

v. 26.—“A whole year.” How many whole years are we contented to spend without seeing such fruit?

As long as the followers of Jesus were all Jews, they were considered as merely another Jewish sect or party, such as Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes. The strict Jews called them Galileans, or Nazarenes. They called themselves “disciples,” “the faithful,” “believers,” “saints,” “brethren,” “those of the way.” Now that they stood out as a body, composed of Jews and Gentiles, the Antiochenes gave them a characteristic name, probably intending it as a nick-name.

IV. *The action of the Antiochene Christians.*

v. 27.—“Prophets,” teachers male and female, whose utterances were so much above their own intellectual level, that the Church recognized them as specially inspired of the Holy Ghost. The gift was higher than “speaking with tongues,” 1 Cor. xiv., 5.

v. 28.—Agabus; as to his manner in prophesying, see xxi., 10.

v. 29.—“Every man, etc.” Here is the only rule of giving that Christ will try us by. All at it, always at it, honestly at it.

v. 30.—“Which they did.” Their determination would have been nothing without this. The prodigal after resolving, “arose and went.” This action would be to the mother Church a token of the genuineness of the work at Antioch, 2 Cor. ix., 12-14.

The importance attached to helping the poor, may be judged from the men the matter was entrusted to. So in 2 Cor. viii., 4-6, 17-23.

“The elders,” elsewhere called overseers or bishops of the Congregation, Acts xx., 17, 28; Titus i., 5, 7; 1st Pet. v., 1, 2. The apostles took the office from the Synagogue, naturally modelling the Church on its form, which in its main features is also ours, (xiv., 23). Every impartial authority now admits that diocesan bishops were unknown in the Apostles’ days

PETER’S RELEASE.

DECEMBER 17th.—Acts xii., 1-17.

Golden Text: Ps. xxxiv. 7.

I. *The second Persecution in Jerusalem.*

PERSONS—Herod Agrippa I., grandson of Herod the Great, who now ruled over Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and Trachonitis, or all the dominions of his grandfather. He had risen by fawning on the Emperors Caligula and Claudius; and he was now

doing all in his power to court the favour of the Jews.

James, son of Zebedee, and “son of thunder.” He was one of the three whom Jesus usually had with him on special occasions. He was the first Apostle who was martyred (Math. 20, 23). He is the only Apostle whose death is mentioned in Scripture. His brother John survived all the others.

II. *Peter in Prison.*

The city was full of zealous Jews, who had come up to the great festival at which Jesus also had been seized. Herod is as punctilious as the members of the Sanhedrim then were, John xviii., 28. During the seven days of unleavened bread, Peter lies in prison, but his head is safe. There is no possibility of escape. Four soldiers are on guard at each watch, and the night is divided into four watches. Each hand of the prisoner is chained to a soldier. A third watches at the door of the cell or chamber; and a fourth at the outer door of the prison. The premises are walled round, and the only exit from them is by a great iron gate.

The Church prays for Peter. Day after day passes, and there is no answer. “Without ceasing” they pray. The last night of the seven comes. Peter takes off his sandals and his loose outer garment, unfastens the girdle that keeps the long tunic or shirt close to the body, lies down with the two soldiers, and falls fast asleep. At the regular hours the guards are changed, and now the last watch is set.

III. *The Release.* v. 7-11.

Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. Till the angel left him in the street, he was as one dreaming while half awake and knowing that it is a dream.

IV.—*The Prayer-meeting.*

PLACE.—The house of Mary, mother of John Mark, and aunt of Barnabas. Many were there. They had spent the whole night praying. A knock is heard at the porch door. The servant girl goes out and asks, who is there? Peter answers, and she recognizes the voice. Rhoda—her name is given, for she had more faith than those who had been praying—rushes back to tell them that their prayers are answered. “Mad,” is their first thought: but when they see her calm and positive, they say “it is his angel.” Anything rather than believe that the Lord had answered their prayer. Each of the Lord’s little ones has his guardian angel, Matt. xviii., 10.

The knocking continues, not loud but impatient, for enemies may be near. They go to the door, and lo, it is Peter. Still they are “astonished.” He hushes their loud