

## THE LIBERATION OF St. PETER.

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[FOR THE CRAFTSMAN.]

In vanished years, so says the Holy Book,  
King Herod, in his folly, undertook  
To calm his people, when in angry mood,  
By glutting them with Galilean blood,  
So fell Saint James, Apostle of the Lord;  
So many others perished by the sword;  
And thus it happened that Peter was at last  
Seized by the King, and into prison cast.

There as he lay, weary of heart and limb,  
The Holy Church made ceaseless prayer for him,  
Mourning his fate; for Herod had decreed  
That Easter past, the Christian dog should bleed;  
Which pleased the Jews, who, eager, fierce, and keen,  
Longed for the life-drops of the Nazarene.  
But the good Lord, who rules o'er earth and sky,  
O'erthrew the hope that His loved Saint should die.

The hour approached; naught changed the Royal plan;  
Wasted and worn, behold, the ancient man  
Lay 'twixt his guards upon the prison floor,  
While mail-clad soldiers guard the inner door.  
The moaning breezes round the prison creep,  
'Thwart the drear sky black clouds tumultuous sweep;  
Gloom reigns above, below, and near and far,  
Save where bright rays from one sweet glimmering star  
Pierce the dim space, and with their pencils faint  
Gild the barred lattice of the prisoned saint.

The soldiers sleep. Their captive calmly prays,  
And thanks his Lord for sending those bright rays  
To glad his heart—to cheer his gloomy lot—  
To breathe the message, "God forgets thee not."

But now a gush of radiance fills the air,  
And lo! there enters one divinely fair,  
Clothed with the Sun, like those who guard the gate  
Of man-lost Eden, or in the Presence wait.  
His form Angelic pearly glory flings  
O'er the grim prison, until India's Kings  
Might truly covet for their Palace halls  
The glowing colors of those changed walls.

Tinged by the lustre of that light divine,  
Like links of gold the rusted fetters shine.  
E'en the fierce features of the slumbering men  
Lose their stern form, and seem to smile again,  
As the soft radiance banishes each trace  
Which shame and sorrow stamp on sinner's face.

Awake, yet wordless, lay the wond'ring Saint,  
His very soul within him waxing faint,  
As the bright Angel gently touched his side,  
And in a voice of silvery cadence cried,  
"Anasta, Petre—nasta en taxel!"  
The words scarce uttered,—lo! the fetters fly  
Off the saint's limbs, the gyves from off his hands,  
And all unchained the great Apostle stands.

Now spake the Seraph: "Peter, it is meet  
That thou shouldst bind thy sandals on thy feet;  
Gird up thy loins, and be no more afraid."  
And the good Saint did as the Bright One said,  
Till, fully clad, he waits the next behest  
From the sweet lips of his Angelic guest,  
Who gently takes him trembling by the hand  
And utters words of mystical command.

Like silken veil the solid walls divide,  
And Saint and Angel softly pass outside;  
This done, each Ashlar seeks its wonted place,  
Nor of the mighty rest leaves sign or trace.  
Then Peter, wondering with a great surprise,  
Wist not the truth of what had met his eyes;  
But thought a vision in his sleep was given  
Of freedom gained through aid of One from Heaven.

Thus 'scaped the twain from prison and from guard,  
And pass the first and now the second ward,  
Until they reach with no'er abated speed  
The iron gates which to the city lead.

At their approach the bolts all backward fly,  
The doors unclose to let the pilgrims by,  
Noiseless, yet swift, and of their own accord,  
Moved by no earthly power, no mortal word.

The portal passed, thus Peter being freed  
Of further aid no longer stands in need,  
So the bright cherub softly smiled adieu,  
And swiftly vanished from his comrades view,  
Who hurrying on with joy bowing feet,  
Reaches at length the well remembered street  
Where Mary dwells, the Mother of Saint Mark,  
Where meets the Church from early dawn to dark,  
Here all the Saints—as one from death arisen—  
Greet him with joy escaped from Herod's prison.

Now can the brethren for themselves discern  
The story's moral and the lesson learn,  
That Masonry though prized and dear,  
No massive pyramids can proudly rear,  
Whose mighty stones and triple gates of brass  
Can o'er forbid God's Holy Ones to pass;  
That Tyrant Kings no dungeons ere can build,  
E'en by the aid of craftsmen duly skilled,  
Whose walls can bind the suppliant captive's sigh,  
Or hold it soaring to the Throne on High.

## REASONS FOR MASONIC SECRECY.

If the secrets of Masonry are replete with such advantages to mankind, it may be asked, why are they not divulged for the general good of society? To this it may be answered, were the privileges of Masonry to be indiscriminately dispensed, the purposes of the institution would be subverted, and our secrets being familiar, would lose their value, and sink into disregard.

It is a weakness in human nature, that men are generally more charmed with novelty than with the intrinsic value of things. Innumerable testimonies might be adduced to confirm this truth. The most wonderful operations of the Divine Artificer, however beautiful, magnificent, and useful, are overlooked, because common and familiar. The sun rises and sets, the sea flows and reflows, rivers glide along their channels, trees and plants vegetate, men and beast act, yet these being perpetually open to view, pass unnoticed. The most astonishing productions of nature on the same account escape observation, and excite no emotion, either in admiration of the great cause, or of gratitude for the blessing conferred. Even virtue herself is not exempted from this unhappy bias in the human frame. Novelty influences all our actions and determinations. What is new, or difficult in the acquisition, however trifling or insignificant, readily captivates the imagination, and insures a temporary admiration; while what is familiar, or easily attained, however noble or eminent, is sure to be disregarded by the giddy and unthinking.

Did the essence of Masonry consist in the knowledge of particular secrets or peculiar forms, it might be alleged that our amusements were trifling and superficial. But this is not the case. These are only keys to our treasure, and having their use, are preserved; while from the recollection of the lessons which they inculcate, the well informed Master derives instruction, draws them to a near inspection, views them through a proper medium, adverts to the circumstances which gave them rise, and dwells upon the tenets which they convey. Finding them replete with useful information, he prizes them as sacred; and convinced of their propriety, estimates their value from their utility.

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