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

**1 SAMUEL-006. THE KING AFTER MAN'S HEART by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"17. And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh; 18. And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you; 19. And ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. 20. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. 21. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. 22. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. 23. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. 24. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. 25. Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. 26. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. 27. But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace."*

*1 Samuel 10:17-27*

These verses fit on to chapter 8., chapters 9. to 10:16, being probably from another source, inserted here because the anointing of Saul, told in them, did occur between Samuel's dismissal of the people and his summoning of the national assembly which is here related. That private anointing of Saul was the divine call to him individually; the text tells of his public designation to the nation. The two are perfectly consistent, and, indeed, the private anointing is presupposed in the incident recorded in this passage, of Saul's hiding himself, for he could not have known the result that he would be taken, unless he had had that previous intimation. The assembly at Mizpah was not convened in order to choose a king, but to accept God's choice, which was then to be declared.

But before the choice was announced, a last appeal was made to the people, if, perchance, they might still be persuaded to forgo their rebellious desire. It is not, indeed, said that this final, all but hopeless attempt was made by Samuel at the divine command, and we are not told that he had any further revelation than that in chapter 8:7-9. But, no doubt, he was speaking as Jehovah's mouthpiece, and so we have here one more instance of that long-suffering divine patience and love which hopeth all things, and lingers pleadingly round the alienated heart, seeking to woo it back to itself, and never ceasing to labour to avert the evil deed, till it is actually and irrevocably done. It may be said that God knew that the appeal was sure to fail, and therefore could not have made it. But is not that mysterious continuance of effort, foreknown to be futile, the very paradox of God's love? Did not Jesus give the traitor the sop, as a last token of friendship, a last appeal to his heart? And does not God still in like manner deal with us all?

Observe how He seeks to win Israel back. It is not by threatenings, but by reminders of His great benefits. He will not drive men back to His service, like a slave-driver with brandished whip, but He wishes to draw them back by the cords of love. It is service from hearts melted by thankfulness, and therefore overflowing in joyful, willing obedience and grateful acts, that He desires. The mercies of God should lead to men offering themselves as living sacrifices.

The last appeal failed, and Samuel at once went on to give the people the desired bitter which they thought so sweet. Of course, it was by their representatives that the tribes presented themselves before God. The manner of making God's choice known is not told, and speculations as to it are idle. Probably a simple yes or no, as each tribe, family or individual was presented was the mode, but how it was conveyed is quite unknown. That is a small matter; more important is it to note that Saul was chosen simply because he was the very type of the national ideal of a hero-king. Both here and in chapter 9:2 his stature and bravery are the only qualities mentioned. What Israel wanted was a rough fighter, with physical strength, plenty of bone and muscle. About moral, intellectual or spiritual qualities they did not care, and they got the kind of king that they wanted,--the only kind that they could appreciate. The only way to teach them that one who was a head and shoulders taller than any of them was not thereby certified to be the ideal king, was to give them such a man, and let them see what good he would do them.

There is no surer index nor sharper test of national or individual character than the sort of heroes they worship. Vox populi has not been very much refined since Saul's day. Athletes and soldiers still captivate the crowd, and a mere prophet like Samuel has no chance beside the man of broad shoulders and well-developed biceps. And very often communities, especially democratic ones, get the king they desire, the leader, statesman or the like, who comes near their ideal. The man whom they choose is the man whom, generally, they deserve. Israel had an excuse for its burst of ardour for a soldier, for it was in deadly danger from the Philistines. Is there as good an excuse for us in Britain, in our recent adoration of successful generals? Israel found out that its idol lacked higher gifts than thews and sinews, and experience taught them the falseness of their ideal.

Saul's hiding among the piles of miscellaneous baggage, which the multitude of representatives had brought with them, is usually set down to his credit, as indicating an engaging modesty; but there is another and more probable explanation of it, less creditable to him. Was it not rather occasioned by his shrinking from the heavy task that God was laying on him? He was not being summoned to a secure throne, but to go out before us, and fight our battles. He might well shrink, but if he had been God-fearing and God-obeying and God-trusting, he would have cried, Here am I! send me, instead of skulking among the stuff. There was another Saul, who could say, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. It had been better for the son of Kish if he had been like the young Pharisee from Tarsus. We too have divine calls in our lives, and alas! we too not seldom hide ourselves among the stuff, and try to avoid taking up some heavy duty, by absorbing our minds in material good. Few things have greater power of obscuring the heavenly vision, and of rendering us unwilling to obey it, than the clinging to the things of this world, which are in their place as the traveller's luggage needful on the road, but very much out of their place when they become a hiding-place for a man whom God is calling to service.

The manner of the kingdom, which Samuel wrote and laid up before the Lord, was probably not the same as the manner of the king (chapter viii. 9-18), but a kind of constitution, or solemn statement of the principles which were to govern the monarchy. The reading in verse 26 should probably be the men of valour, instead of a band of men. They were brave men, whose hearts God had touched. Now that Saul was chosen by God, loyalty to God was shown by loyalty to Saul. The sin of the people's desire, and the drop from the high ideal of the theocracy, and the lack of lofty qualities in Saul, may all be admitted. But God has made him king, and that is enough. Henceforward, God's servants will be Saul's partisans. The malcontents were apparently but a small faction. They, perhaps, had had a candidate of their own, but, at all events, they criticised God's appointed deliverer, and saw nothing in him to warrant the expectation that he would be able to do much for Israel. Disparaging criticism of God's chosen instruments comes from distrust of God who chose them. To doubt the divinely sent Deliverer's power to save is to accuse God of not knowing our needs and of miscalculating the power of His supply of them. But not a few of us put that same question in various tones of incredulity, scorn or indifference. Sense makes many mistakes when it takes to trying to weigh Christ in its vulgar balances, and to settling whether He looks like a Saviour and a King.