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

**1 SAMUEL-017. WHAT DOEST THOU HERE? by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here!"*

*1 Samuel 29:3*

*"Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here!"*

*1 Kings 19:9*

I have put these two verses together, not only because of their identity in form, though that is striking, but because they bear upon one and the same subject, as will appear, if, in a word or two, I set each of them in its setting. David was almost at the lowest point of his fortunes when he fled into foreign territory, and for awhile took service under one of the kings of the Philistines. He served him faithfully, and so, when the last great fight, in which Saul lost his life, was about to be waged between Philistia and Israel, David and his men came as a contingent to the army of the former. The Philistine commanders, very naturally, were suspicious of these allies, just as Englishmen would have been if, on the night before Waterloo, a brigade of Frenchmen had deserted and offered their help to fight Napoleon. So the question What do these Hebrews here?--amongst our ranks--was an extremely natural one, and it was answered in the only possible way, by the subsequent departure of David and his men from the unnatural and ill-omened alliance.

Now, that suggests to us that Christian people are out of their places, even in the eyes of worldly people, when they are fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in certain causes; and it suggests the propriety of keeping apart. Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord What do these Hebrews here? is a question that Philistia often asks. But now turn to the other question. Elijah had fallen into the mood of depression which so often follows great nervous tension. He had just offered the sacrifice on Carmel, and brought all Israel back to the Lord, and Jezebel had flamed out and threatened his life. The usually undaunted prophet, in the reaction after his great effort, was fearful for his life and deserted his work, flung himself into solitude and shook the dust off his feet against Israel. Was that not just doing what I have been saying that Christian people ought to do--separating himself from the world? In a sense, yes, but the voice came, What dost thou here, Elijah? Go back to your work; to Ahab, to Jezebel. Go back to death if need be. Do not shirk your duty on the pretence of separating yourself from the world.

So we put the two questions together. They limit one another, and they suggest the via media, the course between, and lead me to say one or two plain things about that duty of Christian separation from an evil world.

**I. The first thing that I would suggest to you is the inevitable intermingling, which is the law of God, and therefore can never be broken with impunity.**

Christ's parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in the world being like a man that sowed good seed in his field, which sprung up intermingled with tares, contains the lesson, not so much of the purity or nonpurity of the Church as of the inseparable intertwining in the world of Christian people with others. The roots are matted together, and you cannot pull up a tare without danger of pulling up a wheat-stalk that has got interlaced with it. That is but to say that Society at present, and the earthly form of the Kingdom of God, are not organised on the basis of religious affinity, but upon a great many other things, such as family, kindred, business, a thousand ties of all sorts which mat men together, and make it undesirable, impossible, contrary to God's intention, that the good people should club themselves together, and leave the bad ones to rot and stink. The two are meant to be in close contact. Let both grow together till the harvest. If any Christian man were to do as the monks of old did, fly into solitude to look after his own soul, then the question which came to Elijah would be suitable to him, What doest thou here? Is there not work enough for you out there, in that wicked world? Is that not the place for you? Where is the place for the salt? Where the meat is in danger of putrefaction. Rub it in! That is what it was meant for. Ye are the light of the world. That suggests the picture of a lamp upon a pedestal that it may send out its rays, but itself remains apart. But the companion metaphor suggests the closest possible contact, and such contact is duty for us Christian people. Elijah ran away from his work. There are types of Christian life to-day unwholesomely self-engrossed, and too much occupied with their own spiritual condition, to realise and discharge the duty of witnessing in the world. Wherever you find a Christian man --whether he is a monk with bare foot, and a rope round his brown robe, and shaven head, or whether he is in the garb of modern Protestantism-- that tries more to keep himself apart, in the enjoyment and cultivation of his own religious life, than to fling himself into the midst of the world's worst evil, in order to fight and to cure it, you get a man who is sharing in Elijah's transgression, and needs Elijah's rebuke. The intermingling is inevitable in the present state of things; and family, kindred, business, social and political movements, all require that Christian people should work side by side with men who are not possessors of like precious faith. If ever there have been individuals or communities that have tried to traverse that law, they have developed narrowness and bitterness and stunted growth, and a hundred evils that we all know.

**II. And now let me say a word about the second thing, and that is--the imperative separation.**

What do these Israelites here? is the question. Much of all our lives lies outside these necessary connections with the world, of which I have been speaking. And the question for each of us is, What do we do when we are left to do as we like? Where do we go? When the iron weight fastened by the bit of string is taken off the sapling, it starts back to its original uprightness. Is that what your Christianity does for you? When you are left to yourself, when you have done all the work that is required, and you are free, where do you turn naturally? It is of no use to lay down special regulations. There has been far too much regulation and red-tape in our Christianity all along. Do not let us put so much stress upon individual acts. Let us look at the spirit. Whither do I turn? What do I like to do? Who are my chosen companions? What are my recreations? Is my life of such a sort as that the world will point to me, and say, What! you here I a professing Christian; what are you doing here?'

