

CHARITY AND CRUELTY.

SERMON BY REV. A. C. DIXON OF BROOKLYN, N. Y.

What Our Living Lord Does and What He Permits—He Does for Us More Than We Expect—Light in Darkness.

"And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." (Acts 12:11).

We see in the text the conflict between charity and cruelty, philanthropy and hatred, benevolence and malevolence. God and his angel are on the side of charity and philanthropy and benevolence. Herod and the Jews are on the side of cruelty, hatred, and malevolence. Peter knew of a surety that the Lord had sent His angel to "deliver him from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

WHAT GOD PERMITS.

1. He permits His faithful servants to be "vexed." Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. Not all the Church were vexed. Some of them then as now are doubtless so quiet and unaggressive that they did not attract the attention of Herod. They pursued the even tenor of their way unobserved. It was the bold aggressive ones who brought down upon themselves the iron hand of Herod. If a man is content simply to pursue the line of least resistance and live a good life without disturbing the evil about him by protest or rebuke, he will not be bothered by Herod. His quiet seclusion is his protection. But let him assert his convictions, and strive to be a positive force against evil, as well as a quiet force for good and all the Herods in reach will be after him. They will take vicious pleasure in hurting him. An old hunter said he took delight in shooting Indians just to see them jump, and there are people in the world who if you oppose their evil doing will take pleasure in hurting you just to see you jump. If there is a sore spot about you they will find it, and pour nitric acid into it. Your pain is their pleasure. God permitted the devil to vex Job in this way. He had a purpose in it which Job did not see, and when he permits such hurt to come to us we may be sure that there is a wise loving purpose behind it. It will appear sooner or later that the devil and all the Herods have played the fool in trying to injure the cause of Christ by injuring some of his servants.

2. God permits others to be killed. Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword. John remains to be vexed for many years. James was taken suddenly from the vexations of Herod to the rest of heaven. Why should I pray, "Good Lord deliver me from sudden death," when sudden death is sudden glory? James had once confessed that he was willing to drink the cup that Christ must drink, and be baptized with the baptism that he was to be baptized with. Little did he think that his confession would so soon be put to the test. He now gets his wish, for the cup of martyrdom is immediately followed by the crown of glory. His mother had prayed that her two sons might be placed in positions of honor, and her prayer is also answered. It was not Christ's way to give such distinctions arbitrarily, but He permitted James to suffer martyrdom, that his own and his mother's prayers may be answered. The martyr's, as we see in Revelation, have a high place in heaven, and to be the first Apostolic martyr was a special favor. I can see Deacon Stephen meet the Apostle James at the gate of heaven with congratulations, and all the angels come out to greet him with song of welcome. Let us be careful not to pray for promotion in the kingdom of God unless we are willing to welcome God's method of giving it. When you have prayed for perfection do not be surprised if you find yourself in the furnace, where God has placed you in order to answer your prayer by taking out of you the dross that only the fire of affliction can remove. The way to the glory of the open sepulchre is by Gethsemane and Calvary. If you look if the dictionary you will see that "cross" comes just before "crown." And so it is in experience.

WHAT GOD DOES.

1. He thwarts the intentions of His enemies. Herod proposes, but God disposes. Herod intends to kill, and the Jews expect him to do so, but God intends to make Peter the messenger of salvation to Jew and Gentile. The intention of Herod and the expectation of the Jews cannot prevail against the purposes of God. Peter's mission must be accomplished, and our mission in life, however humble, if we are faithful to God, cannot be ruined by all the Herods and Jews in the world.

2. God answers prayer beyond the reach of human agency. While Peter was in prison, "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." Gates, doors, walls, and soldiers are no obstacles to prayer. Unbelief is the only power that can imprison prayer. Peter's prayer pays no attention to the "halt" of the Roman soldier, and the jailer cannot slam the door in its face. It needs no key to unlock closed doors. It has free access to the presence of God, in spite of Herod or any earthly potentate. If the Church had tried to release Peter by force, they could not have passed the outer gate. An attempt to break into the prison would have resulted in disgraceful failure and death. The only approach to Peter is by way of God's throne, and they knew how to walk that way. They believe in the Lord God of Elijah, who delighted in piling up difficulties that he might see his God overcome them. The bullock covered with blood, as it lay on the altar, was obstacle enough to test the faith of an

