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# S E R M O N XXXVII.

THE CHARACTER OF HAMAN\*.

B Y

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ESTHER V. 13:

*Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

A CONSIDERABLE part of the scripture consists in history. This, though it may not seem so useful and important as other parts, affords much instruction, and teaches us many excellent lessons. The lives and characters of great and good men furnish us with examples of faith, of patience, and of holiness, highly worthy our

\* Since this discourse came to hand, the Editors have received a line from the Author, informing, that since he forwarded the manuscript, he has understood that Dr. Hugh Blair has published a discourse upon the same subject, and expresses his doubts respecting the propriety of publishing the present. In comparing the two, the Editors are convinced that there will be no ground of charge against the Author, either upon the score of integrity, or delicacy; they therefore commit it to the press as a valuable acquisition to the work.

EDITORS.

imitation, and excite us to walk in their steps. Nor is the account of wicked men which we have recorded in the word of God, without its use. They exhibit in their lives, a striking proof of the depravity of human nature; and by viewing their characters, drawn agreeably to truth and nature, and painted in their proper colors; we are led to abhor their vices, and shun those wicked courses, which, if persisted in, must end in misery and ruin.

Among the many wicked men, whose characters are handed down to us in the scripture-history, Haman is one of the most remarkable, as well on account of the bold and bloody attempt which he made to destroy the people of God, as the signal vengeance which overtook him as the just punishment of his pride and cruelty. In him we have a striking instance of man's corruption, and a pregnant example of the instability of temporal things. He was suddenly raised to the highest pitch of preferment, and as suddenly tumbled down. One day he is the first favorite and prime minister of the most powerful and magnificent prince in the world; the next, he dies ignominiously upon the gibbet, which he had erected for his enemy.

The sketch which the scriptures give us of Haman's history is short, but sufficient to develop his true character.

In the beginning of the third chapter we are informed of his promotion. *After these things did king Abasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammeda-*

*tha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.* He is here said to be an Agagite, from which it is probably conjectured, that he was of the race of the Amalekites, who, for reasons too obvious to mention, were mortal enemies to the Jews. And this made him more ready to attempt the utter destruction of that nation. The king who promoted him, is here called Ahafuerus. In profane history, according to some chronologers, he is known by the name of Artaxerxes Longimanus; but by others, with greater probability, supposed to be Darius Hystaspes, one of the seven Persian noblemen who slew Smerdis the Magician, who had usurped the throne of Persia, under pretence, that he was the son of Cyrus, and brother of Cambyfes. His dominions were very extensive; for we are told in this book of Esther, that *he reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia.*—How he came to set his affections on Haman, or for what reasons he promoted him, we are not informed. It is plain he was not advanced on account of his merits; for he was a man void of truth, honor and integrity. He was probably an adroit courtier, expert in flattery, and by falling in with the king's humours, and ministering to his pleasures, artfully wrought himself into favor.—This is the common road to preferment with favorites, who, in all ages, have been the curse of courts, of kings, and of kingdoms. But by what means soever he rose, he was suddenly advanced,

and became the second man in the kingdom; and Darius issued orders, that all the other courtiers should *bow down to him, and do him reverence.*

All who wished to pay their court to the favorite readily complied with the order. But Mordecai, a captive Jew, refused; *for he bowed not, nor did him reverence.*

For what reason Mordecai refused to comply with the king's commandment, is not very clear. It is most probable, that he thought himself prohibited by his religion, from giving those extravagant honors to Haman which were required, and amounted to a kind of adoration. That this was due to God alone, Mordecai rightly judged; and he chose rather to incur the displeasure both of the king and Haman, than offend his God. Here the good man affords us an example of holy courage and confidence in the divine protection, well worthy of our notice and imitation—for we should always remember, that God is to be feared more than man.

This behavior of Mordecai soon reached the ears of Haman, who being elated with pride, on account of his late preferment, thought it an unpardonable insult upon him, and *was full of wrath.* Inwardly chafed and fired with indignation, he meditated revenge. *But he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone.* This he reckoned a paltry revenge for the contempt which had been thrown

upon him. He determines to strike a bold stroke, and take vengeance in a way which he thought worthy of so great a man, by utterly exterminating the whole nation of the Jews; for he was informed that Mordecai was of that race.

