

MANAEN ... the prince who became a preacher
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(ACTS 13:1)

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." All these were great leaders of the Church, but not the least among them was the little-known Manaen, about whom an interesting story has been told. Josephus, the Jewish historian, relates that when the first Herod was a child, a prophet named Manahem foretold his accession to the throne. "Now at that time, Herod did not at all attend to what Manahem had said, as having no hopes of such advancement; but a little after, when he was so fortunate as to be advanced to the dignity of king, and was in the height of his dominion, he sent for Manahem, and asked him how long he should reign" (Antiquities of the Jews. Book 15, chapter 8, paragraph 5). It has been suggested that as a mark of royal gratitude, the king adopted the prophet's son Manaen, and that this was the boy who long afterward became a deacon in the Church at Antioch.

The Discontented Prince

If the details of the ancient story be correct, it would be interesting to know what length of time elapsed before the glamour of court life ceased to charm this son of the manse. Probably the ceaseless whirl of gaiety fascinated him, and provided a striking contrast to the limited entertainments of his old home. Laughter, new friends, and a plentiful supply of money, were great assets; yet there came a day when Manaen became conscious of a deeper hunger, of an intense yearning to find something which would satisfy the inherent longings of his heart. Herod's murder of John Baptist revived memories of his own father, and Manaen realized that had it been possible, Manahem would have joined in the fearless denunciation of the king's conduct. And as the glamour of frivolity began to disappear, the dissatisfaction of this young man constantly increased. He was beginning to discover that abiding peace was a rare gem; that a man must visit the wells of God's salvation before he can find springs of eternal refreshment capable of meeting every need.

The Discerning Penitent

And then came Jesus of Nazareth! Every day the crowds flocked to hear the new Teacher; and every day, new stories of triumphant grace circulated throughout the nation. Did Manaen join the eager throng to hear the Saviour? Already the impact of the Lord's message had been felt in court circles, for Joanna, the wife of the prime minister, had responded to the call of Christ. It would not be possible for this unhappy prince to hear the word of God and not to feel a resurgence of the old emotions. Jesus of Nazareth spoke of God, of eternity, of life; and every sincere heart answered His call. How we would love to question Manaen! Did he come, as the nobleman, to the feet of Jesus? Did he pour out his soul in earnest supplication? And when he eventually renounced the sinful associations of palace life, did the news of his conversion thrill or shock the nation?

The Distinguished Preacher

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And so Herod's foster-brother became a Christian; and it is most inspiring to discover that amid the leaders of the Church at Antioch, the one-time prince had an honoured place. Indeed, he had a part in sending out the first Christian missionaries, for as the prophets and teachers of Antioch "ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Manaen left his society friends, and found new companions among the humble followers of the Saviour. The pomp and splendid magnificence of the old life became a memory as he dressed in the unpretentious garments of an ordinary man. The ostentatious superficiality of princelings faded into insignificance as he walked with God. The new message became the delight of his heart, and his educational attainments were used to advantage when he began to instruct his new friends in the ways and wisdom of God. Soon the Christian prince was known to all the brethren, and ultimately he was advanced to a place of eminence in the councils of the Church.

What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
Since Jesus came into my heart

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