

Lady Macbeth and her husband at the murder of Duncan). He felt that there were unseen spiritual powers behind John who would reckon with his slayer. **Observed him**—A wrong translation. R. V. "kept him safe" from the malice of Herodias. He feared lest any violence to John should arouse the fanatical portion of the people who all counted him a prophet. **Did many things**—tried to quiet his conscience by many good deeds, but he would not give up his sinful course of life. The R. V. reads, "was much perplexed," his sense of duty was at war with his inclinations. **Heard him gladly**—as Felix heard Paul (Acts. 24: 24-26). "This guilty man, disquieted by the reproaches of memory and the demands of conscience, found it a relief to hear stern truth or to see from far the beautiful light of righteousness." (Chadwick.)

II. THE BIRTHDAY BANQUET. 21. A convenient day—i. e. for the schemes of Herodias. She seized upon the birthday festival as a good opportunity to extort compliance with her wishes. Her implacable enmity to John arose from two causes. He had stung her to the quick, and her woman nature felt this more keenly than the coarser soul of Herod did. Besides, there was danger that hearing John gladly, and "doing many things," might end in his doing the one thing that would be ruin to her. **Birthday**—This was a pagan custom, abhorrent to the Jews, because connected with idolatrous worship. It was common amongst Egyptians (Gen. 40: 20), Persians, Greeks and Romans. The Herods celebrated their birthdays with such magnificence that they passed into a proverb—"A Herod's day" (*Herodis dies*). **Lords**—magnates, high state officers. **High captains**—Gr. "chiliarchs," commanders of a thousand (Acts 21: 31; 25: 23), chief military officers. **Chief estates of Galilee**—The most influential personages in the province, who were not directly in the service of the tetrarch.

22. The daughter of Herodias herself—i. e. Herodias' own daughter. The emphasis expresses the scorn of the writer. She degraded her own daughter into a common dancing girl, in order to play upon the worst passions of Herod, and by them gain her purpose. Her name was Salome. **Danced**—Matthew says (R. V.) "in the midst." "Her dancing was doubtless of a mimetic and wanton character" (Meyer), a statement which is amply warranted by what we know of the customs of that day and the morals of the court of Herod. Contrast the modesty of the heathen queen in Esther 1: 10-12.

23. He swore unto her—Perhaps she had been "before instructed" on this point by her mother, so as to secure Herod against withdrawing his promise under any pretext. **Unto the half of my kingdom**—(Compare Esther 5: 3, 6; 7: 2.) A weak imitation of

Ahashuerus. He was no king, and held what he had by grace of Cæsar.

24—"The girl flew to her mother, and said, 'What shall I ask?' It was exactly what Herodias expected, and she might have asked for robes, or jewels, or palaces, or whatever such a woman loves; but to a mind like hers revenge was sweeter than wealth or pride, and we can imagine with what fierce malice she hissed out the unhesitating answer, 'The head of John the Baptist.'" (Farrar.)

25. Straightway with haste—Excited by her mother's manner, and with the cruel blood of the Herods in her veins, "the scent of blood" arouses her fierce nature. **I will**—This word is emphatic. "Observe the pertness of the wanton damsel." (Meyer.) **Bye-and-bye**—R. V. "forthwith," "this very instant." **A charger**—A large platter from which other dishes are "charged," or loaded. The Greek word means "a wooden trencher," such dishes having been made of wood in primitive times.

III. THE MARTYRED PROPHET. 26. The king was exceeding sorry—For several reasons: (1) He shrank from the deed, especially in the midst of jovial feasting. It was an ill-omened ending to a birthday banquet. (2) He had a superstitious, if not conscientious, fear of the consequences. (3) It was a dangerous thing to do, for all the people held John to be a prophet, and they might rise in rebellion to avenge him. (4) He rather liked John's outspoken, but respectful, boldness, and did not resent his rebukes so much as Herodias did (see verse 20). (5) He would also feel annoyed at being thus at last outwitted by Herodias. **For the oath's sake**—Compelled by a false code of honor. R. V. "for the sake of his oaths." He had reiterated his promise again and again. Such an oath ought not to have been kept. Oaths to commit crime are blasphemous and invalid, themselves heinous sins. (Lev. 5: 4-6, 10.) "Promises which should not be made, should not be kept." Such a thing was manifestly not in the intention of the king. It was more than half his kingdom. It might mean the whole of it. A true sense of honor would have cast the shame on the damsel for taking a mean advantage. "When one has begun wrong, repentance is more honorable than pertinacity." **For their sakes that sat with him**—"reclined with him" around the table in oriental fashion. He was afraid of covert sneers from the sycophants around him.

27. An executioner—lit. "a watcher," one of the body-guard. The word is a Latin one peculiar to Mark. He alone of the evangelists uses the word "centurion." This gospel was written for Roman readers. **In the prison**—A case of judicial assassination. The narrative conveys the impression that the banquet was held at Machærus, where John was imprisoned, and that all was over in a few moments. Had the feast been held at Tiberias two days must have elapsed before the head