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

**1 CHRONICLES-006. THE WAVES OF TIME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The times that went over him."*

*1 Chronicles 29:30*

This is a fragment from the chronicler's close of his life of King David. He is referring in it to other written authorities in which there are fuller particulars concerning his hero; and he says, the acts of David the King, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer ... with all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over all Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

Now I have ventured to isolate these words, because they seem to me to suggest some very solemn and stimulating thoughts about the true nature of life. They refer, originally, to the strange vicissitudes and extremes of fortune and condition which characterised, so dramatically and remarkably, the life of King David. Shepherd-boy, soldier, court favourite, outlaw, freebooter and all but brigand; rebel, king, fugitive, saint, sinner, psalmist, penitent--he lived a life full of strongly marked alternations, and the times that went over him were singularly separate and different from each other. There are very few of us who have such chequered lives as his. But the principle which dictated the selection by the chronicler of this somewhat strange phrase is true about the life of every man.

**I. Note, first, the times which make up each life.**

Now, by the phrase here the writer does not merely mean the succession of moments, but he wishes to emphasise the view that these are epochs, sections of time, each with its definite characteristics and its special opportunities, unlike the rest that lie on either side of it. The great broad field of time is portioned out, like the strips of peasant allotments, which show a little bit here, with one kind of crop upon it, bordered by another little morsel of ground bearing another kind of crop. So the whole is patchy, and yet all harmonises in effect if we look at it from high enough up. Thus each life is made up of a series, not merely of successive moments, but of well-marked epochs, each of which has its own character, its own responsibilities, its own opportunities, in each of which there is some special work to be done, some grace to be cultivated, some lesson to be learned, some sacrifice to be made; and if it is let slip it never comes back any more. It might have been once, and we missed it, and lost it for ever. The times pass over us, and every single portion has its own errand to us. Unless we are wide awake we let it slip, and are the poorer to all eternity for not having had in our heads the eyes of the wise man which discern both time and judgment. It is the same thought which is suggested by the well-known words of the cynical book of Ecclesiastes--To every thing there is a season and a time--an opportunity, and a definite period--for every purpose that is under the sun. It is the same thought which is suggested by Paul's words, As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men. In due season we shall reap if we faint not. There is a time for weeping and a time for laughing, a time for building up and a time for casting down. It is the same thought of life, and its successive epochs of opportunity never returning, which finds expression in the threadbare lines about a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune, and neglected, condemns the rest of a career to be hemmed in among creeks and shallows.

Through all the variety of human occupations, each moment comes to us with its own special mission, and yet, alas! to far too many of us the alternations do not suggest the question, what is it that I am hereby called upon to be or to do? what is the lesson that present circumstances are meant to teach, and the grace that my present condition is meant to force me to cultivate or exhibit? There is one point, as it were, upon the road where we may catch a view far away into the distance, and, if we are not on the lookout when we come there, we shall never get that glimpse at any other point along the path. The old alchemists used to believe that there was what they called the moment of projection, when, into the heaving molten mass in their crucible, if they dropped the magic powder, the whole would turn into gold; an instant later and there would be explosion and death; an instant earlier and there would be no effect. And so God's moments come to us; every one of them--if we had eyes to see and hands to grasp--a crisis, affording opportunity for something for which all eternity will not afford a second opportunity, if the moment be let pass. The times went over him, and your life and mine is parcelled out into seasons which have their special vocation for and message to us.

How solemn that makes our life! How it destroys the monotony that we sometimes complain of! How it heightens the low things and magnifies the apparently small ones! And how it calls upon us for a sharpened attention, that we miss not any of the blessings and gifts which God is meaning to bestow upon us through the ministry of each moment! How it calls upon us for not only sharpened attention, but for a desire to know the meaning of each of the hours and of every one of His providences! And how it bids us, as the only condition of understanding the times, so as to know what we ought to do, to keep our hearts in close union with Him, and ourselves ever standing, as becomes servants, girded and ready for work; and with the question on our lips and in our hearts, Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do? and what wouldst Thou have me to do now? The lesson of the day has to be learned in a day, and at the moment when it is put in practice.

**II. Another thought suggested by this text is, the Power that moves the times.**

As far as my text represents--and it is not intended to go to the bottom of everything--these times flow on over a man, as a river might. But is there any power that moves the stream? Unthinking and sense-bound men--and we are all such, in the measure in which we are unspiritual--are contented simply to accept the mechanical flow of the stream of time. We are all tempted not to look behind the moving screen to see the force that turns the wheel on which the painted scene Is stretched. But, Oh! how dreary a thing it is if all that we have to say about life is, The times pass over us, like the blind rush of a stream, or the movement of the sea around our coasts, eating away here and depositing its spoils there, sometimes taking and sometimes giving, but all the work of mere eyeless and purposeless chance or of natural causes.

