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

**1 SAMUEL-019. AT THE FRONT OR THE BASE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff."*

*1 Samuel 30:24*

David's city of Ziklag had been captured by the Amalekites, while he and all his men who could carry arms were absent, serving in the army of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. On their return they found ruin, their homes harried, their wives, children, and property carried off. Wearied already with their long march, they set off at once in pursuit of the spoilers, who had had a long start of them. When they reached the brook Besor, two hundred of them were too weary and footsore to ford it, and so had to be left behind. But these were not useless, for the heavy baggage was left in their charge, and the other four hundred were thus enabled to march more lightly, and therefore more swiftly. They picked up a sick slave, whom his Amalekite master had heartlessly abandoned to die on the veldt. He was almost dead, so they fed him, and when he was able to answer, questioned him. He undertook to guide David and his band, and thus, as twilight was beginning to fall and the Amalekites were spread abroad over all the ground, eating and drinking and feasting because of all the great spoil that they had taken. the four hundred burst on them, routed them utterly, and won back all their goods and much more.

Then came a quarrel. The four hundred who had gone to the fight insisted that the booty was theirs, and that the two hundred who had had no hand in winning it should have no share in the distribution. But David over-ruled this and laid down a principle of distribution which was adopted as the standing law of Israel--that the soldiers who were actually in the fight and those who stayed behind guarding the baggage, looking after the base of operations, should share alike. It was fair that they should do so, for the two hundred would willingly have been in the thick of battle, and, further, though they did not fight, they helped the fighters, and by guarding the heavy baggage contributed to the victory as really as if they had been in the fray and come out of it with swords dripping with Amalekite blood.

**I. God's battle requires two forms of service.**

In David's raid, as in every campaign, some of the available strength has to be taken to guard the camp, the place where the supplies are, the base of operations, and pickets and detachments have to be left behind all the way, to keep open the communication. The sword is not more needful than the long train of baggage carts, and the forwarding of supplies to the front is as indispensable to the conduct of the war as the headlong charge.

In every great work there is the same distinction of parts and functions, all co-operating to produce the effect which seems to be entirely due to that cause which happens to come last in the series. Organisation of labour associates many hands in the different stages of the one result. There are very few things in this world which are the product of one simple cause alone. You cannot grow a grain of corn without the seed with its vital germ, the soil with its mysterious influences, the sunshine and the rain, the sower's hand and basket, the plougher's plough, and all these, except the blessed sunshine, are the results of a series of other causes which lie forgotten, but are really represented in the issue. If one of them were struck out, all the rest would be ineffectual. In a great machine all its parts are equally necessary, and a defect in a cog on a wheel would be as fatal as a flaw in the cylinder or a crack in the mighty shaft. What would become of a ship if the pintle that the rudder works on were away? The effect of a whole orchestra may depend on the coming in of the flute at the right place.

So in the work which God has given to the Church to do, there are the two forms of service, the direct and the indirect. There are the fighters and the guards of the baggage. And these two are equally necessary. That without which a great work could not have been done is great. When Luther came out from the Diet of Worms, and a knight clapped him on the shoulder, and said, Well done! little monk, he had a share in the memorable deed of that day. The man who gave Luther a flagon of beer when his lips were dry with speaking there before emperor and cardinals, was included in the promise to the giver of a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple.

We have brethren in Christ who have gone to the front, hazarding their lives on the high places of the field. Their hands will droop if they do not feel that a chain of sympathy stretches between them and us, for they in their solitude need all the strength which the confidence of a multitude at home feeling with them can give. They are powerfully influenced by the tone of feeling among us. When devotion languishes and faith droops here, these will generally pass through the same phases among them. When we are strong and bold, their hearts will be quickened by the pulsations of ours, and their courage heightened by thoughts of those from whom they come. Our disorders, our heresies, our struggles are all reproduced on the mission field. An epidemic here travels thither before long, and the spiritual condition of the Church at home is one of the most powerful means of determining that of the churches abroad. A blight among our vines soon shows itself in the little gardens just reclaimed from the waste.

The fighters need material helps and appliances for their work. The days in which the law for apostles and missionaries was, Go forth without purse or scrip, ended before Jesus said, Go ye into all the world. That condition was solemnly revoked by our Lord Himself, when He said, When I sent you forth without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip. The fighters material wants are now to be met by Christ's administration of natural means, even as before they had been met by Christ's administration of supernatural ones. His messengers cannot live, do their work, or extend the kingdom, but by the help of material appliances. Those who abide by the stuff are to organise the commissariat department, and to see that those who are far ahead, among the ranks of the foe, do not want for either food or weapons, and are not left isolated, hemmed in by the enemy, and languishing because they feel that they are forgotten by those who live at home at ease.

