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

**ACTS-075. WOULD-BE EXORCISTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?."*

*Acts 19:15*

These exorcists had no personal union with Jesus. To them He was only Jesus whom Paul preached. They spoke His name tentatively, as an experiment, and imitatively. To command in the name of Jesus was an appeal to Jesus to glorify His name and exert His power, and so when the speaker had no real faith in the name or the power, there was no answer, because there was really no appeal.

**I. The only power which can cast out the evil spirits is the name of Jesus.**

That is a commonplace of Christian belief. But it is often held in a dangerously narrow way and leads to most unwise pitting of the Gospel against other modes of bettering and elevating men, instead of recognising them as allies. Earnest Christian workers are tempted to forget Jesus own word: He that is not against us is for us. There is no need to disparage other agencies because we believe that it is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. Many of the popular philanthropic movements of the day, many of its curbing and enlightening forces, many of its revolutionary social ideas, are really in their essence and historically in their origin, profoundly Christian, and are the application of the principles inherent in the Name to the evils of society. No doubt many of their eager apostles are non-Christian or even anti-Christian, but though some of them have tried violently to pluck up the plant by the root from the soil in which it first flowered, much of that soil still adheres to it, and it will not live long if torn from its native habitat.

It is not narrowness or hostility to non-Christian efforts to cast out the demons from humanity, but only the declaration of a truth which is taught by the consideration of what is the difference between all other such efforts and Christianity, and is confirmed by experience, if we maintain that, whatever good results may follow from these other influences, it is the powers lodged in the Name of Jesus, and these alone which can, radically and completely, conquer and eject the demons from a single soul, and emancipate society from their tyranny.

For consider that the Gospel which proclaims Jesus as the Saviour is the only thing which deals with the deepest fact in our natures, the fact of sin; gives a personal Deliverer from its power; communicates a new life of which the very essence is righteousness, and which brings with it new motives, new impulses, and new powers.

Contrast with this the inadequate diagnosis of the disease and the consequent imperfection of the remedy which other physicians of the world's sickness present. Most of them only aim at repressing outward acts. None of them touch more than a part of the whole dreadful circumference of the dark orb of evil. Law restrains actions. Ethics proclaims principles which it has no power to realise. It shows men a shining height, but leaves them lame and grovelling in the mire. Education casts out the demon of ignorance, and makes the demons whom it does not cast out more polite and perilous. It brings its own evils in its train. Every kind of crop has weeds which spring with it. The social and political changes, which are eagerly preached now, will do much; but one thing, which is the all-important thing, they will not do, they will not change the nature of the individuals who make up the community. And till that nature is changed any form of society will produce its own growth of evils. A Christless democracy will be as bad as, if not worse than, a Christless monarchy or aristocracy. If the bricks remain the same, it does not much matter into what shape you build them.

These would-be exorcists but irritated the demons by their vain attempts at ejecting them, and it is sometimes the case that efforts to cure social diseases only result in exacerbating them. If one hole in a Dutch dyke is stopped up, more pressure is thrown on another weak point and a leak will soon appear there. There is but one Name that casts a spell over all the ills that flesh is heir to. There is but one Saviour of society--Jesus who saves from sin through His death, and by participation in His life delivers men from that life of self which is the parent of all the evils from which society vainly strives to be delivered by any power but His.

**II. That Name must be spoken by believing men if it is to put forth its full power.**

These exorcists had no faith. All that they knew of Jesus was that He was the one whom Paul preached. Even the name of Jesus is spoiled and is powerless on the lips of one who repeats it, parrot-like, because he has seen its power when it came flame-like from the fiery lips of some man of earnest convictions.

In all regions, and especially in the matter of art or literature, imitators are poor creatures, and men are quick to detect the difference between the original and the copy. The copyists generally imitate the weak points, and seldom get nearer than the imitation of external and trivial peculiarities. It is more feasible to reproduce the contortions of the Sibyl than to catch her inspiration.

This absence or feebleness of personal faith is the explanation of much failure in so-called Christian work. No doubt there may be other causes for the want of success, but after all allowance is made for these, it still remains true that the chief reason why the Gospel message is often proclaimed without casting out demons is that it is proclaimed with faltering faith, tentatively and without assured confidence in its power, or imitatively, with but little, if any, inward experience of the magic of its spell. The demons have ears quick to discriminate between Paul's fiery accents and the cold repetition of them. Incomparably the most powerful agency which any man can employ in producing conviction in others is the utterance of his own intense conviction. If you wish me to weep, your own tears must flow, said the Roman poet. Other factors may powerfully aid the exorcising power of the word spoken by faith, and no wise man will disparage these, but they are powerless without faith and it is powerful without them.

Consider the effect of that personal faith on the speaker--in bringing all his force to bear on his words; in endowing him for a time with many of the subsidiary qualities which make our words winged and weighty; in lifting to a height of self-oblivion, which itself is magnetic.

Consider its effect on the hearers--how it bows hearts as trees are bent before a rushing wind.

Consider its effect in bringing into action God's own power. Of the man, all aflame with Christian convictions and speaking them with the confidence and urgency which become them and him, it may truly be said, It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.

Here then we have laid bare the secret of success and a cause of failure, in Christian enterprise. Here we see, as in a concrete example, the truth exemplified, which all who long for the emancipation of demon-ridden humanity would be wise to lay to heart, and thereby to be saved from much eager travelling on a road that leads nowhither, and much futile expenditure of effort and sympathy, and many disappointments. It is as true to-day as it was long ago in Ephesus, that the evil spirits feel the Infant's hand from far Judea's land, and are forced to confess, Jesus we know and Paul we know; but to other would-be exorcists their answer is, Who are ye? When a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in peace. There is but One stronger than he who can come upon him, and having overcome him, can take from him all his armour wherein he trusted and divide the spoils, and that is the Christ, at whose name, faithfully spoken, the devils fear and fly.