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

**1 KINGS-017. OBADIAH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth."*

*1 Kings 18:12*

This Obadiah is one of the obscurer figures in the Old Testament. We never hear of him again, for there is no reason to accept the Jewish tradition which alleges that he was Obadiah the prophet. And yet how distinctly he stands out from the canvas, though he is only sketched with a few bold outlines! He is the governor over Ahab's house, a kind of mayor of the palace, and probably the second man in the kingdom. But though thus high in that idolatrous and self-willed court, he has bravely kept true to the ancient faith. Neither Jezebel's flatteries nor her frowns have moved him. But there, amid apostasy and idolatry he stands, probably all alone in the court, a worshipper of Jehovah. His name is his character, for it means servant of Jehovah. It was not a light thing to be a worshipper of the God of Israel in Ahab's court. The feminine rage of the fierce Sidonian woman, whom Ahab obeyed in most things, burned hot against the enemies of her father's gods, and hotter, perhaps, against any one who thwarted her imperious will. Obadiah did both, in that audacious piece of benevolence when he sheltered the Lord's prophets--one hundred of them--and saved them from her cruel search. The writer of the book very rightly marks this brave antagonism to the outburst of the queen's wrath as a signal proof of a more than ordinary devotion to the worship and fear of Jehovah. His firmness and his religion did not prevent his retaining his place of honour and dignity. That says something for Ahab, and more perhaps for Obadiah.

Most of you believe that you ought to fear the Lord': but you are apt to put off, and so I wish to urge on you that you should give your hearts to Jesus Christ at once.

**I. The blessedness of youthful religion.**

**(a)** It guards from many temptations, and keeps a character innocent of much transgression.

Think of the dangers that lie thick in the streets of every great city, and of a lad coming up from a country home of godliness, where he was surrounded by a mother's love and an atmosphere of purity, and launched into some lonely lodging, or some factory or warehouse with many tempters. Nothing will be such a help to resistance and victory as to be able to say, So did not I because of the fear of the Lord.

**(b)** It will save from remorse. Even if a man sobers down after sowing his wild oats, which is a very problematical if, what bitter memories of wasted days, what polluting memories of filthy ones, will haunt him! And if he does not sober down, what then?

It is folly to begin life on a wrong tack, in regard to which the best that you can say is that you do not mean to continue it. If you do not, then the wise thing is to get at once on to the road on which you do mean to continue, and to save the weary work of retracing steps and the painful consciousness of having made a false start. Are you so sure that you will wish, or that it will be possible, to face right about and get on to a new line? Fishermen catch lobsters and the like by means of baskets with one opening, the withes of which are so set that the entrance is easy, but that a ring of sharp points oppose all attempts at turning back and getting out. The world lays pots of that sort, and many a young man and woman glides smoothly in, and finds it impossible to get out.

**(c)** It usually leads to a deeper and more peaceful and harmonious religion than is attained by those who have given the world the better part of their days, and have only the last fragment of them to give to God. Obadiah had feared God from his youth, and that had a good deal to do with his brave stand against Jezebel. It is a grand thing to enlist habit on the side of godliness.

**II. The foes of youthful religion.**

There are foes within .... the strong self-reliance and bounding life proper to youth, without which at the opening of the flower, the bloom would be poor and the fruit little, ... the power of appeals to the unjaded and physically strong senses, ... the difficulty at such a stage of life of looking forward and soberly regarding the end.

There are foes without ....the crowds of tempters of both sexes, men and women who take a devilish pleasure in polluting innocent minds, ... the companions whose jeers are worse to face than a battery, ... the inconsistencies of so-called Christians, the anti-Christian literature which is peculiarly fascinating to the young, with its brave show of breaking with mouldy tradition and enthroning reason and emancipating from rusty fetters.

**III. The too probable alternative to youthful religion.**

It is but too likely that, if a man does not fear the Lord from his youth, he will never fear Him. Thank God, there is no time nor condition of life in which the wicked man cannot forsake his way, or the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn to the Lord with the assurance that He will abundantly pardon. But it is sadly too plain to observation, and to the experience of some of us, that obstacles grow with years, that habits and associations grip with increasing power, that in all things our natures become less flexible, the supple sapling becoming gnarled and tough, that a middle-aged or old man is more inextricably tied and bound by the cords of his sins, than a young one is.

Sin lies to us by first saying, It is too soon to be religious, and then it lies to us by saying, It is too late.

The inclination diminishes.

The Gospel long heard and long put aside, loses power.

 Contrast the beauty of a course of life, begun on the same lines as those on which it ends, and being like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the meridian of the day, with one which gave the greater part of its years to the world, the flesh, and the devil, or at least to one's godless self, and the dregs of it only to God.

[A Sermon preached to the Young.]