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

**1 KINGS-007. THE MATTER OF A DAY IN ITS DAY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"At all times, as the matter shall require."*

*1 Kings 8:59*

I have ventured to diverge from my usual custom, and take this fragment of a text because, in the forcible language of the original, it carries some very important lessons. The margin of our Bible gives the literal reading of the Hebrew; the sense, but not the vigorous idiom, of which is conveyed in the paraphrase in our version. At all times, as the matter shall require, is, literally, the thing of a day in its day; and that is the only limitation which this prayer of Solomon places upon the petition that God would maintain the cause of His servants and of His people Israel. The kingly suppliant got a glimpse of very great, though very familiar, truths, and at that hour of spiritual illumination, the very high-water mark of his relations to God--for I suppose he was never half as good a man afterwards--he gave utterance to the great thought that God's mercies come to us day by day, according to the exigencies of the moment.

Now, I think that in the words the matter of a day in its day we may see both a principle in reference to God's gifts and a precept in reference to our actions. Let us look at these two things.

**I. A principle in reference to God's gifts.**

Of course, obviously--and I need not say more than a word about that-- we find it so in regard to the outward blessings that are poured into our lives. We are taught, if the translation of the New Testament is correct, to ask, Give us this day our daily bread, and to let to-morrow alone. Life comes to us pulsation by pulsation, breath by breath, by reason of the continual operation, in the material world, of the present God's present giving. He does not start us, at the beginning of our days, with a fund of physical vitality upon which we thereafter draw, but moment by moment He opens His hand, and lets life and breath and all things flow out to us moment by moment, for no creature would live for an instant except for the present working of a present God. If we only realised how the slow pulsation of the minutes is due to the touch of His finger on the pendulum, and how everything that we have, and the existence of us who have it, are results of the continuous welling out from the fountain of life, of ripple after ripple of the waters, everything would be more sacred, and more solemn, and fuller of God than, alas! it is.

But the true region in which we may best find illustrations of this principle in reference to God's gifts is the region of the spiritual and moral bestowments which He in His love pours upon us. He does not flood us with them: He filters them drop by drop, for great and good reasons. I only mention three various forms of this one great thought.

God gives us gifts adapted to the moment. The matter of a day, the thing fitted for the instant, comes. In deepest reality, all is one gift, for in truth what God gives to us is Himself; or, if you like to put it so, His grace. That little word grace is like a small window that opens out on to a great landscape, for it gathers up into one encyclopaediacal expression the whole infinite variety of beneficences and bestowments which come showering down upon us. That one gift is, as the Apostle puts it in one of his eloquent epithets, the manifold grace of God, which word in the original is even more rich and picturesque, because it means the many-variegated grace--like some rich piece of embroidery glowing with all manner of dyes and gold. So the one gift comes to us manifold, rich in its adaptation to, and its exquisite fitness for, the needs of the moment. The Rabbis had a tradition that the manna in the wilderness tasted to every man just what each man needed or wished most. It Is as though in some imperial city on a day of rejoicing, one found a fountain in the market-place pouring out, according to the wish of the people, various costly wines and refreshing drinks, God's gift comes to us with like variety--the matter of a day in its day.

God never gives us the wrong medicine. In whatever variety of circumstances we stand, that one infinitely simple and yet infinitely complex gift contains what we specially want at the moment. Am I struggling? He extends a hand to steady me. Am I fighting? He is my sword and shield, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. Am I anxious? He comes into my heart, and brings with Him a great peace, and all waves cease to toss and smooth themselves into a level plain. Am I glad? He comes to heighten the gladness by some touch of holier joy. Am I perplexed in mind? If I look to Him, His coming shall be as the morning, and illumination will be granted. Am I treading a lonely path? There is One by my side who will neither change, nor fail, nor die. Whatever any man needs, at the moment that he needs it, that one great Gift will supply the matter of a day in its day.

God gives punctually. Many of us may have sometimes sent Christmas presents to India or Australia some weeks before. Some will arrive in time and some will be too late. God's gifts never reach us before the day, and they never come after the day. The Lord shall help her, and that right early, said the grand psalm. What the Psalmist was thinking about was, I suppose, that miraculous intervention when the army of Sennacherib was smitten in a night. Timid and faithless souls in Jerusalem, as they looked over the walls and saw the encircling lines of the fierce foes drawing closer and closer round the doomed city, must have said, Our Lord delayeth His coming, and could not stand the test of their faith and patience, involved in God's apparent indifference to the need of His people. To-morrow the assault is to be delivered. To-night

The Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,

And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;

and the would-be assailants, when that to-morrow dawned, were lying stiff and stark in their tents. God's help comes, not too soon, lest we should not know the blessedness of trusting in the dark; and not too late, lest we should know the misery of trusting in vain.

