

The Princeton Theological Review

OCTOBER, 1923

IS GOD ALMIGHTY?

III. OMNIPOTENCE AND PHILOSOPHY¹

“God either wishes to take away evils and is not able; or he is able and not willing; or he is neither willing nor able; or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and not able he is feeble, which does not belong to the nature of God. If he is able and not willing he is envious, which is equally foreign to God. If he is neither willing nor able he is both envious and feeble, and so is not God. If he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, whence are the evils? or why does he not take them away?” It is in this way that Epicurus, according to Lactantius, *De Ira Dei*, xiii, formulated the problem of evil. A similar dilemma, stated in more up-to-date fashion by a soldier in the trenches who writes from “Somewhere in Hell,” is thus set forth in a letter to an American preacher in London: “The luck is all on your side; you still believe in things. Good for you. It is topping, if one can do it. But war is such a devil’s nursery. I got knocked over, but I am up and at it again. I’m tough. They started toughening me the first day. My bayonet instructor was an ex-pug, just the man to develop one’s innate chivalry. They hung out the bunting and gave me a big send-off, when we came out here to scatter the Hun’s guts. Forgive me writing so. I know you will forgive me, but who will forgive God? Not I—not I! This war makes me hate God. I don’t know whether he is the God of battle and enjoys the show, as he

¹ Previous articles have discussed the Biblical Data and Omnipotence and Religious Experience. See this REVIEW, October, 1922, and April, 1923.

NOTES AND NOTICES

THE REWARD OF THE KING'S FAVORITE (Esther vi. 8)

This verse, especially the last clause, has occasioned the commentators much perplexity and has been variously rendered. The difficulty is chiefly due to the ambiguity of the word "his"—does "*his* head" refer to the king's favorite, to the horse, or to the king himself? But the problem is considerably complicated by the further uncertainty as to the way in which the verbs are to be rendered (whether as past, present, or future), and by the indefiniteness of the particle of relation (אֲשֶׁר) which stands at the beginning of the clause. Let us examine the interpretations which are based on the triple ambiguity of the phrase "his horse."

I. "His head" refers to the king's favorite.—This interpretation is favored by the rendering of the Vulgate: "He ought to be arrayed (*debet indui*) in kingly vestments and to be placed (*imponi*) upon a horse which is from the stud of the king and to receive (*accipere*) a diadem of kings upon his head (*caput suum*)." The LXX omits the last clause of the verse, reading: "Let the servants (παῖδες) of the king bring a linen robe, which the king wears (περιβάλλεται) and a horse upon which the king rides (ἐπιβαίνει)." The margin (7th cty.) of the Sinaitic Codex supplies the last clause of the verse: "and let be placed (δ.θήτω) a diadem of the kingdom upon his head." While the Vulgate and LXX do not agree exactly and while neither follows the Hebrew closely, it is interesting to note that both favor the view that "*his* head" refers to the king's favorite and that the particle of relation is to be taken as introducing an object clause equivalent to a jussive. This interpretation was adopted by Luther, although he followed the Hebrew more closely than either the Vulgate or the LXX.

This explanation of the verse is open to serious objection, both from the standpoint of grammatical construction and of interpretation. In the Hebrew the word for "placed" (*nittan*) is in the perfect tense, as are the verbs in the two preceding clauses. It would seem natural, therefore, to understand them all as referring to the past: "has worn. . . has ridden. . . has been (was) set." To treat the first two verbs as frequenta-

tives (cf. LXX *abv.*, and AV. "useth to wear," "rideth upon") seems very questionable;¹ but whether these verbs are rendered as past or present does not materially affect the meaning. The serious difficulty is with the third verb. To regard it as equivalent to a jussive seems decidedly forced and unnatural and would require that the pointing be changed.² The simplest thing is to treat this verb exactly like those in the two preceding clauses and to regard the last clause as completing the descriptive statement (cf. iii. 12, 15, iv. 8).