Oh, brethren! there is nothing more dismal or paralysing than the contemplation of the flow of the times over our heads, unless we see in their flow something far more than that.

It is very beautiful to notice that this same phrase, or at least the essential part of it, is employed in one of the Psalms ascribed to David, with a very significant addition. He says, My times are in Thy hand. So, then, the passage of our epochs over us is not merely the aimless flow of a stream, but the movement of a current which God directs. Therefore, if at any time it goes over our heads and seems to overwhelm us, we can look up through the transparent water and say, Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me, and so I die not of suffocation beneath them. God orders the times, and therefore, though, as the bitter ingenuity of Ecclesiastes, on the lookout for proofs of the vanity of life, complained, in a one-sided view, as an aggravation of man's lot, that there is a time for everything, yet that aspect of change is not its deepest or truest. True it is that sometimes birth and sometimes death, sometimes joy and sometimes sorrow, sometimes building up and sometimes casting down, follow each other with monotonous uniformity of variety, and seem to reduce life to a perpetual heaping up of what is as painfully to be cast down the next moment, like the pitiless sport of the wind amongst the sandhills of the desert. But the futility is only apparent, and the changes are not meant to occasion man's misery to be great upon him, as Ecclesiastes says they do. The diversity of the times comes from a unity of purpose; and all the various methods of the divine Providence exercised upon us have one unchanging intention. The meaning of all the times is that they should bring us nearer to God, and fill us more full of His power and grace. The web is one, however various may be the pattern wrought upon the tapestry. The resulting motion of the great machine is one, though there may be a wheel turning from left to right here, and another one that fits into it, turning from right to left there. The end of all the opposite motions is straight progress. So the varying times do all tend to the one great issue. Therefore let us seek to pursue, in all varying circumstances, the one purpose which God has in them all, which the Apostle states to be even your sanctification, and let us understand how summer and winter, springtime and harvest, tempest and fair weather, do all together make up the year, and ensure the springing of the seed and the fruitfulness of the stalk.

**III. Lastly, let me remind you, too, how eloquently the words of my text suggest the transiency of all the times.**

They passed over him as the wind through an archway, that whistles and comes not again. The old, old thought, so threadbare and yet always so solemnising and pathetic, which we know so well that we forget it, and are so sure of that it has little effect on life, the old, old thought, this too will pass away, underlies the phrase of my text, How blessed it is, brethren! to cherish that wholesome sense of the transiency of things here below, only those who live under its habitual power can fairly estimate. It is thought to be melancholy. We are told that it spoils joys and kills interest, and I know not what beside. It spoils no joys that ought to be joys. It kills no interests that are not on other grounds unworthy to be cherished. Contrariwise, the more fully we are penetrated with the persistent conviction of the transiency of the things seen and temporal, the greater they become, by a strange paradox. For then only are they seen in their true magnitude and nobility, in their true solemnity and importance as having a bearing on the things that are eternal. Time is the ceaseless lackey of eternity, and the things that pass over us may become, like the waves of the sea, the means of bearing us to the unmoving shore. Oh! if only in the midst of joys and sorrows, of heavy tasks and corroding cares, of weary work and wounded spirits, we could feel, but for a moment, all would be different, and joy would come, and strength would come, and patience would come, and every grace would come, in the train of the wholesome conviction that here we have no continuing city.

Cherish the thought. It will spoil nothing the spoiling of which will be a loss. It will heighten everything the possession of which is a gain. It will teach us to trust in the darkness, and to believe in the light. And when the times are dreariest, and frost binds the ground, we shall say, If winter comes, can spring be far behind? The times roll over us, like the seas that break upon some isolated rock, and when the tide has fallen and the vain flood has subsided, the rock is there. If the world helps us to God, we need not mind though it passes, and the fashion thereof.

But do not let us forget that this text in its connection may teach us another thought. The transitory times that went over Israel's king are all recorded imperishably on the pages here, and so, though condensed into narrow space, the record of the fleeting moments lives for ever, and the books shall be opened, and men shall be judged according to their works. We are writing an imperishable record by our fleeting deeds. Half a dozen pages carry all the story of that stormy life of Israel's king. It takes a thousand rose-trees to make a vial full of essence of roses. The record and issues of life will be condensed into small compass, but the essence of it is eternal. We shall find it again, and have to drink as we have brewed when we get yonder. Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. There is a time to sow, and that is the present life; and there is a time to gather the fruits of our sowing, and that is the time when times have ended and eternity is here.