**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ACTS-046. THE ANGEL'S TOUCH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"7.* *And, behold, the angel of the Lord ... smote Peter... . 23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him [Herod].--."*

*Acts 12:7,23*

The same heavenly agent performs the same action on Peter and on Herod. To the one, his touch brings freedom and the dropping off of his chains; to the other it brings gnawing agonies and a horrible death. These twofold effects of one cause open out wide and solemn thoughts, on which it is well to look.

**I. The one touch has a twofold effect.**

So it is always when God's angels come, or God Himself lays His hand on men. Every manifestation of the divine power, every revelation of the divine presence, all our lives' experiences, are charged with the solemn possibility of bringing us one or other of two directly opposite results. They all offer us an alternative, a solemn either --or.

The Gospel too comes charged with that double possibility, and is the intensest and most fateful example of the dual effect of all God's messages and dealings. Just as the ark maimed Dagon and decimated the Philistine cities and slew Uzzah, but brought blessing and prosperity to the house of Obed-edom, just as the same pillar was light to Israel all the night long, but cloud and darkness to the Egyptians, so is Christ set for the fall of some and for the rising of others amidst the many in Israel, and His Gospel is either the savour of life unto life or of death unto death, but in both cases is in itself unto God, one and the same sweet savour in Christ.

**II. These twofold effects are parts of one plan and purpose.**

Peter's liberation and Herod's death tended in the same direction--to strengthen and conserve the infant Church, and thus to prepare the way for the conquering march of the Gospel. And so it is in all God's self-revelations and manifested energies, whatever may be their effects. They come from one source and one motive, they are fundamentally the operations of one changeless Agent, and, as they are one in origin and character, so they are one in purpose. We are not to separate them into distinct classes and ascribe them to different elements in the divine nature, setting down this as the work of Love and that as the outcome of Wrath, or regarding the acts of deliverance as due to one part of that great whole and the acts of destruction as due to another part of it. The angel was the same, and his celestial fingers were moved by the same calm, celestial will when he smote Peter into liberty and life, and Herod to death.

God changes His ways, but not His heart. He changes His acts, but not His purposes. Opposite methods conduce to one end, as winter storms and June sunshine equally tend to the yellowed harvest.

**III. The character of the effects depends on the men who are touched.**

As is the man, so is the effect of the angel's touch. It could only bring blessing to the one who was the friend of the angel's Lord, and it could bring only death to the other, who was His enemy. It could do nothing to the Apostle but cause his chains to drop from his wrists, nor anything to the vainglorious king but bring loathsome death.

This, too, is a universal truth. It is we ourselves who settle what God's words and acts will be to us. The trite proverb, One man's meat is another man's poison, is true in the highest regions. It is eminently, blessedly or tragically true in our relation to the Gospel, wherein all God's self-revelation reaches its climax, wherein the arm of the Lord is put forth in its most blessed energy, wherein is laid on each of us the touch, tender and more charged with blessing than that of the angel who smote the calmly sleeping Apostle. That Gospel may either be to us the means of freeing us from our chains, and leading us out of our prison-house into sunshine and security, or be the fatal occasion of condemnation and death. Which it shall be depends on ourselves. Which shall I make it for myself?