

Contemporary Mystic Christianity **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

The Book of Esther

It is the fascinating and almost fairy-like lore of Persia which forms the background of the lovely Book of Esther. The very name of Persia is associated with beauty and light, and there is reason to believe that the ancient Hebrews also felt its charm for in biblical writings the name Elam, which we find in Genesis (14th chapter), means "high" and "exalted" — one of the many words having a dual meaning, since Persia is high not only in respect to its beautiful mountains but also in the spiritual consciousness which these typify. Mountains are always the abode of mighty spiritual powers, whose influence overshadows the land at their feet, and whose radiance clothes the summits with glory.

Elam, biblically, was a descendant of Shem; Sushan (Sun) is connected with the words lily and white, because of the glorious white lilies growing in her gardens. Zenophon writes that "the Persians, wherever they are, or come to, have gardens laid out and make the land fertile and beautiful." In Persian usage, the words garden and paradise are synonymous.

In Christian centuries many ancient Persian tales have been taken over and adapted by Moslem Arabs, and even

Esther herself has been identified with the bewitching Scheherazade of Arabian Nights fame.

Firdusi, the great Moslem mystic of Persia, describes the beauty and delights of Persian life in a manner very reminiscent of the Esther Feast in the Bible. Among other things we find this: "A tree was erected, opaque in its branches, the summit inclining to the throne, the stem of silver, the branches of gold, rubies formed the flowers, fruits of carniol and sapphires smiled out of the dark green leaves of emerald."

It is said that the royal Persian gardens rivalled in splendor and beauty the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon and were veritable Arabian Nights' scenes of enchantment. Again, in the Arabian annals we read of the Caliph Al Moktader who had a silver tree, in the branches of which sat birds of gold and silver that could not only sing, but could also move about in the tree.

The magnificent gardens of Persia were not designed merely for sensuous pleasures, however; they served as religious shrines as well. Persia is ruled by Taurus, the sign of Venus, and this is reflected in the national religion, Zoroastrianism, in which is found a profound reverence for the Earth and its fruits, as well as the adoration of light or fire as the visible attribute of Godhead. Theirs was a religion of nature. Fertility and usefulness are keywords of

the Persian religious life. A typical blessing was: "May the earth bring forth fruit for you and may you have both vines and herds." There is much uncertainty concerning the history of the great Teacher, Zoroaster; but it is thought that he lived in the time of King Cyrus, who established the star-worship of Zoroastrianism throughout the Empire — an indication of the influence of conquered Babylon, perhaps. At any rate through his influence a religious and political revolution was brought about which produced far-reaching effects not merely on the then current religious beliefs but on the religions of future centuries.

The important work begun by Cyrus was carried to completion by Darius, who was the real architect and builder of the great Persian Empire, during whose reign Zoroastrianism became the permanent religion of the Persian people.

Both Cyrus and Darius possessed deep occult knowledge. In the Bible it is clearly shown that they recognized a kinship of spirit between their own religion and that of the captive Hebrews whom they met after the conquest of Chaldea. It is evident in this complicated story that the Divine Fire of Zoroaster acted as a purifying force in the religion of Babylonia with its star-worship, but the Persian religion was in its turn acted upon by the Chaldean

astrology; and both are found in the Christian religion centuries later, having descended through Jewish channels.

The priestly class of the Zoroastrian religion were the Magi. This group existed in Media (the northern part of Persia) before Cyrus but during this period of Persian history Magianism became dominant throughout the whole land. Of this cult were the Magi who came to find the Christ Child, according to an ancient Zoroastrian prophecy; for we read in the Zend Avesta that Zoroaster predicted the birth of the Great One when a new star should appear in the constellation Virgo.

Many and beautiful are the legends connected with the birth of Zoroaster. His mother was told by an Oracle that she should become the mother of a great man. It is said that the babe was born without tears and came laughing into the world. He was seen to sleep quietly in the fire, and all animals, feral and, domestic, ministered unto him.

We need not label the esoteric interpretation of these tales, which should be fairly obvious; the "fire" in which the babe slept was of course no material fire, but the Divine Fire which burns in all living beings, and which is technically called the Life Ether. It is perfectly visible to the etheric vision. As the ego becomes more and more spiritually powerful this "fire," which is specifically in the blood, becomes increasingly luminous, until instead of the delicate

pink-orange of a slow fire it assumes the burning brilliance of diamond fire, and for this reason it is said that the "blood" of saints is "white", meaning white to the spiritual vision.

Zoroaster's name is reminiscent of the spirit of his doctrine. It has been variously translated as meaning "Gold Star," and "Born of the Stars," and "Incarnate Star." Sirius, the glorious blue-white diamond of the heavens, has been closely linked with the life, work and teaching of Zoroaster, as also with the Master Jesus. This powerful spiritual star-center has often been called Aster. Plutarch says that "Ahuramazda (the God of the Persians) placed the star Sirius as guardian and overseer of the heavens."

