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

**ACTS-049. PETER AFTER HIS ESCAPE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him forth out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren, And he departed, and went into another place."*

*Acts 12:17*

When the angel departed from him, Peter had to fall back on his own wits, and they served him well. He considered the thing, and resolved to make for the house of Mary. He does not seem to have intended to remain there, so dangerously near Herod, but merely to have told its inmates of his deliverance, and then to have hidden himself somewhere, till the heat of the hunt after him was abated. Apparently he did not go into the house at all, but talked to the brethren, when they came trooping after Rhoda to open the gate. The signs of haste in the latter part of the story, where Peter has to think and act for himself, contrast strikingly with the majestic leisureliness of the action of the angel, who gave his successive commands to him to dress completely, as if careless of the sleeping legionaries who might wake at any moment. There was need for haste, for the night was wearing thin, and the streets of Jerusalem were no safe promenade for a condemned prisoner, escaped from his guards.

We do not deal here with the scene in Mary's house and at the gate. We only note, in a word, the touch of nature in Rhoda's forgetting to open for gladness, and so leaving Peter in peril, if a detachment of his guards had already been told off to chase him. Equally true to nature, alas, is the incredulity of the praying many, when the answer to their prayers was sent to them. They had rather believe that the poor girl was mad or that, for all their praying, Peter was dead, and this was his angel, than that their intense prayer had been so swiftly and completely answered. Is their behaviour not a mirror in which we may see our own?

Very like Peter, as well as very intelligible in the circumstances, is it that he continued knocking, Well he might, and evidently his energetic fusillade of blows was heard even above the clatter of eager tongues, discussing Rhoda's astonishing assertions. Some one, at last, seems to have kept his head sufficiently to suggest that perhaps, instead of disputing whether these were true or not, it might be well to go to the door and see. So they all went in a body, Rhoda being possibly afraid to go alone, and others afraid to stay behind, and there they saw his veritable self. But we notice that there is no sign of his being taken in and refreshed or cared for. He waved an imperative hand, to quiet the buzz of talk, spoke two or three brief words, and departed.

**I. Note Peter's account of his deliverance.**

We have often had occasion to remark that the very keynote of this Book of Acts is the working of Christ from heaven, which to its writer is as real and efficient as was His work on earth. Peter here traces his deliverance to the Lord. He does not stay to mention the angel. His thoughts went beyond the instrument to the hand which wielded it. Nor does he seem to have been at all astonished at his deliverance. His moment of bewilderment, when he did not know whether he was dreaming or awake, soon passed, and as soon as the sober certainty of his waking bliss settled on his mind, his deliverance seemed to him perfectly natural. What else was it to be expected that the Lord would do? Was it not just like Him? There was nothing to be astonished at, there was everything to be thankful for. That is how Christian hearts should receive the deliverances which the Lord is still working for them.

**II. Note Peter's message to the brethren.**

James, the Lord's brother, was not an Apostle. That he should have been named to receive the message indicates that already he held some conspicuous position, perhaps some office, in the Church. It may also imply that there were no Apostles in Jerusalem then. We note also that the many who were gathered in Mary's house can have been only a small part of the whole. We here get a little glimpse into the conditions of the life of a persecuted Church, which a sympathetic imagination can dwell on till it is luminous. Such gatherings as would attract notice had to be avoided, and what meetings were held had to be in private houses and with shut doors, through which entrance was not easy. Mary's door had a gate in it, and only that smaller postern, which admitted but one at a time, was opened to visitors, and that after scrutiny. But though assemblies were restricted, communications were kept up, and by underground ways information of events important to the community spread through its members. The consciousness of brotherhood was all the stronger because of the common danger, the universal peril had not made the brethren selfish, but sympathetic. We may note, too, how great a change had come since the time when the Christians were in favour with all the people, and may reflect how fickle are the world's smiles for Christ's servants.

**III. Note Peter's disappearance.**

All that is said of it is that he went into another place. Probably Luke did not know where he went. It would be prudent at the time to conceal it, and the habit of concealment may have survived the need for it. But two points suggest themselves in regard to the Apostle's flight. There may be a better use for an Apostle than to kill him, and Christ's boldest witnesses are sometimes bound to save themselves by fleeing into another city. To hide oneself till the calamity be overpast may be rank cowardice or commendable prudence. All depends on the circumstances of each case. Prudence is an element in courage, and courage without it is fool-hardiness. There are outward dangers from which it is Christian duty to run, and there are outward dangers which it is Christian duty to face. There are inward temptations which it is best to avoid, as there are others which have to be fought to the death. Peter was as brave and braver when he went and hid himself, than when he boasted, Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I! A morbid eagerness for martyrdom wrought much harm in the Church at a later time. The primitive Church was free from it.

But we must not omit to note that here Peter is dropped out of the history, and is scarcely heard of any more. We have a glimpse of him in chapter xv., at the Council in Jerusalem, but, with that exception, this is the last mention of him in Acts. How little this Book cares for its heroes! Or rather how it has only one Hero, and one Name which it celebrates, the name of that Lord to whom Peter ascribed his deliverance, and of whom he himself declared that there is none other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.