

another of his birthdays in Rome in A. D. '39, he was terrified by a Banquo-like appearance of the murdered prophet. The superstition that already suggested to Herod the resurrection of John might well act more strongly on the anniversary of the murder; and after he had connived at the death of the One who, by his miracles, showed that he possessed greater power than John." (Williams) John, when living, wrought no miracle (John 10: 41) but having returned from the spirit world it was natural to expect new manifestations of power, literally "works of power are active in him."

3.—Herod had arrested John about a year before (Matt. 4: 12; Mark 1: 14.) The prison in which he was confined was the fortress of Machærus on the borders of Arabia, about 9 miles east of the north end of the Dead Sea.

Herod was probably at this time engaged in war with his father-in-law, Aretas, whose daughter he had driven away when he took Herodias to wife.

The war proved disastrous for Herod. Josephus informs us that it was the general opinion amongst the Jews that in this way God showed his displeasure at the treatment John received from him.

Herodias was a grand-daughter of Herod the Great and married her uncle Philip, a half brother of Antipas, the Herod of this Lesson. This Philip, the father of Salome, who danced before Herod, must be distinguished from Philip the Tetrarch, his half brother and subsequently the husband of Salome. He had fallen under the displeasure of his father and was excluded from the succession. He was living in retirement at Jerusalem.

4.—His union with Herodias was unlawful for three reasons; (1) Philip her husband was still living; (2) Herod had a wife; (3) she was within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity (Lev. 18: 14; 20: 19) and of affinity (Lev. 18: 16; 20: 21.)

The emphasis is to be laid on the last reason. It was an aggravation of the crime of adultery. Josephus says, that John's bold rebuke was only a pretext, so far as Herod was concerned. He was shameless enough not to feel hurt by it. His real reason was lest John should stir up an insurrection.

The tense used in Mark 6: 18, implies that John had reproved Herod more than once. It

was the burden of his exhortations to him (Alford.) He had rebuked Herod's profligacy besides, (Luke 3: 19.) Compare Nathan and David (2 Sam. 12: 7,) and note the different spirit in which a true child of God takes a faithful rebuke.

John was a true prophet, (Ezek. 2: 5-7.) He risked his life when he rebuked Herod, but he feared God rather than man. We become responsible for sin that we do not denounce when a fitting opportunity occurs.

5.—From the parallel narratives we learn that Herodias was more bitter against John than Herod. She "set herself against him" (Mark 6: 19,) lit. "cherished inward wrath against him," watching for her opportunity of revenge. She "desired to kill him," she had a settled and persistent determination on the subject.

Besides his fear that any violence to John would arouse the indignation of the nation, Herod had a secret respect for the brave reprover of his sins.

As Queen Mary feared Knox, or Abab Elijah, so Herod felt that there were unseen spiritual powers behind John who would reckon with his slayer.

Mark tells us that he "kept him safe" from the malice of Herodias and tried to quiet his conscience by many good deeds. The R. V. reads "he was much perplexed," he would not give up his sinful course of life and his sense of duty was at war with his passions. He even "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 afar the beauteous light of righteousness." (Chalwick.)

6.—Mark tells us that Herodias was on the watch for "a convenient day" and had her scheme ready to spring upon Herod at a moment's notice. She seized upon this birthday festival as a good opportunity to extort compliance with her wishes. John had stung her to the quick, and her woman nature felt his rebuke more keenly than the coarser soul of Herod.

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.