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

**JOSHUA-014. THE END OF THE WAR by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"43. And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. 44. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that He sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."*

*Joshua 21:43-45*

*"1. Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 2. And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses, the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: 3. Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. 4. And now the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as He promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan. 5. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all your heart, and with all your soul. 6. So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. 7. Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan: but unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them, 8. And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. 9. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses."*

*Joshua 22:1-9*

The old order changeth, giving place to new. In this passage we have the breaking up of the congregation and the disbanding of the victorious army. The seven years of fighting had come to an end. The swords were to be beaten into plowshares, and the comrades who had marched shoulder to shoulder, and shared the fierce excitement of many a bloody field, were to be scattered, each becoming a peaceful farmer or shepherd. A picturesque historian, of the modern special correspondent sort, would have overlaid the narrative with sentiment and description; but how quietly the writer tells it, so that we have to bethink ourselves before we apprehend that we are reading the account of an epoch-making event! He fixes attention on two things,-- the complete fulfilment of God's promises (xxi. 43-45) and the dismissal to their homes of the contingent from the trans-Jordanic tribes, whose departure was the signal that the war was ended (22:1-8). We may consider the lessons from these two separately.

**I.** The triumphant record of God's faithfulness (21:43-45). These three verses are the trophy reared on the battlefield, like the lion of Marathon, which the Greeks set on its sacred soil. But the only name inscribed on this monument is Jehovah's. Other memorials of victories have borne the pompous titles of commanders who arrogated the glory to themselves; but the Bible knows of only one conqueror, and that is God. The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself. The military genius and heroic constancy of Joshua, the eagerness for perilous honour that flamed, undimmed by age, in Caleb, the daring and strong arms of many a humble private in the ranks, have their due recognition and reward; but when the history that tells of these comes to sum up the whole, and to put the philosophy of the conquest into a sentence, it has only one name to speak as cause of Israel's victory.

That is the true point of view from which to look at the history of the world and of the church in the world. The difference between the miraculous conquest of Canaan and the ordinary facts of history is not that God did the one and men do the other; both are equally, though in different methods, His acts. In the field of human affairs, as in the realm of nature, God is immanent, though in the former His working is complicated by the mysterious power of man's will to set itself in antagonism to His; while yet, in manner insoluble to us, His will is supreme. The very powers which are arrayed against Him are His gift, and the issues which they finally subserve are His appointment. It does not need that we should be able to pierce to the bottom of the bottomless in order to attain and hold fast by the great conviction that there is no power but of God, and that from Him are all things, and to Him are all things.

Especially does this trophy on the battlefield teach a needful lesson to us in the Christian warfare. We are ever apt to think too much of our visible weapons and leaders, and to forget our unseen and ever-present Commander, from whom comes all our power. We burn incense to our own net, and sacrifice to our own drag, and, like the heathen conqueror of whom Habakkuk speaks, make our swords our gods (Hab.1:11, 16). The Church has always been prone to hero-worship, and to the idolatry of its organisation, its methods, or its theology. Augustine did so and so; Luther smote the whited wall (the Pope) a blow that made him reel; the Pilgrim Fathers carried a slip of the plant of religious liberty in a tiny pot across the Atlantic, and watered it with tears till it has grown a great tree; the Wesleys revived a formal Church,--let us sing hallelujahs to these great names! By all means; but do not let us forget whence they drew their power; and let us listen to Paul's question, Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but servants through whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?'

And let us carve, deep-cut and indelible, in solitary conspicuousness, on the trophy that we rear on each well-fought field, the name of no man save Jesus only. We read that on a pyramid in Egypt the name and sounding titles of the king in whose reign it was erected were blazoned on the plaster facing, but beneath that transitory inscription the name of the architect was hewn, imperishable, in the granite, and stood out when the plaster dropped away. So, when all the short-lived records which ascribe the events of the Church's progress to her great men have perished, the one name of the true builder will shine out, and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. Let us not rely on our own skill, courage, talents, orthodoxy, or methods, nor try to build tabernacles for the witnessing servants beside the central one for the supreme Lord, but ever seek to deepen our conviction that Christ, and Christ only, gives all their powers to all, and that to Him, and Him only, is all victory to be ascribed. That is an elementary and simple truth; but if we really lived in its power we should go into the battle with more confidence, and come out of it with less self-gratulation.

We may note, too, in these verses, the threefold repetition of one thought, that of God's punctual and perfect fulfilment of His word. He gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give; He gave them rest, ... according to all that He sware; there failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken. It is the joy of thankful hearts to compare the promise with the reality, to lay the one upon the other, as it were, and to declare how precisely their outlines correspond. The finished building is exactly according to the plans drawn long before. God gives us the power of checking His work, and we are unworthy to receive His gifts if we do not take delight in marking and proclaiming how completely He has fulfilled His contract. It is no small part of Christian duty, and a still greater part of Christian blessedness, to do this. Many a fulfilment passes unnoticed, and many a joy, which might be sacred and sweet as a token of love from His own hand, remains common and unhallowed, because we fail to see that it is a fulfilled promise. The eye that is trained to watch for God's being as good as His word will never have long to wait for proofs that He is so. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord. And to such a one faith will become easier, being sustained by experience; and a present thus manifestly studded with indications of God's faithfulness will merge into a future still fuller of these. For it does not need that we should wait for the end of the war to have many a token that His every word is true. The struggling soldier can say, No good thing has failed of all that the Lord has spoken. We look, indeed, for completer fulfilment when the fighting is done; but there are brooks by the way for the warriors in the thick of the fight, of which they drink, and, refreshed, lift up the head. We need not postpone this glad acknowledgment till we can look back and down from the land of peace on the completed campaign, but may rear this trophy on many a field, whilst still we look for another conflict to-morrow.