Peter is lying in prison. Herod intends, after the Passover, to bring him out to the people. The scaffolding is ready. The first watch of the night passes, and the second. If once it is fairly light, escape is impossible. But in the grey dawn the angel touches the sleeper. He wakes while his guards sleep. There is no need for hurry. He who has God for his Deliverer has no occasion to go out with haste. So, with strange and majestic leisureliness, the escaping prisoner is bid to put on his shoes and gird himself. No doubt, he cast many a scrutinising glance at the four sleeping legionaries whom a heedless movement might have wakened. When all is ready, he is led forth through all the wards, each being a separate peril, and all made safe to him. The first gate opens, and the second gate opens, and the iron gate that leads into the city opens, and quietly he and the angel go down the street. It is light enough for him to see his way to the house where the brethren are assembled. He gets safe behind Mary's door before it is light enough for the gaolers to discover his absence, and for the pursuers to be started in their search. The Lord did help him, and that right early-- the matter of a day in its day.

We shall find, if we leave our times in His hand, that the old simple faith has still a talismanic power to quiet us. His time is best, so be patient, and be trustful in your patience.

Again, God gives gifts enough, and not more than enough. He serves out our rations for spirit as for body, as they do on shipboard, where the sailors have to take their pots and plates to the galley every day and for each meal, and get enough to help them over the moment's hunger. The manna fell morning by morning. He that gathered much had nothing over, he that gathered little had no lack. So all the variety of our changeful conditions, besides its purpose of disciplining ourselves and of making character, has also the purpose of affording a theatre for the display, if I may use such cold language--or rather let me say affording an opportunity for the bestowment--of the infinitely varied, exquisitely adapted, punctual, and sufficient grace of God.

**II. But now, secondly, a word about the text as containing a precept for our action.**

Let me put what I have to say in three plain sentences.

First, take short views of the future. Of course, we have to look ahead, and in reference to many things to take prudent forecasts, but how many of us there are who weaken ourselves and spoil to-day by being over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils! It is a great piece of practical philosophy, and I am sure that it has much to do with our getting the best out of the present moment, that we should either take very short or very long views of the future. Either

Let the unknown to-morrow

Bring with it what it may,

or look beyond the last of the days into the unseen light of an unsetting sun. If I must anticipate, let me anticipate the ultimate, the changeless, the certain; and let me not condemn my faculty of picturing that which is to come, to look along the low ranges of earthly life, and torture myself by imagining all the possibilities of evil of which my condition admits, as being turned into certainties to-morrow. Take the matter of a day in its day. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Let us make the minute what it ought to be, then God will make the whole what it ought to be.

Again I say, let us fill each day with discharged duties. If you and I do not do the matter of the day in its day, the chances are that no to-morrow will afford an opportunity of doing it. So there will come upon us all, if we are unfaithful to this portioning out of tasks to times, that burden of an irrevocable past, and of the omitted duties that will stand reproving and condemning before us, whensoever we turn our eyes to them. It might have been, and it is not; does a sadder speech than that fall from human lips? Brethren, the day, though it is short, is elastic; and no one knows how much of discharged service and accomplished work and fulfilled responsibilities can be crammed into its hours, until he has earnestly tried to fill each moment with the task which belongs to the moment. The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing. If our day is not filled full of work, some to-morrow will be filled full, in retrospect, of thorns and stings. Life is short; the night cometh when no man can work. I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day.

Lastly, I would say, keep open a continual communion with God, that day by day you may get what day by day you need. There are hosts of people who call themselves, and, in some kind of surface way, are, Christian people, who seem to think that they get all that they need of the grace of God in a lump, at the beginning of their Christian career, and who are living upon past communications and the memory of these, and are forgetting that they can no more live and be nourished upon past gifts of God's grace than upon the dinner that they ate this day last year. We must hang continually upon Him, if we are continually to receive from His hand. No past blessing will avail for present use.

Dear friends, the purpose of this principle, which I have been trying to illustrate in God's way of dealing with us, is that we shall be content to be continually dependent, and consciously as well as continually dependent, upon Him. In the measure in which we keep our hearts open for the perpetual influx of His grace, in that measure shall we be ready for each day as it comes; for its trials and its joys, for its possibilities and its duties.

This, too, must be remembered--that the days bolted together make months; and the months, years; and the years, life; and that life as a whole is a day; and that there is a matter of that day which can only be done in its day. Oh that none of us may be the subjects of that sad wail from a Saviour's heart and a Saviour's lips, which lamented, If thou hadst known, at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now--the night has come, and the darkness of the night, and--they are hid from thine eyes!