As regards the meaning, the circumstance that in the next verse mention is made only of the "robe" and the "horse," while no further reference is made to the "royal diadem" (*kether mal^okhuth*) seems to be a serious objection to the view that *three* things, robe, horse, and diadem are here referred to as all intended for the king's favorite. For surely of the three, the diadem was the most important; and it would be quite remarkable that in the subsequent narrative we should find the robe and the horse, referred to *three* times—in the words of Haman (vs. 9), in the command of the king (vs. 10), and in the description of the execution of the command (vs. 11)³—but no

¹ We would expect the imperfect to be used, cf. 2 Sam. xiii. 18. The perfect might mean "wears" (Job xii, 5, Ps. lxxv. 14, civ. 1) but hardly "useth to wear."

² *Nittan* seems clearly to be a perfect Niphal. By changing the pointing it could be read as: (1) A participle Niphal (*nittān*, cf., Isa. xxxiii. 16). That the participle may express a wish and be closely akin to a jussive is clear from the fact that it appears in the formula of blessing ("Blessed be he that blesseth thee," etc.). But such a use of the participle seems improbable here. (2) An infinite absolute (*nathōn* or possibly *nittōn*). In favor of such a reading we have the fact that the infinite absolute Qal of this verb is used in the immediate context (vi. 9; cf. ii. 3) and this construction occurs repeatedly elsewhere in Esther (ix. 6, 12, 16, 17, 18). (3) Maurer (1835) suggested that the verb be read as the imperfect of the Qal *nitten* "(I command) that we place." All of these readings of which the second seems the most probable, would require the taking of the relative in the sense of "that." For this there is good warrant in the Book of Esther (i. 19, ii. 10, iii. 4, iv. 11, vi. 2) as well as elsewhere in the OT.

³ The LXX and the Vulgate differ considerably from the Hebrew and also from one another in their rendering of these verses. The LXX in the "short form" of vss. 8, 9 (that represented by Codex B and the text of \aleph) omits in vs. 9 the reference to "robe" and "horse," the reason being perhaps that they have just been referred to in vs. 8 (the long form of

further reference of any kind to the royal diadem or to the crowning of the favorite.

Not only does the lack of any further reference to the "royal diadem" argue against the correctness of this view, but it is questionable whether Haman with all his confident and overweening presumption would have asked the privilege of wearing a royal diadem. The "royal diadem" is referred to elsewhere only in i. 11 and ii. 17; and in both instances it designates the regalia of the queen. In i. 11 Vashti is commanded to appear before the king and his nobles wearing a "royal diadem"—a circumstance which goes far toward disproving the unworthy motives which have been attributed to the king in summoning her to his presence. In ii. 17 we are told that a "royal diadem"⁴ was placed on Esther's head⁵ when she became queen: "and he set a royal diadem upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti"—a ceremony which marked the completion of Esther's triumph and of Vashti's disgrace. If Haman's demand included the privilege of wearing a royal diadem, would it not have made him guilty of *lese majeste*? This has been pointed to by commentators as a proof of the boundless presumption of Haman. Yet it is hard to believe that Haman would so far forget himself as to become guilty of so serious an offence.

There are several reasons for thinking that the request to wear a royal diadem may not have been as overweening as might be supposed and did not necessarily amount to *lese majeste*. It would be natural to infer this first of all from the attitude of the king. That such a king as Ahasuerus would lightly regard the infringement of his royal prerogatives seems out of the question. A monarch who put to death those who intruded unbidden upon his presence would not hesitate to rebuke a royal favorite

these verses corresponds closely with the MT). The same applies to vs. 10 in the LXX: the margin of \aleph supplies the mention of robe and horse which is omitted in the text of \aleph and in B. The Vulgate shortens verse 9 very much and omits any mention of robe and horse.

⁴ The LXX renders *kether* uniformly by *διάδημα*; in ii. 17 it adds the word *γυναικεῖον*. It should be noted in this connection that the decoration later assumed by Mordecai was not a "royal diadem" but a "crown" (*עֲתֹרֶת*, *στέφανος*).