The Persian name for the heavenly light was Tir. The famous Festival of Tiragham was no doubt part of the Summer Solstice commemoration, at which fertility was conferred through water. "He draws out the clouds and plants yearn for him." Quoting from the Clementines: "He is called thus (Zoroaster) because a living river of the star had come upon him." Therefore we understand that Light is conceived of as like unto water, as in the Hebrew also we find references to the Ocean of Light. St. Teresa of Avila, seeing this spiritual light, and knowing nothing of the ancient Persian, corroborates the pre-Christian concept: "It surpasses all that can be imagined here below, even in its

whiteness and splendor alone. It is not a splendor which dazzles, but a soft whiteness and the splendor infused, which gives the greater delight to the vision and does not tire it, nor does the clarity by which one sees this beauty so divine. . . . It is like seeing a very clear water which runs over crystal and reflects the sun."

It is in this mystical sense that we must understand the statement that "Zoroaster was the Star-son, upon him flowed the Star-soul. He was the animated Sirius."

During this period, the Summer Solstice actually occurred while the Sun transited the constellation Cancer. This was the season in which Sirius was so honored by the Egyptians, who erected numerous temples throughout their land dedicated to this great Star.

It is significant that the Midsummer Feast in the Book of Esther is held primarily in honor of Mordecai, who is a son of the tribe of Benjamin, correlated, as we know, to the sign Cancer. "For Mordecai was viceroy of King Ahasuerus. His fame was from one end of the world to the other. This is that Mordecai who is like the star Noga that glitters among the stars and is like the dawn of the morning. He had pleasure in the greatness of his brothers, sought the good of his people and spoke peace to all his seed." (Cassel's Commentary on Esther.)

The Persian king was held to be the earthly likeness of the Sun God Mithra. The name Cyrus means "to shine." White horses are symbols of light, and the chariot of Mithra was drawn by white horses, as also were the carriages of the Persian kings. Moreover, the king always sat behind his seven counselors as the Sun behind the stars. These seven princes had free access to the king; and in the story of Esther, it is they who decide the fate of Queen Vashti and they also who, together with Cyrus, sign the order for Ezra which made possible the rebuilding of the Temple.

In the Persian month of Mihr occurred the great festival to the Sun God Mithra. Mihr was the Tishri of the Jewish calendar (October), and this Feast corresponds to the Festival of the Tabernacles celebrated at the Autumnal Equinox. Plutarch in his Table Talks refers to the Feast of the Tabernacles as "falling in the time of the vintage"; and is of the opinion that it was dedicated to Bacchus, who, the student will recall, is identified with Dionysus, of whom we have previously spoken. His Syrian name was Adonis; and in Hebrew it appears under the universalized concept of Adonai.

The Persian festival was also a nature feast and Mihr was called the Vintage Month. The king was crowned with a golden diadem to represent the rays of the Sun and partook of a repast of grapes, fruits and berries, myrtle, citron and

sugar, all symbols of productiveness conferred by the Sun upon the Earth. He also danced in celebration of the Mithra Feast, the dance imitating the movements of the Sun in the heavens as, in Greek mythology, the hero Theseus danced after his successful conquest of the Minotaur and release from the labyrinth.

Typical of the Persian spirit is the story that a noted visitor to the Court discovered the king, Cyrus, working in his own extensive and luxurious gardens. Impressed with the spectacle he said, "Rightly I call thee happy, because thou joinest virtue to riches."

The Persians, being so steeped in star-lore, had a lovely and poetical custom of bestowing star names on their daughters. The name of the legitimate wife of Xerxes was Amestris, compounded of Amesha and Sitra, and meaning heavenly star.

Servants as well as their mistresses were given poetical names borrowed from nature. The Second Targum. states that the seven maids given Esther, one for each day of the week, possessed each a name descriptive of her day. Monday, according to Persian cosmogony, was the day the heavens were created, and the name of the maid for that day was "Heaven's Child." On Tuesday were created trees, fruits and vegetables, and the, slave who attended Esther on this day bore the name of "Garden Flower." On

Wednesday were created the stars of heaven; its maid was "Star Light." On Thursday all creeping things were formed; the attendant on this day was "Butterfly." The slave who served on Friday, in correspondence with the work of the Sixth Day when animals and man were formed, bore the name "Little Lamb." Saturday, Saturn's day of rest, brought an attendant named "Quiet." On the Sun's Day, the Day of Light, Esther was attended by a girl who bore the name of "Phoenix," the bird symbolic of light and resurrection, and famed in alchemical lore of many centuries.