In order to accomplish his bloody design, he makes application to the king; and, by calumniating the Jews, prevails upon him to pass a decree, that they should be all destroyed. The king, it seems, never enquired into the merits of the cause. He took his favorite's word for the justice and propriety of the measure; and in this discovered his extreme weakness and temerity. He was wholly under the government of his minister, who had obtained an entire ascendant over him. Without hesitation or deliberation he signs the death-warrant, by which millions of innocent persons were to perish. For the decree extended to the Jews who had returned to their own land, which was a province of the Persian empire.

And now Haman thought himself secure of the most ample revenge. But mark, with what infinite ease God can frustrate the wicked purposes of proud aspiring mortals, turn their counsels into foolishness, and bring their mischief upon their own heads! Haman falls into the net, which he himself had spread for others. It seems he did not know that the queen was of the Jewish nation.— Her God makes an instrument for the deliverance of his people. She, by the advice and direction

of her uncle Mordecai, who seems still to have retained the authority of a father over her, puts her life in her hands, and interposes in behalf of her people—She succeeds. In order to bring about the destruction of their enemy, she desires the king to invite Haman to a banquet, which she had prepared for him. The king grants her request, and the invitation is repeated. Haman thinking this a high distinction, and a mark of particular favor, comes home to his wife and his friends with a heart elated with pride, and overwhelmed with joy, and informs them of the *glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him.* He adds, *moreover, that queen Esther had let no man come in with the king to the banquet which she had prepared, but himself;* and that he was invited to come again to her on the next day. *Yet all this, says he in the words of the text, availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

As he returned from the banquet, he observed that Mordecai did not show him that respect which was required; and this dashed all his pleasure. In order, therefore, to administer comfort, his wife and friends, who, it seems, were nothing behind himself, either in ambition or cruelty, advise him to have a gallows raised fifty cubits high, and speak to the king next day, that Mordecai might be hanged thereon. The hint pleased him, and he gave orders that the gallows should be,

made; little thinking that he was providing a gibbet for himself.

This remarkable piece of history affords much useful instruction, which we shall now endeavor to point out.

I. From this passage of history we may learn, that ambition is insatiable and cruel in the highest degree.

Could ambition be satisfied, Haman might have been contented with the profusion of recent honors, which were heaped upon him, and that pitch of power and greatness to which he was raised.—No subject could be more highly advanced. He was the second man in one of the greatest empires in the world. He was the chief favorite in the Persian court, so much celebrated for its riches and splendor; and the darling of the most magnificent monarch upon earth. His wealth was immense; for he offered the king *ten thousand* talents for executing his decree against the Jews. He had a numerous offspring to inherit his riches and honors; and nothing seemed to be wanting to render him as happy as the things of this world could make him. *Yet all this availed him not while Mordecai was at the gate.* And suppose Mordecai had been taken out of the way—suppose he had succeeded in his bloody purpose of cutting off the whole Jewish nation; do you think he would have been satisfied? No—there would still have been a Mordecai in the gate; something or other to di-

sturb his restless mind. In all probability he would have next aspired to the kingdom. He would have *thought scorn* to be any longer a subject, and endeavored to make his way to the throne of Persia. Suppose him seated on the throne—would he have been contented with his *hundred and twenty-seven provinces*? Far from it. He would have been for adding more, and subduing the whole world; and even then, would have been as far from being satisfied as ever. Where do we read that the greatest conquerors, or most absolute monarchs were ever satisfied with their power? Was an Alexander, a Cæsar, a Tamerlane, or any other of the scourges of God, and butchers of the world, contented with their acquisitions? Alexander conquered the world; was he satisfied? No such matter. The tear of Ambition flowed, because there were no more worlds to conquer. Ambition never says enough—it always cries, *give, give*. The more ambitious men have, the more they want. Let them be elevated to the highest pitch of power and grandeur imaginable, their wild restless souls are still aspiring at something greater. There is always something to agitate their minds; so that they cannot rest in contentment and tranquillity. There is always a *Mordecai in the gate*. Ambition is as cruel, as it is insatiable. How cruel was the ambition of Haman?—Because Mordecai, from some religious scruples, refused to bow down to him, nothing but his blood could extinguish the rage of the ambitious tyrant. Nor did he think

