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

**JOHN-108**. **THE IRREVOCABLE PAST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"What I have written I have written."*

*John 19:22*

This was a mere piece of obstinacy. Pilate knew that he had prostituted his office in condemning Jesus, and he revenged himself for weak compliance by ill-timed mulishness. A cool-headed governor would have humoured his difficult subjects in such a trifle, as a just one would have been inflexible in a matter of life and death. But this man's facile yielding and his stiff-necked obstinacy were both misplaced. So I will, so I command. Let my will suffice for a reason, was what he meant. He had written his gibe, and not all the Jews in Jewry should make him change.

But his petulant answer to the rulersrequest for the removal of the offensive placard carried in it a deeper meaning, as the Title also did, and as the people's fierce yell, His blood be on us and on our children, did. Possibly the Evangelist had some thought of that sort in recording this saying; but, at all events, I venture to take a liberty with it which I should not do if it were a word of God's, or if it were given for our instruction. So I take it now as expressing in a vivid way, and irrespective of Pilate's intention, the thought of the irrevocable past.

**I. Every man is perpetually writing a permanent record of himself.**

It is almost impossible to get the average man to think of his life as a whole, or to realise that the fleeting present leaves indelible traces. They seem to fade away wholly. The record appears to be written in water. It is written in ink which is invisible, but as indelible as invisible. Grammarians define the perfect tense as that which expresses an action completed in the past and of which the consequences remain in the present. That is true of all our actions. Our characters, our circumstances, our remembrances, are all permanent. Every day we make entries in our diary.

**II. That record, once written, is irrevocable.**

We all know what it is to long that some one action should have been otherwise, to have taken some one step which perhaps has coloured years, and which we would give the world not to have taken. But it cannot be. Remorse cannot alter it. Wishes are vain. Repentance is vain. A new line of conduct is vain.

What an awful contrast in this respect between time future and time past! Think of the indefinite possibilities in the one, the rigid fixity of the other. Our present actions are like cements that dry quickly and set hard on exposure to the air--the dirt of the trowel abides on the soft brick for ever. Many cuneiform inscriptions were impressed with a piece of wood on clay, and are legible millenniums after.

We have to write currente calamo, and as soon as written, the MS. is printed and stereotyped, and no revising proofs nor erasures are possible. An action, once done, escapes from us wholly.

How needful, then, to have lofty principles ready at hand! The fresco painter must have a sure touch, and a quick hand, and a full mind.

What a boundless field the future offers us! How much it may be! How much, perhaps, we resolve it shall be! What a shrunken heap the harvest is! Are you satisfied with what you have written?

**III. This record, written here, is read yonder.**

Our actions carry eternal consequences. These will be read by ourselves. Character remains. Memory remains.

* We shall read with all illusions stripped away.
* Others will read--God and a universe.
* We shall all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ.

**IV. This record may be blotted out by the blood of Christ.**

It cannot be made not to have been, but God's pardon will be given, and in respect to all personal consequences it is made non-existent. Circumstances may remain, but their pressure is different. Character may be renewed and sanctified, and even made loftier by the evil past. Our dead selves may become stepping-stones to higher things.

Memory may remain, but its sting is gone, and new hopes, and joys, and work may fill the pages of our record.

He took away the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to His Cross.

Our lives and characters may become a palimpsest. I will write upon him My new name. Ye are an epistle of Christ ministered by us.