The Book of Esther has been one of the most disputed of the canonical collection. The orthodox church has shown great hesitation in accepting its canonicity. It has often been pointed out that this book does not mention the name of God and that it adds nothing to the sum of revelation. Yet the great medieval scholar, Moses Maimonides, boldly declared that "when the Messiah comes all the work of the prophets will be done away with, the only books necessary will be the Pentateuch and Esther," thus demonstrating the great diversity of opinion which has so long existed relative to this document.

There can be found no historical corroboration for the events of this narrative. (The identification with Scheherazade of the Arabian Nights is pure legend.) The king is assumed to be the son of Darius, or Ahasuerus, the

Greek form of the name Xerxes. Josephus, however, identifies him with Artaxerxes. The name of his queen, historians suggest, was Amestris. There is, however, no record in the life of Xerxes which parallels the Esther story; and it may be that Josephus is closer to the facts. Another historical objection to this story is the fact that Persian kings were obliged, under the Law of the Medes and the Persians (the strictness of which is proverbial), to choose their queens from one of six noble Persian families, and such an episode as described in the Book of Esther would have been a total impossibility in that day.

These historical objections, however, do not alter the esoteric interpretation, which is the real reason for its final triumphant inclusion in the canon of the Scriptures. Within the story of Esther is concealed much relative to the Illumination received by one who is ready to pass into the great Temple of Light which exists beyond the realm of the seen. It is here, under the guidance of one of the Wise Men, designated a king, that the Gates of Illumination swing wide and the goal of many Earth lives, the expanded consciousness of the Initiate, is attained.

The inner-plane activity cannot be translated exactly in objective terminology; our language is but poorly equipped to express the reality there. It may even be necessary at times to use a symbology which is repugnant because

ordinary language cannot convey the proper meaning. If we keep this in mind, we shall not wonder at the scholar who declares that "in passing from the other books of the Old Testament to Esther we pass from heaven to earth"; but we know that we must learn to read and understand a new language, truly a "new tongue", the symbol-language of the heaven worlds, where every form and every appearance bears infinite wisdom which delights the mind even more than its beauty delights the eye. Contrary to the exteriorized version, therefore, in Esther we pass esoterically from Earth to Heaven. This book is a divine symbology, its wisdom is ageless, its truths available always to the aspirant who seeks to find and enter the inner recesses of the sacred shrine of hidden Light.

The Book of Esther

The Characters

Further light on the characters represented by Mordecai and Esther is given in the following excerpt from the Gamara:

"There was a certain Jew in Shushan, the capital, whose name was Mordecai. 'Why was Mordecai called a Jew?' He was not of the tribe of Judah, but a descendant of Benjamin, He was called a Jew because he feared the Lord as all Jews should. And Mordecai brought his cousin

Hadassah or Esther. She was called Hadassah, meaning myrtle, because of her sweet disposition and kindly acts, which were compared to the fragrant perfume and ever fresh beauty of the myrtle. In many instances the righteous are compared to the myrtle, as in Isaiah 53:13: Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord (Law) for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Instead of Haman, the thorn the fig-tree, Mordecai, shall spring forth; and in place of Vashti, a nettle, Esther, the myrtle, shall share the Persian throne. Her name Esther was well chosen, from the Greek Estarah, a bright star. Her pious deeds ceased only with her life, and her beauty was equaled only by her spiritual qualities."

And again, "She was called Esther as her Temple or soul name because she was like the planet Venus which in Greek is Astarta. Her human name was Hadassah because as the myrtle spreads fragrance in the world so did she spread good works." This the esotericist may look upon as a reference to the "odor of sanctity" which the mystic knows to be a fact, despite the ridicule of materialists. It is said that when the Catholic saint, Teresa of Avila, died, the sweet fragrance from her body was so overpowering that it was necessary to open the windows in the room where it lay. It is asserted, further, that after four centuries the remains of her body have not yet yielded to decomposition,

despite the fact that portions of the body have been distributed as relics at various shrines. The fragrance of the myrtle is the soul-fragrance of the holy Esther. Again the Venusian motif is plain: the myrtle was sacred to the goddess Venus.

It has been pointed out by archeologists that the name Ishtar is the equivalent of the Esther of the Bible, Ishtar being the goddess Venus of the Chaldeans. Mordecai is the Hebrew equivalent of Marduk. From the cryptic scrolls of Assurbanipal, King of Assyria, is taken the following brief summation of the story of Ishtar:

To the land from whence none return, Ishtar, daughter of the Sun, inclined her ear.

To the house from whose entrance there is not exit,

To the road from whose passage there is no return.

To the road from whose passage there is no return.

