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

**GENESIS-044. JOSEPH, THE PARDONER AND PRESERVER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him. Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him."*

*Genesis 45:1-15*

THE noble words in which Joseph dissipates his brothers doubts have, as their first characteristic, the recognition of the God by whom his career had been shaped, and, for their next, the recognition of the purpose for which it had been. There is a world of tenderness and forgivingness in the addition made to his first words in verse 4, Joseph, your brother. He owns the mystic bond of kindred, and thereby assures them of his pardon for their sin against it. It was right that he should remind them of their crime, even while declaring his pardon. But he rises high above all personal considerations and graciously takes the place of soother, instead of that of accuser. Far from cherishing thoughts of anger or revenge, he tries to lighten the reproaches of their own consciences. Thrice over in four verses he traces his captivity to God. He had learned that wisdom in his long years of servitude, and had not forgotten it in those of rule.

There will be little disposition in us to visit offences against ourselves on the offenders, if we discern God's purpose working through our sorrows, and see, as the Psalmist did, that even our foes are

men which are Thy hand, O Lord. True, His overruling providence does not make their guilt less; but the recognition of it destroys all disposition to revenge, and injured and injurer may one day unite in adoring the result of what the One suffered at the other's hands. Surely, some Christian persecutors and their victims have thus joined hands in heaven. If we would cultivate the habit of seeing God behind second causes, our hearts would be kept free from much wrath and bitterness.

Joseph was as certain of the purpose as of the source of his elevation. He saw now what he had been elevated for, and he eagerly embraced the task which was a privilege. No doubt, he had often brooded over the thought, Why am I thus lifted up? and had felt the privilege of being a nation's saviour; but now he realises that he has a part to play in fulfilling God's designs in regard to the seed of Abraham. Cloudy as his outlook into the future may have been, he knew that great promises affecting all nations were intertwined with his family, separation from whom had been a sorrow for years. But now the thought comes to him with sudden illumination and joy: This, then, is what it all has meant, that I should be a link in the chain of God's workings. He knows himself to be God's instrument for effecting His covenant promises. How small a thing honour and position became in comparison!

We cannot all have great tasks in the line of God's purposes, but we can all feel that our little ones are made great by being seen to be in it. The less we think about chariots and gold chains, and the more we try to find out what God means by setting us where we are, and to do that, the better for our peace and true dignity. A true man does not care for the rewards of work half as much as for the work itself. Find out what God intends, and never mind whether He puts you in a dungeon or in a palace. Both places lie on the road which He has marked and, in either, the main thing is to do His will.

Next comes the swiftly devised plan for carrying out God's purpose. It sounds as if Joseph, with prompt statesmanship, had struck it out then and there. At all events, he pours it forth with contagious earnestness and haste. Note how he says over and over again My father, as if he loved to dwell on the name, but also as if he had not yet completely realised the renewal of the broken ties of brotherhood. It was some trial of the stuff he was made of, to have to bring his father and his family to be stared at, and perhaps mocked at, by the court. Many a successful man would be very much annoyed if his old father, in his country clothes, and hands roughened by toil, sat down beside him in his prosperity. Joseph had none of that baseness. Jacob would come, if at all, as a half-starved immigrant, and would be an abomination to the Egyptians. But what of that? He was my father, and his son knows no better use to make of his dignity than to compel reverence for Jacob's grey hairs, which he will take care shall not be brought down with sorrow to the grave. It is a very homely lesson--never be ashamed of your father. But in these days, when children are often better educated than their parents, and rise above them in social importance, it is a very needful one.

The first overtures of reconciliation should come from the side of the injured party. That is Christ's law, and if it were Christians practice, there would be fewer alienations among them. It is Christ's law, because it is Christ's own way of dealing with us. He, too, was envied, and sold by His brethren. His sufferings were meant to preserve life. Stephen's sermon in the Sanhedrin dwells on Joseph as a type of Christ; and the typical character is seen not least distinctly in this, that He against whom we have sinned pleads with us, seeks to draw us nearer to Himself, and to lead us to put away all hard thoughts of Him, and to cherish all loving ones towards Him, by showing us how void His heart is of anger against us, and how full of yearning love and of gracious intention to provide for us a dwelling-place, with abundance of all needful good, beside Himself, while the years of famine shall last.