⁵ The express statement that the *kether* was placed on Esther's head is the clearest indication we have that the reference is not to royal apparel, or regalia in general, but to a "diadem." This is favored by the use of the word in Aramaic and New Hebrew. But, cf. footnote 8, *infra*.

not reproved for his suggestion; he is in a sense commended severely for overstepping the mark. Yet Haman is not merely for it by being commanded to fulfill it to the letter, to the last detail, as a token of royal acknowledgment to Mordecai the Jew. And while it may be argued that the king was really by this command giving to Haman the rebuke which he deserved and playing a practical joke upon him, it may be seriously questioned whether Ahasuerus would have taken this way of rebuking his favorite if it really involved anything approaching *lese majeste*.⁹ The attitude of the king toward the request of Haman seems therefore, clearly to indicate that the request did not infringe the royal prerogative. If it were certain that Haman really asked to wear the diadem the inference that such a request did not involve *lese majeste* would seem both obvious and necessary. The difficulty is that the attitude of the king may equally well be interpreted to mean that Haman's request cannot have involved the wearing of a royal diadem. This argument is consequently inconclusive.

There are however two further reasons which militate against the view that Haman could not ask for the royal diadem without infringing the royal prerogative. The first is the indefiniteness of the reference to the diadem. It is a rather remarkable fact that in the three passages in Esther where the *kether* is referred to the article is not used once. In every case it is a royal diadem not *the* royal diadem which is spoken of. This would be rather remarkable if a definite diadem were referred to. The other reason is furnished us by classical writers. Xenophon^{6a} in describing how Cyrus the Great appeared on an occasion of pomp and splendor tells us that he wore his tiara upright (ὀρθῶν) and he adds, "He had also a fillet (*diadem*) about his tiara, and his kinsmen (συγγενεῖς) also had the same mark of distinction, and they retain it even now." He tells us further that Cyrus wore "a purple tunic shot with white" as to which he remarks "no one but the king may wear such a one" and he

⁹ The argument that the failure of Ahasuerus to mention the diadem (vs. 10) implies that he did not permit it to be given is inconclusive, as Cassel points out. There is not the slightest hint of reproof in the king's words to Haman. The phrase "as thou hast said," followed by the explicit command, "omit not a thing of all that thou hast said" argues rather that the suggestion was to be carried out in its entirety.

^{6a} *Cyropaedia*, VIII. iii. 13 (Miller's translation).

gives the interesting item that, "his hands he kept outside his sleeves" referring to the fact that "the Persians were obliged, in the presence of the king, to thrust their hands inside the sleeves of their doublets in token of their submission to royalty." Here then Xenophon not merely tells us that the wearing of a diadem was not an exclusive prerogative of the sovereign, but mentions in the same connection two others that were.

The "kinsmen" of the king, Xenophon tells us might wear diadems. Who were these kinsmen? That they did not have to be blood relations is clear (cf. esp. 1 Esdras iii. 7, iv. 42). The historian Curtius Rufus states that the "nobilissimi propinquorum" of Darius who marched with him against Alexander numbered "almost two hundred" and that the "cognati regis" were "fifteen thousand." While *cognatus* would be a good rendering of *συγγενῆς* it seems highly probable that Curtius uses *propinquus* as its equivalent. This would mean that the "kinsmen" of the king constituted quite a numerous body. To what extent we may trust these statements it is difficult to say. But they throw a very interesting light upon the passage which we are considering. They would at least suggest that Haman's request amounted to this that he an alien slave of a despotic monarch—we are told that he was an Agagite—be made a "kinsman" of the king. This would be in some respects a large request but it would also be a very natural one. It might be made the reward of merit (see the passage in 1 Esdras cited above) and it would in no wise infringe the royal prerogative. But even if we were justified in accepting these statements without qualification—and it is difficult to believe that such is the case—there would still be difficulties to clear up. If Haman's object was to secure from the king the title of "kinsman" and to play a conspicuous role in the proclamation of the honor, it would be the wearing of the diadem which he would be most concerned about and the absence of any further reference to it would be all the more difficult to explain. Whereas the wearing of a "royal robe" might in the light of Xenophon's statement be regarded as improper and exceeding the bounds of propriety—a view which is not favored by the narrative of Esther.

While the statements which we have quoted from the Classics may suffice to prevent us from rejecting this interpretation of Haman's request on the ground that it would involve *lese maj-*

este, two serious difficulties remain. One is the syntactical difficulty; the other is the failure to make further reference to the "diadem." To the writer this last is a serious and even a conclusive objection to the interpretation which regards "his head" as referring to the king's favorite.

