

SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

## The Quiet Hour

YOUNG  
PEOPLE

## DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.\*

(By Rev. J. W. McMillan, M.A.)

John the Baptist was risen, v. 14. The features of the man he had slain were photographed on the memory of Herod. They were ever present to his inward gaze. It is so with all our evil deeds. We can never get away from the sight of them. "It were done when it is done," said Macbeth, when he was planning the murder of his sovereign and guest. But it is not done. We have not finished with our sin when they have been committed. They will rise again as surely as our bodies, and proclaim that the guilt of them belongs to us. Oh, the torture of remorse, the agony of an accusing conscience! These are hell's sharpest pangs. Would we escape them? Then let us smite the sin that leads to them.

Prophecy, v. 15. So people try to explain, and by an explanation, so minimize, anything great. It is said that a brother of Dr. Chambers, living in London, remained smoking in a tavern, while all the city was crowding to hear the famous Northern divine preach. A companion, not knowing the relationship, asked him, "Did you ever hear your namesake and fellow-countryman?" "Heard him," said the brother. "I heard his first speech. He persisted in thinking of that infant occurrence in stupid and jealous delight and scorn. So, too, we say of old warnings which have grown familiar, 'We have heard that before, and, neglecting them, are lost.'

It is not lawful, v. 18. Now, who was John to rebuke Herod? He was the voice of truth, and truth has always authority over vice and crime. Truth is so great, that the meanness of its mouthpiece cannot degrade it. If the house in which you are sitting catches fire, no one needs to beg your permission to sound the alarm. Be it stranger, or schoolboy, or beggar, the barking of a dog, or the scurrying of mice, you respect and heed the warning and are grateful for it. And whoever or whatever awakens a person to his sin has done a friendly act. Do not despise the warnings of the divine Spirit, because He sometimes uses strange and humble heralds.

Heard him gladly, v. 20. Perhaps readiness to listen is the first element of profit. But it goes only a very little way. You may be fond of your teacher, and yet pay no attention to the teaching. You may love your parents, and yet break their hearts with disobedience. You may like the voice and manner of the preacher, and yet learn nothing from the sermon. We constantly hear people singing hymns because their ears are caught by the tunes, whereas, so far as any profit from the words is concerned, they might as well sing negro lullabies. Said Jesus, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

Made a supper, v. 21. And the wine flowed freely, no doubt. And was jollity and fun, as when a half-dozen young fellows meet in the bar-room, which, in every community, flings open its doors that lead to ruin and death. But next day these chaps get up with a "head," and are unfit for an honest day's work. Down with treating! Close the bars! Let old and young unite in this demand, and make their wishes so plainly known that the makers of our laws will not dare to oppose them!

Sware unto her, v. 23. "When wine is in, wit is out." Anything seems wise and noble and heroic to people in a merry mood of drunkenness. The guests at this supper, no doubt, considered this oath a truly royal utterance, full of generosity,

\*S.S. Lesson May 29, 1906—Mark 6: 14-20. Commit to memory v. 20. Read Matthew 14: 1-12; Luke 5: 1-20; 6: 7-13. Golden Text—Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.—Ephesians 5:18.

decision and courage. What a sorry piece of folly it must have seemed in the sober daylight of the next morning! "Wine is a mocker." It loves to make a laughing stock of its victim. One rigid abstainer told of his care, as follows: "Once, in my drinking days, I saw a couple of fellows about half-loaded, who were making fools of themselves. I asked a friend of mine if I was like that when I was drunk. He said I was far worse. So I signed the pledge."

Her mother, v. 24. Here is an unwomanly woman, an unmotherly mother, and an inhuman human being. The worst is often just the corruption of the best. The higher the point from which the fall takes place, the longer the drop and the more ruinous the crash at the bottom. As an apple is a more pleasing thing than a piece of wood, so a rotten apple is more offensive than a rotten piece of wood. The vices of man are worse than those of any other animal. He can be more brutal than any brute. As he is meant to be the highest of creatures, so he sometimes sinks lower than the lowest. This is a matter for deep and serious thought. By just as much as the angelic is possible for us, by just so much is the diabolic. Satan was an archangel.

