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

**1 CHRONICLES-002. DAVID'S CHORISTERS' by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"They stood in their office, according to their order."*

*1 Chronicles 6:32 (R.V margin)*

This brief note is buried in the catalogue of the singers appointed by David for the service of song in the house of the Lord. The waves of their choral praise have long ages since ceased to eddy round the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and all that is left of their melodious companies is a dry list of names, in spite of which the dead owners of them are nameless. But the chronicler's description of them may carry some lessons for us, for is not the Church of Christ a choir, chosen to shew forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light? We take a permissible liberty with this fragment, when we use it to point lessons that may help that great band of choristers who are charged with the office of making the name of Jesus ring through the world. Now, in making such a use of the text, we may linger on each important word in it and find each fruitful in suggestions which we shall be the better for expanding in our own meditations.

We pause on the first word, which is rendered in the Authorised and Revised Versions waited, and in the margin of the latter stood. The former rendering brings into prominence the mental attitude with which the singers held themselves ready to take their turns in the service, the latter points rather to their bodily attitude as they fulfilled their office. We get a picture of the ranked files gathered round their three leaders, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan. These three names are familiar to us from the Psalter, but how all the ranks behind them have fallen dim to us, and how their song has floated into inaudible distance! They stood, a melodious multitude, girt and attent on their song, or waiting their turn to fill the else silent air with the high praises of Jehovah, and glad when it came to their turn to open their lips in full-throated melody.

Now may we not catch the spirit of that long vanished chorus, and find in the two possible renderings of this word a twofold example, the faithful following of which would put new vigour into our service? We are called to a loftier office, and have heavenly harmonies entrusted to us to be made vocal by our lips, compared with which theirs were poor. They waited on their office, and shall not we, in a higher fashion, wait on our ministry, and suffer no inferior claims to block our way or hamper our preparedness to discharge it? To let ourselves be entangled with the affairs of this life, or to drowse in idle cell, sleepily letting summonses that should wake us to work sound unheeded and almost unheard, is flagrant despite done to our high vocation as Christians. They also serve who only stand and wait, but not if in their waiting their eyes are straying everywhere but to their Master's pointing hand or directing eye. The world is full of voices calling Christ's folk to help; but what a host of so-called Christians fail to hear these piteous and despairing cries, because the noise of their own whims, fancies, and self-centred desires keeps buzzing in their ears. A constant accompaniment of deafness is constant noises in the head; and the Christians who are hardest of hearing when Christ calls are generally afflicted with noises which are probably the cause, and not merely an accompaniment, of their deafness. For indeed it demands no little detachment of spirit from self and sense, from the world and its clamant suitors, if a Christian soul is to be ready to mark the first signal of the great Conductor's baton, and to answer the lightest whisper, intrusting it with a task for Him, with its self-consecrating Here am I. Send me.

It used to be said that they who watched for providences never wanted providences to watch for; it is equally true that they who are on the watch for opportunities for service never fail to find them, and that ears pricked to hear what God the Lord shall speak, summoning to work for Him, will not listen in vain. Paul saw in a vision a man of Macedonia begging for his help, and straightway he concluded that God had called him to preach in Europe. Happy are these Christian workers who hear God's voice speaking through men's needs, and recognise a divine imperative in human cries!

May we not see in the attitude of David's choristers as they sang, hints for our own discharge of the tasks of our Christian service? There was a curse of old on him who did the work of the Lord negligently, and its weight falls still on workers and work. For who can measure the harm done to the Christian life of the negligent worker, and who can expect any blessing to come either to him or to others from such half-hearted seeming service? The devil's kingdom is not to be cast down nor Christ's to be builded up by workers who put less than their whole selves, the entire weight of their bodies, into their toil. A pavior on the street brings down his rammer at every stroke with an accompanying exclamation expressing effort, and there is no place in Christ's service for dainty people who will not sweat at their task, and are in mortal fear of over-work. Strenuousness, the gathering together of all our powers, are implied in the attitude of Heman and his band as they stood in their office. Idle revellers might loll on their rose-strewn couches as they sing idle songs to the sound of the viol and devise for themselves instruments of music, like David, but the austerer choir of the Temple despised ease, and stood ready for service and in the best bodily posture for song.

The second important word of the text brings other thoughts no less valuable and rich in practical counsel. The singers in the Temple stood in their office, which was song. Their special work was praise. And that is the highest task of the Church. As a matter of fact, every period of quickened earnestness in the Church's life has been a period marked by a great outburst of Christian song. All intense emotion seeks expression in poetry, and music is the natural speech of a vivid faith. Luther chanted the Marseillaise of the Reformation, A safe stronghold our God is still, and many another sweet strain blended strangely with the fiery and sometimes savage words from his lips. The Scottish Reformation, grim in some of its features as it was, had yet its Gude and Godly Ballads. At the birth of Methodism, as round the cradle at Bethlehem, hovered as it were angel voices singing, Glory to God in the highest. A flock of singing birds let loose attends every revival of Christian life.

