretations make it applicable to present conditions, even so the Babylonian priests and playwrights took for a nucleus old material like the war between Marduk and Homan, and applying it to their then conditions, presented it on their festivals. (Just as Goethe used the names of Mephistopheles and Faust—both old names—for his new drama.<sup>17</sup>)

<sup>16</sup> See Paton in the *International Critical Commentary*, "Esther," p. 53; also Paul Haupt, *Purim*, Note 1, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> See Haupt, *Purim*.

The questions that would now suggest themselves are: (a) When was the translation into the Hebrew made? (b) What changes did the Jewish translator make from the original? (c) What was his purpose in making the translation? (d) When was the Esther story adopted into the canon?

In order to be able to answer these questions, we must attempt to discover and establish the origin of the feast of Purim among the Jews. The origin of the Purim festival is puzzling to historians and Hebrew scholars. The name was not known in Jewish history up to the time of Josephus; yet its peculiar observances go back to a very remote period. Thus Purim has two days of celebration,—the one called simply *Purim*, the other called *Shushan Purim*. Only one of the days was celebrated by the people,—unfortified cities observing the first day, falling on the fourteenth of Adar, while people inhabiting fortified cities kept the second day, the fifteenth of Adar. But, says the Talmud, only such fortified cities count for celebrating the fifteenth of Adar as had a tower around them since the days of Joshua the son of Nun.<sup>18</sup> What relation Purim, which according to the biblical account, is celebrated in commemoration of an event which took place in the time of Xerxes (485-465 B. C.), had to Joshua, the son of Nun, who lived about 1100 B. C., is hard to conjecture. It does, however, point to the fact that Purim might be a festival going far back, even to the days of Joshua. There is, moreover, a statement in the Talmud to the effect that with the arrival of the Millenium, all the old Jewish holidays will be abolished, excepting Purim which will remain forever.<sup>19</sup> This saying would seem to indicate that the day of Purim had struck deep roots in Israel. Another indication that Purim is an old holiday is the form of the bread which Jewish women bake for that day. Every Jewish festival has its special traditional form of bread, and that of Purim is in the shape of a triangle, filled with poppyseeds and known as Haman's Pocket. This is probably a remnant of the days of the old pagan worship, and the form of the bread was meant to represent the human form. Indeed another indication of the great antiquity of the day is the fact that the real meaning of the name is forgotten—for the biblical etymology is very doubtful.

The only explanation of this paradoxical feature of the festival—that on the one hand it is nowhere mentioned until very late, and on the other that its ceremonies point toward an extremely

<sup>18</sup> Mishna, I. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Talmud Jerusalmi, *Meg.* 15a.

remote date— is that it was an old Semitic holiday, commemorated on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar, and that, like many other Canaanitish customs, it was adopted by the Children of Israel on their entrance into Palestine. As the festival was known to be a pagan holiday, the prophets fought against its observance as they did against all other heathenish practices. Indeed it may be that Jeremiah had in mind one of the Purim ceremonies when he denounced the people for making dough images of the heavenly constellations.<sup>20</sup>

But in spite of the prophetic opposition, the festival persisted in Israel even after the return of the Jews from the Exile. As the people during their captivity in Babylon had had no direct contact with the Canaanites and Canaanitish customs, they kept up certain old observances and ceremonies without knowing their exact reason or origin. In fact, some Semitic pagan customs are maintained to this day among the Jews, although they are not mentioned in the Bible and are ignored by the scribes and rabbis. Such ceremonies are, for instance, the monthly sanctification of the moon, and the custom of *Kapporath* on the day preceding *Yom Kippur*. These and other rites have been kept up to the present time, even though they are not found in the scriptures and are not even mentioned in the Talmud, being preserved by verbal tradition. The same was true in the case of Purim. In the days of the second temple, many of its quaint usages and rites were observed out of love for old rites; but the reason and origin of the festival were entirely forgotten. This idea is substantiated by the fact that the festival of Purim is found among all old Semitic peoples the world over.—*Pur* being a good Semitic word encountered in most of the Semitic languages. And possibly the Babylonian festival, where this story of Marduk and Homan was presented, was also called *Purim*. In all probability a Jew who happened to witness one of these Babylonian presentations of the play of Marduk, being delighted to find here a reference to an old festival observed by his own people without their knowing anything of its origin, and noticing that even the same word Purim was used in that play, freely translated it into Hebrew and made it fit for a Jewish audience. Without the least hesitation, then, this man Judaized Ishtar into Esther, and made of the god Marduk Mordecai, the Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin. Homan, the god of Elam, he simply transformed into Haman, an imaginary inveterate enemy of the Jews. In the original play, the Babylonian gods, the satellites of

<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah vii. 18; also xlv. 15.

Marduk, were to be destroyed by the Elamite adversary Homan. The Jewish translator unconcernedly substituted Judeans for the Babylonian deities. In this way he changed a celestial revolution into an imaginary massacre of innocent human beings, and an old myth of a war between gods in heaven into a miraculous Jewish salvation.

When this translation was made and whether its adoption by the Jews was immediate, is of course now impossible to determine. The first reference to a celebration on the fourteenth and fifteenth day of Adar is made in the Second Maccabees; but there the festival is called the *Day of Mordecai*. Whether this was the original name for Purim or whether it was another festival is an unsettled question among scholars. At any rate, Josephus was the first to refer to the story of Esther and the festival instituted in memory of the delivery of the Jews recorded in that story. But as we have seen, the ceremonies of the day and its memories point to a hoary antiquity, to the days of Joshua. This explanation would countenance the hypothesis of numerous scholars that the Purim festival was adopted by the Jews either from the Canaanites, or even earlier, from their neighbors, the original Semites, in celebration of the return of spring. On those festivals a human being was immolated and hanged on a tree. This sacrificial victim, who was chosen by lot from among the captives, represented the god of the enemy. Among the Elamites, the captive's name was made Marduk; among the Babylonians and the other Semites, the victim represented Homan, the god of the Elamites. Later, however, when the Jews abolished human sacrifices, they substituted an image of dough for the human being, but still to represent the original Homan. But the Purim festival being entirely pagan, fell into disrepute with the prophets, and was only observed by the lower classes of people. After the Exile the origin of the festival was entirely forgotten, yet its ceremonies lingered among the masses and especially the women, who are ever the last to give up any ceremony in which they are participants. It was therefore a relief to many when later the Book of Esther appeared which alleged that the Purim festival was a good Jewish holiday, observed in memory of a miraculous rescue of the Jewish people from the hands of their enemies. Henceforth this story of Esther was accepted into the canon, and the old feast of Purim was reinstated in the calendar as a legitimate Jewish holiday.