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# HEROD THE TETRARCH.

K MARK VI, 18.

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SOME persons seem to approach very near the Kingdom of God without entering it. Concerned to a certain extent about their souls, and perhaps mixed up with religion and religious people, they yet never obtain solid peace. Lingering on the confines of the happy land, they may learn its language, contemplate its beauties, and know its people, but their own feet never pass its well defined boundary. Love of the world, and sin,—a secret unwillingness to surrender themselves entirely to the Lord, is in most cases the real reason. Why was Agrippa only *almost* persuaded to be a christian? Why did Felix tremble and not *believe*? Wherefore did one go away sorrowful from Christ when offered by Him the treasures of heaven? But one of the most striking illustrations of the fact that “light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,” is afforded in the notices given us in the Gospels of Herod the Tetrarch. It is painful but profitable to examine this man’s history; and it may lead some to inquire before enquiry is too late, whether they are really on safe ground; and awaken them to a consciousness of the superficial character of a profession, once made in common with themselves, by the man who beheaded John, and shared with Pilate in the murder of the Lord Jesus.

C. & S.

We read of Herod in his last days, that he "feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him, and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly!" The first thing to be remarked here is, that while Herod at one time had much to do with *John*, it does not appear that he was ever brought to feel himself a sinner *before God*. Impressions from without are very different from inward conversion. Of the latter Herod knew nothing: the former he received at one time from the just and holy man; at another from Herodias or some lord or high captain of Galilee. It is an unenviable faculty that enables a person to trim his way between the conflicting claims of God and the world; to pass with ease and satisfaction from a religious atmosphere, to the festive supper room; to hear John in the morning, and see the daughter of Herodias dance in the evening. Herod feared John. It is one of the glories of godliness that it often commands respect even where it finds no sympathy. He feared John, but it was a fatal flaw in his religion that he never learned properly to fear God.

An inadequate sense of sin, and want of depth in the exercises of the soul, are often combined, with the doing of many things, as in the case before us. To seek to hide from self and from others inward spiritual disquietude and to cover a weak point by outward observances, and restless activity, is also a very common thing. When Adam and his wife were drawn from their concealment amongst the trees, and stood convicted in the divine



presence, God could show grace, and clothe them with skins ; but nakedness was never so pitiable and remediless as when it shrank from God, and was covered with an apron of fig leaves.

One who has no deep sense of sin, or who wishes to disguise from himself the necessity of breaking off from some conscious wickedness in which he is living, may to a certain point hear the word of God gladly, and do many things. That Herod succeeded thus in deceiving himself, for a season is very likely ; that he ever deceived John is improbable ; but to suppose that he was ever any thing else in God's sight that an ephemeral insincere professor is impossible. To be faithful with oneself is essential for a hopeful inquiry after truth. The temporary stimulant which the sermon or prayer meeting may afford to the insincere inquirer, leaves the root of his malady altogether untouched. It is as the harp of David acting on the evil of Saul ; "refreshed and well" so long as he heard the music, no one could answer for his conduct when its notes had died away. If Herod reminds us of some who are described as "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," (2 Tim. iii. 6, 7.) his case like theirs admits of an easy solution ; for no person *laden with lusts which they willingly retain*, can seek with the hope of finding, or knock with the expectation of its being opened to him.

What availed it that this man under the influence of a transient religious impulse, "did many things ?" What

they were, matters little ; for none were the fruits of a genuine faith. They might be evidences of a mind unsatisfied with itself ; willing to go to certain lengths of self denial in order to work out a righteousness of its own ; but always stopping short where it most behoved it to begin. No wonder if those who cease not to do evil can never learn to do well. Some important fact or symptom, studiously concealed from the physician will often render skill and medicine unavailing. Herod's case however was too glaring to admit of that reserve with which some have continued for years to deceive themselves, and those who are anxiously seeking their spiritual welfare. Every one knew that he was married to his brother's wife. Every one must have seen the emptiness of that man's profession, who gave his ear to John and his heart to Herodias. Any one might have read his character in the words of Isaiah ; " He feedeth on ashes : a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ? " (xliv, 20.)