The Church's praise is the noblest expression of the Church's life. Its hymns go deeper than its creeds, touch hearts more to the quick, minister to the faith which they enshrine, and often draw others to see the preciousness of the Christ whom they celebrate. How little we should have known of Old Testament religion, notwithstanding law and prophets, if the Psalter had perished!

And it is true, in a very deep sense, that we shall do more for Christ and men by voicing our own deep thankfulness for His great gifts and speaking simply our valuation of, and our thankfulness for, what we draw from Him than by any other form of so-called Christian work. We can offend none by saying: We have found the Messias, and are adoringly glad that we have. The most effectual way of moving other souls to participate in our joy is to let our joy speak. If you wish me to weep, your own tears must not be held back, and if you wish others to know the preciousness of Christ, you must ring out His name with fervour of emotion and the triumphant confidence. We are the secretaries of God's praise, as George Herbert has it, for we have possession of His greatest gift, and have learned to know Him in loftier fashion than Heman's choristers dreamed of, having seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and tasted the sweetness of redeeming love. The Apocalyptic seer sets forth a great truth when he tells us that he first heard a new song from the lips of the representatives of the Church, who could sing, Thou wast slain and didst redeem us to God with Thy blood, and then heard their adoration echoed from many angels round about the throne, and finally heard the song reverberated from every created thing in heaven and earth, in the sea and all deep places. A praising Church has experiences of its own which angels cannot share, and it sets in motion the great sea of praise whose surges break in music and roll from every side of the universe in melodious thunder to the great white throne. Without our song even angel voices would lack somewhat.

God said, "A praise is in Mine ear;

There is no doubt in it, no fear:

Clearer loves sound other ways:

I miss My little human praise."'

The song of the redeemed has in it a minor strain that gives a sweetness far more poignant than belongs to those who cannot say: Out of the depths I cried unto Thee. The sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought, and recount experiences of conquered sin and life springing from death.

But it is also true that no kind of Christian service will be effectual, if it lacks the element of grateful praise as its motive and mainspring. Perhaps there would be fewer complaints of toiling all night and wearily hauling in empty nets, if the nets were oftener let down not only at Thy word but with glad remembrance of the fishermen's debt to Jesus, and in the spirit of praise. When all our work is a sacrifice of praise, it is pleasing to God and profitable to ourselves and to others. If we would oftener bethink ourselves, and herald every deed with a silent dedication of it and of ourselves to Him who died for us, we should less often have to complain that we have sowed much and brought back little. A pinch of incense cast into the common domestic fire makes its flame sacrificial and fragrant.

The last important word of the text is also fertile in hints for us. The singers stood in their office according to their order. That last expression may either refer to rotation of service or to distribution of parts in the chorus. They did not sing in unison, grand as the effect of such a song from a multitude sometimes is, but they had their several parts. The harmonious complexity of a great chorus is the ideal for the Church. Paul puts the same thought in a sterner metaphor when he tells the Colossian Christians that he joys beholding your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ, where he is evidently thinking of the Roman legion with its rigid discipline and its solid, irresistible, ranked weight. Division of function and consequent concordant action of different parts is the lesson taught by both metaphors, and by the many modern examples of the immense results gained in machinery that almost simulates vital action, and by organisations for great purposes in which men combine. The Church should be the highest example of such combination, for it is the shrine of the noblest life, even the life of its indwelling Lord. Every member of it should have and know his place. Every Christian should know his part in the great chorus, for he has a part, even if it is only that of tinkling the triangle in the orchestra or beating a drum. That division of function and concordance of action apply to all forms of the Church's action, and are enforced most chiefly by the great Apostolic metaphor of the body and its members. Paul did not delight in uniformity. Inferiors calling themselves his successors have often aimed at enforcing it, but nature has been too strong for them, and the hedge will grow its own way in spite of pedants shears. If the whole body were an eye, where the hearing? The monotony of a church in which uniformity was the ideal would be intolerable. The chorus has its parts, and the soprano cannot say to the bass, I have no need of you, nor the bass to the tenor, I have no need of thee.

So let us see that we find our own place, and see that we fill it, singing our own part lustily, and not being either confused or made dumb because another has other notes to sing than are written on our score. Let us recognise unity made more melodious by diversity, the importance of the humblest, and having gifts differing according to the grace given unto us let us wait on our ministry, and stand in our office according to our order.