that sufficient. The whole Jewish nation must be immolated to appease his anger and glut his revenge. He thought it beneath such a great man, as he was, to reek his vengeance on Mordecai alone. The blood of innocent millions must atone for the neglect of one man. He resembled Nero, who wished that all the Romans had one neck, that he might have the pleasure of cutting them all off at one blow. Ambition sticks at nothing to compass its designs. It wades to empire through seas of blood. No principles of religion, virtue or humanity can restrain the wretch, whose ruling passion is the lust of power. He will sacrifice all these to his beloved object. Hold up a crown, or a kingdom, or even an inferior object to such a man, and he will stop at no act of cruelty, however horrid, which he thinks may forward his designs. Treachery, poison, daggers, and all the instruments of death, are employed without remorse. He cares not how much blood he spills, nor how much misery he causes, if he can only gain his point.—Neither the desolation of countries, nor the sacking of cities—neither the cries of widows, nor the tears of orphans, nor the weeping voice of nature itself, can restrain him in his ambitious career. After the bloody decree was passed which doomed a whole nation, *both young and old, little children and women*, to fall a sacrifice at the shrine of ambition, we are informed, that the *king and Haman sat down to drink*. Having issued orders for a general massacre of the whole nation, and dispatched messen-

gers into all the provinces, without remorse, they sit down to regale themselves at the banquet.—Hardened monsters! who never seriously reflected on the horrid consequences of their bloody mandate; or reflecting, did not relent at the complicated miseries they were about to bring upon an innocent people. This is a specimen of what cruel and ambitious princes, and their cruel and ambitious ministers can do. What seas of blood have been shed—what havock of the human race has been made by the kings and Hamans of the earth! Goaded on by ambition, and prompted by the lust of power, what devastation have they spread over the earth! How many, instigated by the thirst of dominion, have violated all the tender ties of nature! Sons have dethroned and slain their fathers, that they might seize their kingdoms and possess their power! Fathers have murdered all their sons, lest they should conspire against them, and rob them of their dominions. Brothers have butchered brothers; and it is a common thing in eastern countries, for the reigning prince to put to death all his relations, and, in short, all the persons in his kingdom, who can be supposed to have the most distant claim to the crown. There is no need to produce particular instances of the cruel and tragical effects of pride and ambition. The scriptures abound with them—the history of the world is full of them, and exhibits a picture of human nature as lamentable as it is painful and shocking to a humane and benevolent heart!—The history

of the human race is, in fact, a history of human guilt; and whatever may be said of the dignity of our nature, this affords a clear evidence of its depravity.

II. From the history of Haman we may learn, that no man can be happy, while he is under the dominion of pride, malice, and other malevolent passions.

Haman's external circumstances were such, as seemed to promise all the happiness which this world could bestow. He had not only *food to eat, and raiment to put on*, but lived in great elegance and splendor. He was immensely rich—he had honors sufficient to satisfy any man who could be satisfied. But was he contented and happy? Far from it. And what was the reason? Mordicai, a poor captive Jew, was at the gate, and would not be as mannerly as he desired. This was the cause of all his chagrin—this disturbed his proud spirit, and destroyed all that satisfaction which he might have enjoyed from his opulence, and the fresh honors which were heaped upon him. *What availt' all these things, says he, so long as Mordecai the Jew sitteth at the king's gate?* His pride would not suffer him to rest. Rage and envy had taken possession of his heart. His soul was inwardly torn with indignation, malice and hatred. Mordecai was in the gate. This destroyed his peace, and threw a dark shade over his prosperity.

Thus it is with all those who are under the dominion of malevolent and diabolical passions. Let

a man be as happy as he will in other respects, if his mind be a prey to pride, malice, hatred, and other inimical passions, he can enjoy no true peace. How can peace and tranquillity reign in the breast corroded with malice, which, like a vulture, preys upon the mind, and even emaciates the body? How can that man, who continually pines with envy at the prosperity of others, enjoy any true felicity himself? These are all painful passions—the poison of them drinks up the spirits—and, while we are under their dominion, all the power, riches and honors in the world, cannot make us happy. The proud man will always find enow to mortify him, by refusing that honor and respect, which his high opinion of his own importance leads him to expect. There will always be some Mordecai in the gate, who will refuse to bow down before him, however great he may think himself. He who is of a wrathful, envious, or malicious disposition, will never want an object for his hatred and malice. Every Haman will find a Mordecai to excite his indignation, and provoke his envy; and while he is under the government of these restless and malignant passions, he never can be happy, though he were lord of the whole earth.—All Haman's wealth and honors availed him nothing while he saw Mordecai sitting at the king's gate.

III. Another lesson, which we are taught by this passage of history, is, that those things which men most desire, often prove their ruin.