ordinary man. But Elijah multiplied difficulties by telling his servant to pour upon it twelve barrels of water. The unbelief of this age would have told the servant to pour oil upon it instead of water, so that it might ignite if a spark of fire touched it. We are so anxious to make it easy for God to do things. As it is, we hesitate to undertake anything in God's name, until we have evidence that we can do it, whether God helps us or not. But the man of faith undertakes in God's power what would be impossible without Him, and prayer is the means by which He works. Human agency is not to be despised or neglected. Peter did not try to get out of jail by knocking, but when he found himself at the door of John Mark, with only a friendly wall between himself and his friends, he knocks lustily until Rhoda opens the door. The natural can be accomplished by natural means, but prayer puts into action supernatural forces which bring about supernatural results. It was all right for the praying disciples to send Rhoda to the door to let Peter in, but it would have been folly supreme for them to send Rhoda to the jail to bring Peter out. Only an angel is equal to the task of liberating Peter though any child might have lifted the door latch and let him in. Prayer sends the angel without dispensing with Rhoda. But a prayerless Church has only Rhoda, and no angel.

3. God gives his people rest in the midst of cause for distress. Joined to two soldiers, and with the probability of being killed next morning, Peter falls asleep. It is rather difficult I should think for three men joined together to get into a comfortable position. But Peter, wearied with the work of the day, has such rest of mind that he can sleep without bodily comfort. He has cast his burden on the Lord, believing that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. He is willing to glorify God by life or death. Such a man may be hurt but not harmed. Jail walls cannot shut out his vision of heaven, and in the dreams of his sleep he hears the songs of the angels. Though the body may be uncomfortable the promise of Christ, "Lo I am with you always" furnishes a pillow for his soul, and the Lord giveth His beloved sleep. I fear that some of us in such a position would have had an attack of insomnia, and might have been restless enough to irritate the soldiers to whom we were chained. But Peter's calm serenity seems to have put the soldiers to sleep, for they knew there was no use in keeping awake to watch a prisoner who could go to sleep under such circumstances. And thus the sleep of the soldiers made it easier for the angel to perform his mission. Our restless anxiety is a greater hindrance to God's work than prison walls. In quietness and confidence shall we lay our strength.

4. Our Living Lord gives light in darkness. "A light shined in the prison." There was no window through which light could come, but a Christian with the quiet heart needs no window opening into the world to let in the light. God maketh the light of the sun, but not the light of God's countenance. Take from him the printed word and memory will be the angel to hold the light of the promise. The light of God's presence and truth shines brightest in the dark. I shall never forget my first experience of a stereopticon exhibition. I sat near the front with a company of village boys who grew impatient in the dark, but when the beautiful pictures began to fall on the canvas we were glad it was dark, for their colors were all the more distinct because of the surrounding darkness. And so God may put His children in the dark, that He may show them clearly the pictures of his love and mercy that are thrown by the pen of inspiration upon the canvas of Scripture.

5. God sometimes smites His people with a stroke of love. The angel smote Peter on the side and raised him up by saying, "Arise quickly." It may have taken a smart blow to awake Peter from his heavy sleep, but it was meant to raise him up and rid him of his chains. And when the messenger of God smites us, let us know that His loving purpose is to awake us from sleep and raise us to a higher level and give us a larger liberty.

6. Our Living Lord is careful of our comfort and health. The angel tells Peter to gird himself and put on his sandals lest the chilly night air should give him a cold. He says "Cast thy garments about thee." Peter must not appear before the disciples without his sandals and girdle, as if he had broken jail and ran from the guard. All things are done decently and in order. There is no haste nor confusion. Peter comes out of jail as his Lord came out of the sepulchre after the linen clothes had been carefully folded and laid aside. Unbelief begets fear that puts us into a nervous hurry, but he that believeth shall not make haste. The great matter of delivering Peter from prison does not make the angel careless about minor details. In our great undertakings for God we may rest assured that He will give us grace to attend to the little matters which make drudgery, and often discourage us by their dull routine.

Squayah, the Indian chief who reduced to written characters the language of the Cherokees, will have a monument erected to his memory. The people of the Cherokee nation propose to place the monument in the public square at Tahquah, the capital of the nation. Squayah died about forty

years ago. He was a man of great ability and industry, and his work has been of great value to the Cherokee people. The monument to be erected in his honor is a fitting tribute to his memory and to the efforts he made to preserve and record the Cherokee language and history. The monument will stand as a lasting reminder of his contributions to his people and to the world.

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Table listing various mercantile businesses and their appraisers across different locations in Centre County, PA, including Aaronsburg, Bellefonte, Hagerstown, and others.

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