Exceeding sorry, v. 26. When Theodore Parker was a child of six, he one day lifted a stick to strike a tortoise, as he had seen older boys do. But in that moment an inner voice whispered loud and clear, "It is wrong." In his fright the boy hastened home to fling himself into his mother's arms. "What was the voice?" he asked. And his mother answered, "People call it conscience, but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul. Always your happiness will depend upon obedience to that little voice." How glad Herod would have been afterwards, had he yielded to the leading of that sorrow for his foolish promise and revoked it!

The King commanded, etc., v. 27. It is a stiff undertaking to conquer conscience. Herod seemed to have succeeded in it. But in fact, as v. 14 reveals, conscience re-awakes, and the king is rent with fierce remorse. Conscience, sooner or later, avenges all disobedience. The only way with it, is to do as it bids. He that is rash enough to do otherwise pays dearly for his folly.

## LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

(By Rev. James Ross, D.D.)

Dancing—Was originally a natural expression of great joy, and as such it became a religious act in many primitive faiths, employed at marriages, births, anniversaries, and other special occasions in the religious life. But alongside of the dance of worship, there grew up one of quite another character, dancing by specially trained men and women for the entertainment of spectators. On the monuments, girls dressed in long, transparent clothing, with tambourines or castanets in their hands, turn round and round in quick time, bending their bodies in a coquettish manner. This kind of dancing was much cultivated among the Greeks, and from them it passed to the Romans and the Hellenized Jews. Among them it was performed chiefly by women of the town. The fact that a princess of Israel thus demeaned herself, is a revelation of the moral atmosphere of Herod's court. The profession of the dancing girls is still an important and lucrative one in the East, although their motions seem to us a somewhat tame and monotonous performance. They move backwards and forwards, and sideways, now slowly, then rapidly, throwing their arms and heads about, rolling their eyes and wriggling the body into many languishing and suggestive attitudes.

## HEAVENLY JEWELS.

By Rev. W. L. Watkinson, D.D.

"They shall be Mine . . . when I make up My jewels." Mal. iii, 17.

There is a fairy-tale in the meanness flower that grows; the paving-stones, interpreted by geology, are precious as striped Jasper; in a drop of dirty water hides the rainbow, and the "strang" of all things in the hands of the chemist turns out gold, and beauty, and fragrance. Thus in human life we may not seek charm and enrichment in extraordinary elements, dramatic situations, and fine frenzies; all we need is the opening of our eyes to the large purpose and high efficiency of commonplace people, places, and days.

It is quite remarkable to what considerable extent jewels are now being used in mean work. Once they were strictly reserved for the finger of the rich, the tiara and necklace of beauty, the crown of kings; now, instead of being purely ornamental, they are pressed into the roughest, hardest utilitarian service.

They are used in glaziers' tools, dentists' drills, granite cutters' saws, rock drills, and diamonds and sapphires are fixed in thousands of meters for registering the supply of electricity. A democratic age has captured the glittering gem and set it to do dirty work. Yet has the gem suffered no degradation—to cut, drill, and measure abates nothing of its glory.

God also has His jewels, and one day He will make them up. But in the meantime where are they? Shall they be sought in high places, flaming forth in beauty? Is the world talking of their pure lustre? Do they repose sootily in the jewellers' cases of wealth and art? Do they coruscate on festival days? Are they the pride of fashionable circles?

Surely not. Very often the jewels of God are fixed in coarsest settings, secreted in shabbiest neighborhoods, doomed to meanest vocations, delivered to basest uses in the work-a-day world; not one beam of their intrinsic beauty struggles through their sordid lot, not one sparkle of distinction reveals their royal quality and destination. Of the lowliness of these we may boast "Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God"; yet today their station is obscure, their calling paltry, their work hewing wood and drawing water.

Do not despise common positions; they require splendid souls to fill them; do not despise common tasks; it requires rare souls to accomplish them. Only God's jewels can worthily work out His great purpose in humble places and things; and in thus working out His purpose they are proved and polished against the great day of coronation.

Look not wistfully to the high, the distant, the rare; see all needful things in the routine of common days. Do not weaken the soul with vain longings and idealisations. There is no victory like that of the commonplace life bravely lived. John Wesley thought highly of the man who "persevered in dry duty"; of that man God emphatically approves. "To them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life."

Do not despise the small. "The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth," seeking great things, while in the apparently insignificant close at hand reside most momentous possibilities. The wise accept thankfully the small sphere, the one talent, the few things. Rittner observes, in his "Impressions of Japan": "In small things the Japanese are wonderfully artistic; no country can paint china better, or carve more perfectly, whether in ivory,