Haman was a man of unbounded ambition.— Accordingly, there was nothing he so much desired as honor and preferment. He obtained what he so vehemently desired; and it proved his ruin. Had he not been so highly advanced, he would not have been so much elated with pride, nor borne it so hardly, that Mordecai did not bow down to him; nor consequently would have fallen upon those cruel measures, which finally brought him to the gallows. So intent was Haman to obtain the decree against the Jews, that he offered the immense sum of ten thousand talents; and yet this very decree brought destruction on himself, and his whole family. Thus it often happens to blind mortals. They eagerly pursue those very things which, in the end, prove their ruin. With what ardor do many desire and pursue riches? And how frequently do they issue in the perdition both of soul and body, in time and eternity? When men become rich, they commonly become proud; their hearts are lifted up, and they look down upon the poor with contempt. They grow arrogant and tyrannical; and thus incur the resentment of their neighbors, and bring a load of hatred upon themselves, under which they frequently sink. Filled with self-confidence and self-sufficiency, they forget God, become insensible of their dependence upon him, and unthankful for his mercies. Whilst eager in the pursuit of wealth, religion is neglected, and the all-important concerns of their precious immortal souls disregarded. Thus their riches which they

so anxiously desire, at last prove the destruction of their immortal and better part, and overwhelm them in eternal misery and despair. How many are there who consider honor and preferment as the most desirable objects, and the attainment of them, the summit of human felicity? Their supreme wish is to be elevated to high rank and power—to be conspicuous in the eyes of mortals—to be respected, revered, courted and flattered. Like Haman, they would have all men to bow down to them. But when they have obtained all this, how often does it pave the way to their ruin? The higher men rise, the more precarious and dangerous their situation is, and the more liable they are to fall. There is a certain levelling principle in human nature, which leads men to pull down those who are above them, especially if they become haughty and arrogant by their elevation. This, all know, is a very common case: There are few who can bear preferment with moderation; especially, if it be great and sudden. Like persons suddenly elevated to a great distance from the earth, their heads turn—they become intoxicated with their power—and commonly use it in such a manner, as to create to themselves many powerful enemies, who are eager to drag them down from their exalted station. And they often find means to compass their designs. Haman is but one of many favorites who have suddenly fallen from the zenith of power and prosperity, and ended their lives on a gibbet or a scaffold. Poverty, ignominy, and

even death itself oft-times quickly follow the acquisition of those honors, to which the votaries of power and pre-eminence aspire with so much ardour. How often is the arbitrary tyrant, who, urged by ambition, made his way to a throne, suddenly stripped of his crown, and reduced to the condition of the meanest slave? Exulting in the plenitude of his recent power, he knows not how to use it with moderation; and that which he so eagerly pursued, as the completion of his wishes, plunges him in the deepest misery.

IV. We learn from this passage of history, that men are often taken in their own toils; or as the scripture expresses it, *their feet are taken in the net which they had hid*

Haman was at much pains to erect a gallows for Mordecai, and he was hanged on it himself.— He was literally caught in his own snare. While he was using all his address in planning the destruction of Mordecai and the Jews, he was planning his own utter ruin. *God turned his iniquity upon his own head, and his violent dealings upon his pate.* Such instances are frequent. How many have themselves drunk the deadly draught which they had prepared for another? How many, who have treacherously lain in wait to assassinate others, have fallen in the attempt? How many, whilst endeavoring by treachery, calumny, and every hellish art, to undermine and destroy the innocent, have been detected and suffered the deserved punish-

ment? Such is the enmity and malice of the wicked, that they often overshoot themselves, and while they are laying trains for the ruin of the righteous, are themselves blown up. They may, indeed, often succeed against them, as we see they do; but they shall not escape unpunished. *Verily there is a God who judgeth in the earth.* There is a righteous judgment to come, when the proud oppressors of the earth shall stand trembling at the bar of heaven, and suffer the due punishment of their violence and injustice. Even in this world, the Almighty often makes bare his arm against them—arrests them in the midst of their crimes, and turns their violence on their own heads. Thus he did with Haman, causing him to fall into his own snares. But however it may be in this world, they shall hereafter most certainly *receive the reward of their iniquity, and eat the fruit of their own doings.* God will at last plead the cause of the innocent, and take vengeance on their oppressors. Let all such, therefore, remember, that while they are plotting against the righteous, they are plotting their own ruin, and, like Haman, bringing down perdition on themselves, either in this or a coming world. However great and powerful they may be—how weak and helpless soever the righteous may appear, they cannot injure them with impunity.—They have a powerful protector—the Almighty is their defence, and declares, that *he who toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye.* How weak and contemptible did Mordecai appear in the eyes of