There has always been that division of labour. Our Lord Himself had need of many humble instruments as helpers. There were the woman who ministered to His wants, the faithful few whose presence and sympathy were joyful to Him even on the Mount of Transfiguration, and longed for even in the awful solitude of the agony in Gethsemane, the sisters of Bethany whose humble home was His last shelter before the Cross, the owner of the Upper Room, the sad women who prepared sweet spices, the ruler who consecrated his new sepulchre in a garden by His body. Even He, treading the wine-press alone, needed helpers in the background, and, while conquering for us in the awful duel with our enemy, had humble friends who tarried by the stuff. Similarly Paul had his helpers, on whose names he lovingly lingers and has made immortal, a Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church, an Epaphroditus, my fellow soldier, who ministered to my wants, and therefore was a soldier, though he did not fight, an Onesiphorus, who oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.

But let us remember that these two forms of service which are equally necessary are equally binding on us all, in the measure of our opportunity and capacity. Our performing the indirect is no excuse for our neglecting the direct. The conversion of the world is our business and not to be handed over to any society or missionary. No Christian can be only and always a non-combatant, without sin and loss. He is bound to take some share in the actual conflict in one or other of its many parts.

**II. Service may be different in kind and one in essence.**

The determining element in our actions is their motive. Not what we work in, but what we work for, gives the principle of classification. Not the spots on the skin or the colour of the feathers, but the bony skeleton, is the basis of zoological classification. It is not the size or binding of a book, be it quarto or folio or octavo, be it in leather or cloth or paper covers, but its subject, that settles its place in a catalogue. The Christian motives of love to Christ, self-sacrifice, devotion, love to men, make all deeds the same which have these in them in like strength. It matters not whether the copy of a great picture be in oils or an engraving or a photograph, so long as it is a copy. The smallest piece of indirect Christian service may be thus elevated to the same plane as the greatest.

Mere money-giving may have in it all these qualities, as truly and in as great a degree, as the deeds of Apostles and martyrs. Remember how Peter puts in one category these two forms of service, as equally flowing from the manifold grace of God, and equally to be exercised as good stewards thereof--If any man speaketh, speaking as it were the oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth. Remember how Paul classes all varieties of service as equally gifts according to the grace given to us, and to be exercised in the same spirit whatever are the difference in their forms: or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality ... he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let us learn, then, how we ought to help Christian fighters for Christ --as associating ourselves with them and their work by sympathy and sharing in their spirit and motives.

Let us learn how loftily we ought to think of the possible sacredness of the most secular forms of help, and to try thus to consecrate our indirect service.

**III. All work done from the same motive will receive the same reward.**

None need be startled by the thought that Christian work is rewarded. Essentially, it is not deeds but character that is rewarded. The reward is the possession of God of which such a character is capable, and the consequent blessedness which fills such a soul, and cannot but fill it, and which can be enjoyed by no other. The faithful servant enters into the joy of the Lord; the faithful administrator of his Lord's talents enters on the rule over cities in number the same as the talents. Capacity for service is the result of stewardship rightly administered here, and new opportunities yonder are sure to be provided for new capacities.

God's judgment takes little note of that which men's judgment all but exclusively notes. The conspicuousness or success of a man's deeds is nothing to Him. Differences of power are of no account. It is faithfulness that is required in a steward, and it is all the same whether the stewardship is of millions or of farthings. The saints nearest the glory in heaven will not always be the men whose words or deeds fill the pages of Church history and resound through the ages. There will be astounding new principles of nearness and comparative remoteness then.

Christ was repeating what David made a law in Israel, when He said: He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. Therein He recognises the identity in spiritual stature and motive for service, of the prophet and of his dumb helper, and assures us that those who, in widely different ways but under the guidance of the same spirit and motives, have contributed their respective shares to the one triumphant result shall be associated and equalised in the immortal reward.

So remember that what is necessary in our indirect work, if it is to be thus honoured, is that it should have our devotion, and our love to Jesus and to men, throbbing in it, and that it should be accompanied by direct work, in so far as we have opportunities for that. Moneygiving may be made sacred, and by it, exercised in the right spirit, we may lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation and may lay hold upon eternal life.