Offended with the home truths of this man of God, (Luke iii. 19, 20.) Herod, who might otherwise have longer trifled with religion, relieved himself of the plain speaking of John, by shutting him up in prison ; and indeed was only hindered from killing him by the fear of the multitude ( Matt. xiv, 5, ) The tragic circumstances of the birth-day supper,—the dancing—the oath—the deep compunction of the king—the passing conflict which ended in his saving appearances and honour before

his guests, at the price of murder ; are familiar to all. But the atrocious crime of Herod would not seem entirely to have divested him of concern and feeling about religion. He appears interested in the religious topics of the day ; and perhaps the last spark of expiring conscience may be perceived in his idea, when he heard of the miracles of Jesus, that John was risen from the dead.

A profession which has outlived every working of conscience, is probably what is meant by the "leaven of Herod ;"(Mark viii, 15.) and the charge to beware of it is not less needful now, than in the life time of him, who like Cain, Baalam, and Corah, before him, is remembered not only for his personal wickedness, but as the leader of an entire class—the father of a still numerous generation—who while they continue to present the broad family likeness of the combination of religious profession with a thorough worldly spirit, or a continuance in some known sin ; cannot be deemed to disprove their pedigree by showing hands unstained with blood.

The term "fox" applied by our Lord to Herod, (Luke, xiii, 32,) who was seeking to kill him, prepares us for the last page of his history as given in the sacred records. And when Jesus is brought before him ; (Luke xxiii, 8.) and the enmity against the truth, which with all his profession, was ever latent in his heart, is openly manifested in the gorgeous robe with which he arrayed his divine prisoner, and the insults he heaped upon him ; we find at least that crime has now dropped the mantle

of profession; and we see in him one point of superiority over His other murderers, who would not put the price of blood into the treasury, or enter the judgement-hall lest they should be defiled.

To the many questions of Herod the Lord answers nothing. We cannot doubt that even for sins like his there would have been pardon, had he sought it where many of his partners in guilt sought, and where they found theirs. But it was on men who were pricked in their heart, that remission of sins was bestowed,

Herod, far from this, only hoped to have seen "some miracle;" and he was therefore exceeding glad when he saw Jesus. Minds like his have always found a congenial element in excitement. Some new work, or popular preacher; some novel speculation or controversy, may meet the morbid cravings of a spirit that never enjoys the holy calm of pure and undefiled religion, to which its feelings stand much in the same relation as the burning heat of fever to the glow of health. Such a spirit carries with it its uneasiness every where. The sight of a "miracle" would no more give it peace, than it would have given peace to Herod. It wearies in turn every friendly effort to deal with it: and forcing at least the conviction that neither its difficulties are honest, nor its search sincere, but one course remains, and that is to meet its questions as Jesus met Herods;—with silence.

We should hardly have expected to find in the household of Herod the tetrarch, any followers of Christ.

But as, on the one hand, the most favourable circumstances for acquiring a knowledge of the truth are unavailing, if unaccompanied by a really earnest desire for it; so on the other, every entanglement of position is insufficient to hinder such as receive the love of the truth that they may be saved. It is refreshing to meet with the names of Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's Steward, and Manaen, in connexion with this wicked prince. The former was accustomed with other women, to minister to Jesus of her substance: ( Luke viii, 3.) the latter who became a prophet and teacher; ( Acts xiii, 1.) had been brought up with the man whose hand met in friendship with Pilate's on the day of their common guilt.

Let those who would share with Joanna and Manaen, in the present peace, and the future glories of the gospel lay for themselves another and a better foundation than that of Herod the Tetrarch. Let his history warn but not discourage them. Instead of vainly endeavouring to win God's favour by doing many things; let them remember that it is the blood of Christ only, which can purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God: that to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Rom. iv. 5.)

When the hollow professor, or the mistaken religionist, renounces the restless workings of self righteousness,—when he ceases from the ineffectual strivings of his



carnal mind; and no longer says in his heart, who shall bring me down Christ from above? or, who shall bring him up to me again from the dead? but remembers that the word is nigh him, even in his mouth, and in his heart; and calls upon the Lord, in conscious helplessness; (Rom. x. 4—13.)—then, and only then! does he taste the blessedness of that Gospel, which God who is rich unto all that call upon him, freely offers to every poor sinner. He distinguishes then between the mere phraseology and technicalities of religion, and the inward power of truth on the soul. Henceforth made free from sin, and become a servant to God, he has his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

THE END.



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