Haman? He had no apprehension that one so great and powerful as he was, could be in the least danger from such an insignificant creature, as a captive Jew. But yet God so ordered it, that this same Mordecai was the instrument of his ruin.—He dragged him down from his lofty pinnacle of honor—stripped him of all his wealth and grandeur, and brought him to an ignominious death. Though weak in himself, he had an almighty protector; and the God whom he served, delivered him from all the machinations of his adversary, and turned his devices upon his own head.

Let us improve this subject.

1. In the first place, by guarding against a cruel and ambitious temper.

Ambition is not confined to heroes and conquerors, kings and courtiers. It is frequently found among the lower orders of men. Here, indeed, it is not so conspicuous, because it is confined within a narrower sphere, and has not a field so ample to display itself. It discovers itself, however, plainly enough. It does not, indeed, aspire at crowns and kingdoms—it does not destroy nations, or spread havock and desolation over cities and countries. These exploits of wickedness are beyond the reach of the ambitious in lower rank. but it does a great deal of mischief in families, neighborhoods, and societies, by exciting hatred, wrath, strife, and many other inimical passions,

which destroy peace and concord, and produce the most pernicious effects in civil and religious societies. You may often see a whole neighborhood thrown into a flame by two or three men, whose ambition, perhaps, rises no higher than some paltry civil office, or petty commission, which they think will do them honor, or give them a little more power. And they make no scruple at all to lie, calumniate, undermine and betray each other, in order to gain their point. Want of power, and dread of punishment, restrain them from going further, otherwise, like those who are above all law, they would proceed to destroy all who oppose them, and lay waste the world with fire and sword. Every man is by nature a tyrant. There are little tyrants as well as great ones. Our country is full of petty *basbarws*, who exercise a tyranny as cruel and absolute in the small circle of their own plantations, and over their miserable slaves, as the most arbitrary *despot* in Asia. And if interest and custom had not steeled their hearts, and shut their ears to the voice of nature, and the dictates of reason, religion and humanity, they might soon be made sensible of it. We are all so prone to abuse power when once we have gotten it into our hands, that we should be jealous of ourselves, and watch against the cruel effects of a tyrannical temper towards those who are wholly in our power. For my own part, I cannot help trembling for my country as often as I reflect, that God is just, and has declared, that *he will vindicate the oppressed, and*

*punish the oppressor.* Let us all then learn to guard against a cruel and ambitious temper. It becomes us, as Christians, to renounce the pomps and vanities of this world, and not to aim at earthly power and pre-eminence. *The fashion of this world passeth away.* All its glory, pomp and power must soon vanish like a dream. Let us then seek that honor which cometh from God—which is substantial and permanent, and not covet the praise of men. *In honor let us prefer one another,* and learn of our heavenly master to be meek and lowly in heart. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.* He exalts the humble Mordecai, but humbles the proud Haman, and brings down his honor to the dust.

2. From what has been said, let us learn to shun malice, envy, and all the malevolent passions.

While we indulge a malicious, envious or vindictive temper, all genuine peace and comfort must be banished from our breasts. These and similar passions are as inconsistent with our own happiness as they are repugnant to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, to which we are bound as Christians to conform our lives and tempers. It is the peculiar glory of our religion that it reprobates all the malignant passions, and inculcates a benevolent, meek, gentle, and forgiving spirit. However rich, powerful and prosperous we may be, if we are under the government of malice, hatred, envy, and other diabolical passions, we cannot fail

to be wretched and miserable. Mordecai in a state of poverty and captivity, enjoyed more genuine satisfaction and tranquillity of mind, than Haman in the midst of all his riches and honors. It is our duty, therefore, as well as our happiness, to mortify those angry and hateful passions, and cultivate a kind and benevolent disposition. Let charity then, with all her mild and gentle train, take possession of our hearts, and reign and triumph there. Thus shall we be conformed to the spirit, and governed by the precepts of that holy religion which we profess. Finally, let us learn, agreeably to the command and example of our Redeemer, not only to love our friends, but even our enemies; *to bless them that curse us, and to pray for them who despitefully use and persecute us; that we may be the children of our Father in heaven, who maketh his sun to shine upon the evil and good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

