

interests of a more virile and purer form of devotion and zeal in the mission of the true Church of Christ. Here we read the safe and sure lesson, one which can be applied to the life of the believer as well as to the Church, that God is never indifferent, but controls all things by unerring wisdom and infinite love. What seems to man's poor judgment hopeless disaster is in God's ordering of affairs the attainment of some high vantage ground of experience and possibility, which is, as we discover afterward, attainable only upon the conditions of great labor and pain. It must not be forgotten that in the plan of redemption man is the agent, the servant; to the success of this plan all personal good and gain are made subordinate; the apostle, in imprisonment, is taking his place in the line of prophets and of his Lord. What God may do in the emergency concerns not the welfare of Peter, but the glory and triumph of his Church. A soul in alliance with God lives near enough to the great movements of the Spirit in the direction of the kingdom of Christ on the earth to know that it is safe under the administration of divine love and wisdom and redemption, whatever may be the perils and pains which threaten and afflict it from without. The contest that is now begun between Herod and Peter is actually but one form of the contest between the kingdom of Christ and the world.

DELIVERANCE.

The details of this miracle of deliverance are presented with such minuteness that one cannot fail to see that we have before us one of the most illustrious examples of divine interference to be found in the annals of the Church.

Herod had no Roman soldiers in his service, but the military regulations of his troops were modeled after those of the Roman army; so that for the night watch sixteen soldiers were detailed, four being for each watch. Between two of them the prisoner lay, being chained to them hand to hand; two kept watch on the outside. After the Passover, a festival in which Herod could have no real interest, Peter was to be brought forth and publicly executed. There was nothing which from a human point of view could be more hopeless. Peter's inner history during this period of his confinement would be interesting to read. But the very hopelessness of the situation brings out more vividly the fact and the force of the miracle. The distinctness with which the details of this miracle are described has a very important place in the narrative. The question to be decided is not

what in the order of human probability happened, but what in the order and plan of God really could happen for the welfare of the Church. Peter was evidently indispensable to the success of the church at Jerusalem; but this was not all: was not the miracle, as a fact, indispensable to the success of the Church, and in a far more important sense, than any man? By degrees came the knowledge to the disciples that the promise of power which began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost would continue to be an all-powerful ministry of salvation to the believer within and without. And the miracle was to make its history without in the visible demonstration of the power of God, quite as much as the experiences of the humblest believer should testify of the abiding presence of God within. Christianity is the religion of the supernatural, evidenced in the facts of Christian experience, and confirmed by the remarkable signs and wonders which were wrought always in its name and for its interest.

To Peter's amazed senses the real world passes as the unreal. But the fact of what he supposed a vision is the fact of the entire history of the kingdom of Christ. Peter was yet to test this power of God in other spheres, where he would be called upon to defend the doctrine of which this miracle was a most important testimony. One sees what the moral effect of this miracle would be upon Peter. If there was a doubt before concerning the extent to which the promised presence of Christ could aid him all such doubt must pass henceforth out of his history. Severe trials treat us like furnaces of fire treat the ore; they take out of our spiritual life much that is earthly, and bring to our comprehension the fact and force of the supernatural. Faith grows strong with exercise; and temptations, successfully resisted, are ever occasions for a victorious virtue. New phases of persecution are met by new forms of divine manifestation. Exigencies of uncommon seriousness make the power of God's deliverance the more remarkable; dilemmas which utterly dismay the mind and heart are the occasions for the most significant expressions of the divine will and wisdom.

Thoughts for Young People.

PRAYER AND MIRACLES.

1. God does not always work miracles when men think them needed. There are few difficulties in life that Christians would not desire to have surmounted by miracles. Why God did not work a miracle on James must remain an

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