

ling to pause and consider what Christ offers, as ever Herod was. The indifference with which religion is regarded by so many is essentially due to the "cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things" entering in and absorbing all the interest the soul is capable of entertaining.

2. There was much discussion amongst the people as to the person of Jesus, but none seem to have been bold enough to assert his true nature as the Messiah, the Christ of God. Herod accepted the most absurd view of all because his conscience was awakened, but, with the rest he was willing to believe in Christ as a wonder-worker but not as a Saviour from sin.

Some of the most eloquent tributes to the character of Christ have come from the lips and pens of those who denied altogether his divine mission to redeem mankind. There are multitudes of nominal Christians whose attitude towards him is virtually the same. No admiration for Christ will take the place of humble acceptance of Him as Saviour, and earnest striving to forsake sin and grow to holiness of heart.

3. To imprison John the Baptist was as cruel as to cage an eagle. No wonder he grew despondent and longed for a word from Jesus to confirm his weak faith. So brief a ministry—was this all God had for him to do in the world?

Yet his death was not "premature." He justly received the eulogium pronounced upon him by the Master of greatest among men. In him the old Economy came to a fitting close. The preacher of righteousness introduced "The Lord, our righteousness." *Those who suffer for righteousness' sake are not forgotten of God.*

Doubtless John found the gloomy fortress of Machærus as hallowed a trying place with God as Rutherford did his dungeon at Aberdeen. The latter used to date his letters, "Christ's Palace, Aberdeen" and thus wrote to a friend:

"The Lord is with me; I care not what man can do. I burden no man. I want nothing. Nothing is better provided than I am. Sweet, sweet and easy is the Cross of my Lord. All men I look in the face, of whatsoever rank, nobles or poor. Acquaintances and strangers are friendly to me. My Well Beloved is kinder and more warm than ordinary, and cometh and visiteth my soul. My chains are overgilded with gold. No pen, no words, can

express to you the loveliness of my only Lord, Jesus. Thus, in haste, I make for my palace at Aberdeen."

4. John's reproof was stern. "It is not lawful"—Who forbids? John? If that had been all Herod could have smiled. But in John spake the oracles of God, and deep in the libertine's breast, conscience said "Amen." Herod was not accustomed to regard conduct from this point of view. To him, whatever suited his pleasure, his pride, or his ambition, was lawful so long as it did not entail disagreeable consequences. But *no question of expediency or personal preference should come before that of duty.* "Is it right before God?" is the first point to be settled, and when this is answered, all others are mere matters of detail.

5. Herod did not take his rebuke meekly. He not only imprisoned John but would have liked to have put him to death. But political reasons forbade. He did not know how hotly the people might resent such violence to one whom they deemed God's prophet. It would be decidedly unpleasant to rouse the fanatical zeal of the Jews and might lead to a very undesirable investigation of his methods of government.

*Public censure is a wholesome deterrent from open wickedness.* It rests with Christian people to keep the public conscience true to the Bible standard of righteousness. We have no right to stand aside and let unprincipled men govern the country, the province, or the municipality, when by voice and vote we can secure a higher degree of honesty and efficiency amongst our rulers. It is our sacred duty to denounce and antagonize all wrong-doing even when we feel ourselves powerless to prevent it. Even Herod feared the multitude when right was on their side.

## II. The Birthday Banquet.

1. We suppose that there is no difference of opinion now about the propriety of celebrating one's birthday in a becoming manner, but we cannot wonder at the prejudice against such festivals amongst the Jews when they were accompanied with such heathenish orgies as disgraced the anniversary of a Herod's natal day. A comparison of the narratives shows us that the occasion was one of great splendor, and from what we know of the court of Herod, doubtless characterized by much excess both in eating and drinking.