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

**1 CHRONICLES-001. THE KING'S POTTER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"There they dwelt with the king for his work."*

*1 Chronicles 4:23*

In these dry lists of names which abound in Chronicles, we now and then come across points of interest, oases in the desert, which need but to be pondered sympathetically to yield interesting suggestions. Here for example, buried in a dreary genealogical table, is a little touch which repays meditating on. Among the members of the tribe of Judah were a hereditary caste of potters who lived in Netaim and Gederah, if we adhere to the Revised Version's text, or among plantations and hedges if we prefer the margin. But they are also described as dwelling with the king. That can only mean on the royal estates, for the king himself resided in Jerusalem. He, however, held large domains in the territory of Judah, on some of which these ceramic artists were settled down and followed their calling. They were kept on the royal estates and kept in comfort, not needing to till, but fed and cared for, that they might be free to mould, out of common clay, forms of beauty and vessels meet for the master's use. Surely we may read into the brief statement of the text a meaning of which the writer of it never dreamt, and see in the description of these forgotten artisans, a symbol of our Christian relations to our Lord and of our life's work.

**I. We, too, dwell with the King.**

The Davidic king was in Jerusalem, and the potters were among plantations and hedges, yet in a real sense they dwelt with the king, though some of them might never have seen his face or trod the streets of the sacred city. Perhaps now and then he came to visit them on his outlying domains, but they were always parts of his household. And have we, Christ's servants, not His gracious parting word: I am with you always? True, we are not beside Him in the great city, but He is beside us in His outlying domains, and we may be with Him in His glory, if while we still outwardly live among the plantations and hedges of this life, we dwell in spirit, by faith and aspiration, with our risen and ascended Lord. If we so dwell with the King, He will dwell with us, and fill our humble abode with the radiance of His presence, making that place of His feet glorious. That He should be with us is supreme condescension, that we should be with Him is the perfection of exaltation. How low He stoops, how high we can rise! The vigour of our Christian life largely depends on our keeping vivid the consciousness of our communion with Jesus and the sense of His real presence with us. How life's burdens would be lightened if we faced them all in the strength of the felt nearness of our Lord! How impossible it would be that we should ever feel the dreary sense of solitude, if we felt that unseen, but most real, Presence wrapping us round! It is only when our faith in it has fallen asleep that any earthly good allures, or any earthly evil frightens us. To be sure, in our thrilling consciousness, that we dwell with Jesus is an impenetrable cuirass that blunts the points of all arrows and keeps the breast that wears it unwounded in the fray. The world has no voices which can make themselves heard above that low sovereign whisper: I am with you always, even to the end of the world--and after the end has come, then we shall be with Him.

But we find in this notice a hint that leads us in yet another direction. They dwelt with the king in the sense that they were housed and cared for on his lands. And in like manner, the true conception of the Christian life is that each of us is a sojourner with Thee, set down on Christ's domains, and looked after by Him in regard to provision for outward wants. We have nothing in property, but all is His and held by His gift and to be used for Him. The slave owns nothing. The patch of ground which he cultivates for his food and what grows on it, are his master s. These workmen were not slaves, but they were not owners either. And we hold nothing as our own, if we are true to the terms on which it is given us to hold.

So if we rightly appreciate our position as dwelling on the King's lands, our delusion of possession will vanish, and we shall feel more keenly the pressure of responsibility while we feel less keenly the grip of anxiety. We are for the time being entrusted with a tiny piece of the royal estates. Let us not strut about as if we were owners, nor be for ever afraid that we shall not have enough for our needs. One sometimes comes on a model village close to the gates of some ducal palace, and notes how the lordly owner's honour prompts its being kept up to a high standard of comfort and beauty. We may be sure that the potters were well lodged and looked after, and that care for their personal wants was shifted from their shoulders to the king s. So should ours be. He will not leave His servants to starve. They should not dishonour Him and disturb themselves by worries and cares that would be reasonable only if they had no Provider. He has said, All things are given to Me of My Father, and He gives us all that God has given Him.

**II. We dwell with the King for His work.**

The king's potters had not to till the land nor do any work but to mould clay into vessels for use and beauty. For that purpose they had their huts and bits of ground assigned them. So with us, Christ has a purpose in His provision for us. We are set down on His domains, and we enjoy His presence and providing in order that, set free from carking cares and low ends, we may, with free and joyous hearts, yield ourselves to His joyful service. The law of our life should be that we please not ourselves, nor consult our own will in choosing our tasks, nor seek our own profit or gratification in doing them, but ever ask of Him: Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? and when the answer comes, as come it will to all who ask with real desire to learn and with real inclination to do His will, that we make haste and delay not, but make haste to keep His commandments. The spirit which should animate our active lives is plainly enough taught us in that little word, they dwelt with the king for his work.

Nor are we to forget that, in a very profound sense, dwelling with the King must go before doing His work. Unless we are living continually under the operation of the stimulus of communion with Jesus, we shall have neither quickness of ear to know what He wishes us to do, nor any resolute concentration of ourselves on our Christ-appointed tasks. The spring of all noble living is communion with noble ideals, and fellowship with Jesus sets men agoing, as nothing else will, in practical lives of obedience to Jesus. Time given to silent, retired meditation on that sweet, sacred bond that knits the believing soul to the redeeming Lord is not lost with reference to active work for Jesus. The meditative and the practical life are not antagonistic, but complementary, Mary and Martha are sisters, though sometimes they differ, and foolish people try to set them against each other.

But we must beware of a common misconception of what the King's work is. The royal potters did not make only things of beauty, but very common vessels designed for common and ignoble uses. There were vessels of dishonour dried in their kilns as well as vessels meet for the master's use. There is a usual and lamentable narrowing of the term Christian work, to certain conventional forms of service, which has done and is doing an immense amount of harm. The King's work is far wider in scope than teaching in Sunday-schools, or visiting the sick, or any similar acts that are usually labelled with the name. It covers all the common duties of life. A shallow religion tickets some selected items with the name; a robuster, truer conception extends the designation to everything. It is not only when we are definitely trying to bring others into touch with Jesus that we are doing Him service, but we may be equally serving Him in everything. The difference between the king's work and the poor potters own lay not so much in the nature as in the motive of it, and whatever we do for Christ's sake and with a view to His will is work that He owns, while a regard to self in our motive or in our end decisively strikes any service tainted by it out of the category.

We are to hallow all our deeds by drawing the motive for them from the King and by laying the fruits of them at His feet. Thus, and only thus, will the most secular actions be sanctified and the narrowest life be widened to contain a present Christ.

There are subsidiary motives which may legitimately blend with the supreme one. The potters would be stimulated to work hard and with their utmost skill when they thought of how well they were paid in house and store for their work. We have ample reasons for dedicating our whole selves to Jesus when we think of His gift of Himself to us, of His wages beforehand, of His joyful presence with His eye ever on us, marking our purity of motive and our diligence.

There is a final thought that may well stimulate us to put all our skill and effort into our work. The potters work went to Jerusalem. It was for the king. What can be too good for him? He will see it, therefore let us put our best into it. And we shall see it too, when we too enter the city of the great King. Jars that perhaps were wrought by these very workmen of whom we have been speaking turn up to-day in the excavations in Palestine. So much has perished and they remain, speaking symbols of the solemn truth that nothing human ever dies. Our works do follow us. Let us so live that these may be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of the King.