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

**GENESIS-013. GOING FORTH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."*

*Genesis 12:5*

The reference of these words is to Abram's act of faith in leaving Haran and setting out on his pilgrimage. It is a strange narrative of a journey, which omits the journey altogether, with its weary marches, privations, and perils, and notes but its beginning and its end. Are not these the main points in every life, its direction and its attainment? There are--

Two points in the adventure of the diver,

One--when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,

One--when, a prince, he rises with his pearl.

Abram and his company had a clear aim. But does not the Epistle to the Hebrews magnify him precisely because he went out, not knowing whither he went'? Both statements are true, for Abram had the same combination of knowledge and ignorance as we all have. He knew that he was to go to a land that he should afterwards inherit, and he knew that, in the first place, Canaan was to be his objective point, but he did not know, till long after he had crossed the Euphrates and pitched his tent by Bethel, that it was the land. The ultimate goal was clear, and the first step towards it was plain, but how that first step was related to the goal was not plain, and all the steps between were unknown. He went forth with sealed orders, to go to a certain place, where he would have further instructions. He knew that he was to go to Canaan, and beyond that point all was dark, except for the sparkle of the great hope that gleamed on the horizon in front, as a sunlit summit rises above a sea of mist between it and the traveller. Like such a traveller, Abram could not accurately tell how far off the shining peak was, nor where, in the intervening gorges full of mist, the path lay; but he plunged into the darkness with a good heart, because he had caught a glimpse of his journey's end. So with us. We may have clear before us the ultimate aim and goal of our lives, and also the step which we have to take now, in pressing towards it, while between these two there stretches a valley full of mist, the breadth of which may be measured by years or by hours, for all that we know, and the rough places and green pastures of which are equally hidden from us. We have to be sure that the mountain peak far ahead, with the sunshine bathing it, is not delusive cloud but solid reality, and we have to make sure that God has bid us step out on the yard of path which we can see, and, having secured these two certainties, we are to cast ourselves into the obscurity before us, and to bear in our hearts the vision of the end, to cheer us amid the difficulties of the road.

Life is strenuous, fruitful, and noble, in the measure in which its ultimate aim is kept clearly visible throughout it all. Nearer aims, prescribed by physical necessities, tastes, circumstances, and the like, are clear enough, but a melancholy multitude of us have never reflected on the further question: What then? Suppose I have made my fortune, or won my wife, or established my position, or achieved a reputation, behind all these successes lies the larger question. These are not ends but means, and it is fatal to treat them as being the goal of our efforts or the chief end of our being. There would be fewer wrecked lives, and fewer bitter and disappointed old men, if there were more young ones who, at starting, put clearly before themselves the question: What am I living for? and what am I going to do when I have secured the nearer aims necessarily prescribed to me?'

What that aim should be is not doubtful. The only worthy end befitting creatures with hearts, minds, consciences, and wills like ours is God Himself. Abram's Canaan is usually regarded as an emblem of heaven, and that is correct, but the land of our inheritance is not wholly beyond the river, for God is the portion of our hearts. He is heaven. To dwell with Him, to have all the current of our being running towards Him, to set Him before us in the strenuous hours of effort and in the quiet moments of repose, in the bright and in the dark days, are the conditions of blessedness, strength, and peace.

That aim clearly apprehended and persistently pursued gives continuity to life, such as nothing else can do. How many of the things that drew us to themselves, and were for a while the objects of desire and effort, have sunk below the horizon! The lives that are not directed to God as their chief end are like the voyages of old-time sailors, who had to creep from one headland to another, and steer for points which, one after another, were reached, left behind, and forgotten. There is only one aim so great, so far in advance that we can never reach, and therefore can never pass and drop it. Life then becomes a chain, not a heap of unrelated fragments. That aim made ours, stimulates effort to its highest point, and therefore secures blessedness. It emancipates from many bonds, and takes the poison out of the mosquito bites of small annoyances, and the stings of great sorrows. It gleams ever before a man, sufficiently attained to make him at rest, sufficiently unattained to give the joy of progress. The pilgrims who had but one single aim, to go to the land of Canaan, were delivered from the miseries of conflicting desires, and with simplicity of aim came concentration of force and calm of spirit.