**II.** The disbanding of the contingent from the tribes across Jordan (22:1-8). Forty thousand fighting men, of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manasseh, had willingly helped in the conquest, leaving their own newly-won homes on the eastern side of Jordan, and for seven long years taking their share in the hardships and dangers of their brethren. It was no small tax which they had thus cheerfully paid for the sake of brotherly unity. Their aid had not only been valuable as strengthening Joshua's force, but still more so as a witness of the unbroken oneness of the nation, and of the sympathy which the tribes already settled bore to the others. Politically, it was wise to associate the whole people in the whole conquest; for nothing welds a nation together like the glories of common victories and the remembrance of common dangers survived. The separation of the trans-Jordanic tribes by the rapid river, and by their pastoral life, was a possible source of weakness, and would, no doubt, have led to more complete severance, if it had not been for the uniting power of the campaign. If the forty thousand had been quietly feeding sheep on the uplands while their brethren were fighting among the stony hills of Canaan, a great gulf would have opened between them. Even as it was, the eastern tribes drifted somewhat away from the western; but the disintegration would have been still more complete if no memories of the war, when all Israel stood side by side, had lived on among them. Their share in the conquest was not only a piece of policy,--it was the natural expression of the national brotherhood. Even I Joshua had not ordered their presence, it would have been impossible for them to stop in their peacefulness and let their brethren bear the brunt of battle.

The law for us is the same as for these warriors. In the family, the city, the nation, the Church, and the world, union with others binds us to help them in their conflicts, and that especially if we are blessed with secure possessions, while they have to struggle for theirs. We are tempted to selfish lives of indulgence in our quiet peace, and sometimes think it hard that we should be expected to buckle on our armour, and leave our leisurely repose, because our brethren ask the help of our arms. If we did as Reuben and Gad did, would there be so many rich men who never stir a finger to relieve poverty, so many Christians whose religion is much more selfish than beneficent? Would so many souls be left to toil without help, to struggle without allies, to weep without comforters, to wander in the dark without a guide? All God's gifts in providence and in the Gospel are given that we may have somewhat wherewith to bless our less happy brethren. The service of man is not the substitute for, but the expression of, Christianity. Are we not kept here, on this side Jordan, away for a time from our inheritance, for the very same reason that these men were separated from theirs,--that we may strike some strokes for God and our fellows in the great war? Dives, who lolls on his soft cushions, and has less pity for Lazarus than the dogs have, is Cain come to life again; and every Christian is either his brother's keeper or his murderer. Would that the Church of to-day, with infinitely deeper and sacreder ties knitting it to suffering, struggling humanity, had a tithe of the willing relinquishment of legitimate possessions and patient participation in the long campaign for God which kept these rude soldiers faithful to their flag and forgetful of home and ease, till their general gave them their discharge!

Note the commander's parting charge. They were about to depart for a life of comparative separation from the mass of the nation. Their remoteness and their occupations drew them away from the current of the national life, and gave them a kind of quasi-independence. They would necessarily be less directly under Joshua's control than the other tribes were. He sends them away with one commandment, the Imperative stringency of which is expressed by the accumulation of expressions in verse 5. They are to give diligent heed to the law of Moses. Their obedience is to be based on love to God, who is their God no less than the God of the other tribes. It is to be comprehensive--they are to walk in all His ways; it is to be resolute--they are to cleave to Him; it is to be wholehearted and whole-souled service, that will be the true bond between the separated parts of the whole. Independence so limited will be harmless; and, however wide apart their paths may lie, Israel will be one. In like manner the bond that knits all divisions of God's people together, however different their modes of life and thought, however unlike their homes and their work, is the similarity of relation to God. They are one in a common faith, a common love, a common obedience. Wider waters than Jordan part them. Graver differences of tasks and outlooks than separated these two sections of Israel part them. But all are one who love and obey the one Lord. The closer we cleave to Him, the nearer we shall be to all His tribes.

We need only note in a word how these departing soldiers, leaving the battlefield with their commander's praise and benediction, laden with much wealth, the spoil of their enemies, and fording the stream to reach the peaceful homes, which had long stood ready for them, may be taken, by a permissible play of fancy, as symbols of the faithful servants and soldiers of the true Joshua, at the end of their long warfare passing to the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world, bearing in their hands the wealth which, by God's grace, they had conquered from out of things here. They are not sent away by their Commander, but summoned by Him to the great peace of His own presence; and while His lips give them the praise which is praise indeed, they inscribe on the perpetual memorial which they rear no name but His, who first wrought all their works in them, and now has ordained eternal peace for them.