II. "His head" refers to the horse.—This clause will then be simply descriptive of the one which immediately precedes. The verse may then be rendered: "Let them bring a royal garment which the king has worn and a horse on which the king has ridden and on whose (the horse's) head a royal diadem has been placed." This rendering is, according to Professor Paton,⁷ supported by the Targums, the Jewish interpreters generally, and by most modern commentators. It is the rendering of the RV. That it is grammatically sound is undeniable. Indeed, it must be conceded to be, at least as far as the syntax is concerned, the most natural rendering. It also accounts, perhaps, for the failure to again refer to the *kether*. If this was merely a part of the horse's trappings, further specific mention of it would be unnecessary.

This rendering, however, is open to rather serious objection from the standpoint of historical probability. Would a "royal diadem" be placed on the head of a horse? The "diadem" mentioned here is, as we have seen, referred to elsewhere only in i. 11 and ii. 17. In both instances it specifies the regalia of the queen. That such a diadem would be made part of the trappings of a horse, or that the head-dress of a horse would receive the same designation, seems improbable. And it is noticeable that Professor Paton while arguing that "there is no real difficulty in this idea," is able to point only to the "tall, pointed ornaments like a royal turban," which are depicted on the heads of the royal horses of Assyrian reliefs. That these are really royal diadems, he does not assert, nor does he furnish us with any proof that this practice was followed by the Persians.⁸

⁷ *The Book of Esther* (Internat. Critical Commentaries) *in loco*.

⁸ That the royal horses, at least on special occasions and perhaps usually, wore distinctive trappings, specifically a head-gear, is highly probable. It can be easily proved for the Assyrians and the Egyptians and it is probable that the custom prevailed in Persia. With regard to the Assyrians it should be noted that a peculiar head-rig was apparently placed by them on *all* the royal horses. In the Balawat Bronzes we frequently encounter

III. "His head" refers to the king.—This can be understood in two ways:

1. The AV rendering, "and the crown royal which is set upon his head," has been adopted by many commentators using that version, e.g., M. Poole, M. Henry, Scott, etc. This rendering does not commend itself, and it is natural that it should have been removed from the RV text. It is difficult both from the standpoint of syntax and of meaning. While it is not correct to say that it is "grammatically impossible" (Paton),⁹ it must be admitted to be a far less natural rendering than the one we have just considered. Besides this it implies like the first rendering that the favorite is to receive the diadem, and is consequently open to the same objections. Indeed, it seems to aggravate the difficulty by making Haman not merely demand a "royal diadem" but intimate that it is to be one which the king wears and which is as it were to be removed from his head, to be placed on the head of his favorite.

the king riding in a two-horse chariot and followed by two others, all six of the horses wearing a distinctive head-dress. This seems to mean that the head-dress, while royal, was not reserved for the king alone, but for the king and his immediate entourage. It is perhaps noteworthy in this connection that in Esther we read of *a* not *the* "royal diadem." If by this a horse with such trappings is meant the request of Haman would be less overweaning. But this explanation might seem on the other hand to render this clause superfluous, because a horse which the king had ridden might be expected to wear a "royal diadem." And a high official and royal favorite might properly, as it seems, have royal trappings on his horse. That this head-piece could properly be called a *kether* may in the absence of proof be questioned. The fact that we have a word *kothereth* from this root meaning "capital (of a pillar)" might favor the broader usage of this word; and despite the testimony of ancient versions to the rendering "diadem" we might be tempted to assume a connection with the Assyrian word *katru*, "present" and take it in a broader sense than "diadem." But we have no proof of this.

⁹ This is too strong a statement. "And that which was placed a royal crown upon his head" might mean "and the royal crown which was placed upon his head" being an example of רש"א receiving "its closer definition by a substantive following it," as in the expressions: Jer. xlv. 1, "The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah" (*lit.*, "that which was the word of the Lord"); 2 Ki. xii. 6 "wheresoever any breach should be found" (*lit.*, "with reference to all that which shall be found there—a breach"); and 1 Sam. xxv. 30, "according to all the good that he hath spoken" (*lit.*, "according to all that which he hath spoken the good"), etc. (cf. Brown, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 82b).