The first Gate Keeper removed the crown from her head,

The second Gate Keeper removed the ear-rings from her head,

The third Gate Keeper removed the precious stones from her necklace,

The fourth Gate Keeper removed the ornaments from her breast,

The fifth Gate Keeper removed the gemmed girdle from her waist,

The sixth Gate Keeper removed the cincture from her body.

After this she descended into the nethermost Hades, searching for the spring of Living Waters which should restore her beloved husband, Tammuz (Adonis), to life. There she suffered the afflictions of disease and death:

She was smitten with the disease of the eyes in her eyes.

She was smitten with the disease of the side in her side.

She was smitten with the disease of the feet in her feet,

She was smitten with the disease of the heart in her heart.

She was smitten with the disease of the head in her head,

Into the whole of her body disease struck after the Lady Ishtar into hell had descended.

After a time, during which life on the Earth was suspended, there came the command of the High God: "Pour over Ishtar the Waters of Life and bring her before Me." Then,

The first gate she passed restored to her the cincture of her body,

The second gate she passed restored the bracelets to her hands and arms,

The third gate she passed restored the gemmed girdle
to her waist,
The fourth gate she passed restored the ornaments to
her breast,
The fifth gate she passed restored to her the jewels of
her necklace,
The sixth gate she passed restored to her the rings of
her ears,
The seventh gate she passed restored to her the mighty
crown of her head.

In the Book of Esther there is given but a slightly different account of the Fall and Redemption of the Eternal Feminine. Centuries later we discover it in the Gnostic cults, in which it was pre-eminent. Unfortunately, there were "black" as well as "white" Gnostic cults, and among the former this divine concept was debased to such a degree that the whole Gnostic movement was brought into disrepute. Such, for example, were the Nicolaitans, mentioned in Revelation, in whose worship Temple prostitution figured, and which was therefore condemned by the Christ. It was this degradation of the divine Mystery of the Feminine which made it necessary to conceal it from the multitude, and the doctrine of the Primal Man (Cosmic Christ) wholly supplanted it publicly. But within the Mystery Schools, when the neophyte had proved himself pure-minded and holy in heart and deed, the ancient Mystery of

the Divine Feminine was revealed to him as in earlier times. The Gnostic concept of the Primal Man is both Persian and Chaldean. In Christian terminology we call it the Christ-man; while in Chaldean accounts, the supreme Lord, Bel, is said to have literally poured out his blood to infuse life into man; hence the mystic chant, "In the clay of man is kneaded the blood of God." And Saint Paul said, "We are all members of the one body in Christ."

Thus today in both the Church and in esoteric Masonry, unknown to the unseeing multitudes of the outer court, the Fall and Redemption of the Divine Feminine continues to be the foundation of the Mysteries, and in the Book of Esther it is figured in the fall of Vashti and the ascension of Esther. For in the legend of the dethronement of Vashti (the nettle) and in the crowning of Esther (the star) in Sushan, the city of lilies, we find this identical truth presented with the slight variations necessary to suit the temper of the time in which it was given. Jacob Boehme says of this path of self-conquest (as depicted in the Book of Esther) that it is the conflict which occurs between the thistle body and the lily body of man.

Esther and Vashti represent, therefore, the high and the low aspects of the feminine principle in man, the emotional or love life as devoted either to Spirit or sense.

Mordecai and Haman typify the high and low masculine principles, the mentality as directed either toward Spirit or sense.

In the drama of life played out each year upon our planet, there are four alternating seasons, or scenes; two are keyed to the minor of darkness and death, and two are keyed to the majors of gladness and light.

The Midrash compares Esther with the dawning of the morning (Venus, the morning star), the passing of the night. Vashti, correspondingly, is the Evening Star, which disappears from sight, sinking below the horizon in the wake of the Sun.

Again, Vashti is the Autumnal Equinox, when the Sun descends below the equator: Ishtar descending into Hades — the phases of Venus differ noticeably from winter to summer. Haman, the once mighty power who is vanquished and dies in darkness and defeat, is the death of the old year at the Winter Solstice.

Mordecai, the name meaning fruitfulness, who succeeds Haman in power and splendor, represents the full glory of the Summer Solstice when the Sun attains unto its supreme power in the heavens. Esther, the bright star of the dawn, is also the joyous season of the Spring Equinox

when the Earth is clothed in the radiance of the new-born life.

All religions depict the change of these four seasons and their effects on human life, as in the story of the Descent of Ishtar. So also the Book of Esther is attuned to the varying rhythms of these four Sacred Seasons, and, in the by-gone epochs when the Feast Days were truly esoteric observances, the Temple aspirants were able to attune themselves to these varying rhythms and thus lay hold of the "key" to their inner meanings.

— ***Corinne Heline***