I remember that in the autobiography of Mr. Spurgeon, there is a story told about what he did when a child, and living with his grandfather, the pastor of a little country church. There was a very prominent member of that church who was in the habit of going into the public-house occasionally; and the small boy stepped into the sanded parlour where this inconsistent man was sitting, walked up to him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? It was the turning-point of the man's life. That is the question that I desire us all to ask ourselves--where do we go, and what sort of lives do we live in the moments when our own voluntary choice determines our action?

A man is known by the company he keeps, says an old Latin proverb, and I am bound to say that I do not think that it is a good sign of the depth of a Christian professor's religion if he feels himself more at home in the company of people who do not share his religion than in the company of those that do. I do not wish to be strait-laced and narrow, but I do not wish, either, to be so broad as to obliterate altogether the distinction between Christian people and others. The fact of the case is this, dear friends; if we are Christ's servants we have more in common with the most uncongenial Christians than we have with the most congenial man who is not a Christian. And if we were nearer our Master we should feel that it was so. Being let go they went to their own company. Where do you go when you can make your choice?

I am not going to speak in detail about occupations or recreations. I can quite believe that the theatre might be made an instrument of morality. I can quite believe that a race-course might be a perfectly innocent place. I can quite believe that there may be no harm in a dance. All that I say is that there are two questions which every Christian professor ought to ask himself about such subjects. One is, Can I ask God to bless this thing, and my doing it? And the other is, Does this help or hinder my religion? If we will take these two questions with us as tests of conduct and companionship, I do not think that we shall go far wrong, either in the choice of our companions, or in the choice of our surroundings of any kind, or in the choice of our recreations and our occupations. But if we do not, then I am quite sure that we shall go wrong in them all. What communion hath light with darkness? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.

The main question is, do I grasp the aim of life with clearness and decision as being to make myself by God's help such a character as God has pleasure in? If I do I shall regulate all these things thereby.

**III. Now there is one last suggestion that I wish to make, and that is the double questioning that we shall have to stand.**

The lords of the Philistines said, What do these Hebrews here? They saw the inconsistency, if David and his men did not. They were sharp to detect it, and David and his band did not rise in their opinion, but decidedly went down, when they saw them marching there, in such an unnatural place as behind Achish, and ready to flesh their swords in the blood of their brethren. So let me tell you, you will neither recommend your religion nor yourselves to men of the world, by inconsistently trying to identify yourselves with them. There are a great many professing Christians nowadays whose mouths are full of the word liberality, and who seem to try to show how absolutely identical with a godless man's a God-fearing one's life may be made. Do you think that the world respects that type of Christian, or regards his religion as the kind of thing to be admired? No; the question that they fling at such people is the question which David was humiliated by having pitched at his head--What do these Hebrews here? Let them go back to their mountains. This is no place for them. The world respects an out-and-out Christian; but neither God nor the world respects an inconsistent one.

But there is another question, and another Questioner--What doest thou here, Elijah? God did not ask Elijah the question because he did not know the answer; but because he wished to make Elijah put his mood into words, since then Elijah would understand it a little better, and, when he found the tremendous difficulty of making a decent excuse, would begin to suspect that the conduct that wanted so much glozing was not exactly the conduct fit for a prophet. And so let us think that God is looking down upon us, in all our occupation of our free time, and that He is wishing us to put into words what we are about, and why we are where we are.

What do you think you would say if, in some of these moments of unnecessary intermingling with questionable things and doubtful people, you were brought suddenly to this, that you had to formulate into some kind of plausibility your reason for being there? I am afraid it would be a very lame and ragged set of reasons that many of us would have to give. Well! better that we should now have to answer the question What doest thou here? than that we should have to fail in answering the future question, after we have done with the world: What didst thou there?'

Dear brethren, let us cleave to Christ, and that will separate us from the world. If we cleave to the world, that will separate us from Christ. I do not insist on details of conduct, but I do beseech you, professing Christians, to recognise that you are set in the world in order to grow like your Master, and that their tendency to help you to that likeness is the one test of all occupations, recreations, and companionships, by which we may know whether we are in or out of the place that pleases Him. And if we are in it, that blessed hope which is held forth in the parable to which I have already referred, will come full of sweetness and of strength to us, that, yonder, men will be grouped according to their moral and religious character; that the tares will be taken away from the wheat, and, that as Christ says, Then shall the righteous flame as the sun in their heavenly Father's Kingdom.