2. Another rendering of vs. 8 seems clearly admissible and in view of the objections to the renderings which have been discussed, it is worthy of careful consideration: "Let them bring a royal garment which the king has worn and a horse on which the king has ridden, even when a royal diadem was placed upon his head," etc. That is, the king's favorite is to be led through the streets of the city arrayed in a robe worn by the king and riding a horse used by the king on the occasion of a *royal* progress through the streets of the city. So understood the last clause is one of attendant circumstances and as such is appropriately introduced by "and" (*וְ*).

Before considering the grammatical warrant for this translation let us examine it first as its suitability. This rendering commends itself because it avoids the charge of *lese majeste* while at the same time enhancing as much as possible the honor referred to in the preceding clauses. Haman's request to wear a robe the king has worn and ride a horse the king has ridden is a natural one because it is based on the instinctive feeling that personal use or association enhances the value of a gift especially when the donor is a person of prominence. An "autograph," whether letter, book, photograph or what not, is especially prized because of the "personal touch." In former times the gift of a snuff-box was a token of royal favor, or a ring, chain or some other article which the king had worn or carried on his person. The best Biblical illustration of this instinctive feeling is found in 1 Sam. xviii, which tells us of the beginning of that beautiful friendship between David and Jonathan which has become proverbial and of its first outward manifestation: "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow and to his girdle." A classical illustration and one especially appropriate to the present discussion is preserved in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. There we read that when Cyrus the Younger was making his preparations to seize the throne of Persia he endeavored, Absalom-like, to increase his popularity in every possible way. "Frequently, when he had wine served him of a peculiarly fine flavor, he would send half-emptied flagons of it to some of his friends, with a message to this effect: 'Cyrus has not for some time met with pleasanter wine than this; and he has therefore sent some of it to you, and begs you will drink it

today, with those whom you love best.' He would often, too, send geese partly eaten, and the halves of loaves, and other such things, desiring the bearer to say, in presenting them, 'Cyrus has been delighted with these, and therefore wishes you also to taste them.'"¹⁰ The uniqueness of the honor lay of course in the fact that the gift was the very meat and drink of royalty. Cyrus had partaken of it. That made half a fowl of more value than a dozen brace. Similarly, to wear a robe which the king had worn and to ride upon a horse which the king had ridden, would be for the king's favorite a signal token of the royal favor. But, to wear a robe and ride a horse which had been used by the king when on some rare occasion with royal diadem upon his head he had emerged from the seclusion of his palace and appeared before the dazzled eyes of his awe-struck subjects—that would be a surpassing honor. The people would recognize the horse and the robe as the ones which the king had used on an occasion of pomp and splendor and would know that the magnate appearing in such state was indeed one whom the king in very truth delighted to honor. So understood the last clause adds the finishing touch, and marks the climax of the request. It goes as far as Haman dare go; it gives to him the highest honors he dare aspire to. And it does it in such a way as to convey a subtle compliment by emphasizing the *personal* attachment of Haman for the king. Perhaps also it was because of this very personal element so dextrously introduced by Haman that the king, his gratitude increased by the thought of his neglect, regarded it as a suitable tribute to pay to one who had shown his devotion to the king's person by exposing a conspiracy against the king's life—Mordecai, the Jew.

Since, then, the interpretation proposed is suitable in itself and in accord with ancient custom, let us examine the passage to see whether such a rendering can be justified grammatically.

It is to be noted in the first place that, in the clause which immediately precedes, the order of words is such as to bring the subject at the end: "(a horse) which has ridden upon it the king." Whether any importance is to be attached to this is not clear. There is nothing remarkable about the placing of the prepositional object before the subject (see preceding clause) except that in this case it has the result that the word "king" comes

¹⁰ Book I. 9, 26-26 (Watson's translation).

to stand immediately before a clause containing a relative particle which may refer directly to it: "and *who* a royal diadem was placed upon *his* head." Whereas, if the relative refers to the horse, the connection would be closer and more unmistakeable if the prepositional phrase "upon it" came at the end. It may of course be argued that the "and" would naturally coordinate this relative clause with the one which precedes and thereby indicate with sufficient clearness that both relatives and both pronouns refer back to the horse: "a horse *which* has ridden upon *it* the king, and *which* was placed a royal diadem on *its* head." Undoubtedly the fact that it treats both relative clauses alike is a strong argument in favor of the explanation which regards "his head" as referring to the horse. But while this is so it should also be recognized that it is not necessary that the "relative" be used in the same sense or with the same reference in both instances (cf. iv. 11, vi. 2, viii. 11, Deut. xi. 3-6 (?), 2 Chron. i. 11; also 1 Sam. xxii. 17 where **כי** is used in different senses).

Owing to the indefiniteness of the relative¹¹ to which attention was directed at the outset, there are several possible ways of rendering this clause. Three may be mentioned of which the first as perhaps the most probable has been given above:

a. "Even when a royal diadem was placed upon his head."—That "and" may be more or less emphatic and have practically the force of "also" is well known (cf. 1 Sam. xx. 15, Jer. xxxiii. 20, Zech. vii. 5). That the relative **אשר**, like **כי** which it so much resembles, may be used in the sense of "when" is hardly open to question (cf. Gen. vi. 4, xl. 13). Warrant for so construing it in this instance may be found in the fact that the clauses which precede ("has worn. . . has ridden") involve the idea of "time, place, or manner," which according to Driver makes it possible for the relative to be used in this sense.

b. "Even he upon whose head a royal diadem was placed."—That the relative should be used substantively (*i.e.*, as containing its pronominal antecedent) would be favored by the fact that it is so used elsewhere in Esther (ii. 1, 15, ix. 23) though usually after the word "all" (e. g. viii. 9). So construed this clause would add a touch of adulation or eulogy which would be very appropriate in the mouth of one who has just asked high honors for himself. He asks for a garment and a horse used by the

¹¹ Cf. Carl Gaenssle. *The Hebrew Particle אשר*.

king, the wearer of the royal diadem. He does not ask to wear the diadem; he recognizes that to the king alone this right belongs. But he will have a robe and horse that a *crowned king* has used. This might also imply that he is thinking especially of the coronation day: "even he upon whose head a royal diadem was placed (on the day that he succeeded to the throne)."

c. Since *waw* frequently has the force of "when" or "while" and introduces a circumstantial clause (cf. v. 8, vii. 7, Jer, xxxiv. 1 and numerous other passages in the OT) it would seem possible to render this clause as follows: "when that a royal diadem was placed upon his head." This would be favored by the fact that the relative is frequently used in the book of Esther in the sense of "that."¹² Or, possibly the relative may be regarded as used merely for the sake of emphasis (like כִּי¹³ or זֶה¹⁴), in which case "when that" would be practically equivalent to "when."

If it is clear then as the writer believes that the interpretation which regards "his head" as referring to the king can be justified linguistically in more than one way, the question to be decided is whether the greater appropriateness of this interpretation fully offsets the superior simplicity and naturalness of the rendering which regards "his head" as referring to the horse. That it is more appropriate seems hardly open to question. Instead of explaining the failure, the very noticeable failure, of the narrative to make any further mention of the "royal diadem" by making it a part of the trappings of the horse,—a very doubtful expedient,—it accounts for it in a way strictly in accord with i. 11 and ii. 17 and makes the right to wear it a distinctly royal prerogative. Yet it introduces this reference to the diadem in a manner that is doubly appropriate because it is calculated to increase the honor conferred upon the favorite while at the same time avoiding, by a flattering allusion to the exclusive right of the king to wear a diadem, the danger of offending the monarch by the extravagance of the suggestion which has been made. It also as we have seen brings out more clearly still the thought of the immediate context of a personal bond between the king and his favorite and of the peculiar honor implied in the "personal

¹² Cf. footnote 1 *supra*.

¹³ This is perhaps the case in Judg. x. 10 and Job xxxix. 27.

¹⁴ Cf. the use of זֶה after the interrogative מִי.

touch"; and it does this in a way entirely in accord with ancient custom.

The fact that, as remarked at the outset, the phrasing of this verse is so ambiguous makes it difficult to find an interpretation which can be regarded as wholly satisfactory. While the writer feels that enough can be said in favor of the interpretation which he has proposed to justify him in calling attention to it, he is inclined to feel that the ambiguity which has caused the commentators so much trouble was deliberately intended, that Haman may even have hoped, presumptuous as it may seem, that the king might even allow him to wear a royal diadem. But he so phrased his suggestion that in case the king demurred, he could readily claim that he was asking for nothing of the sort—not for glory, but only for reflected glory.

Princeton.

OSWALD T. ALLIS.