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

**JUDGES-003. RECREANT REUBEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Why satest then among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart."*

*Judges 5:16 (R.V.)*

**I. The fight.**

The warfare is ever repeated, though in new forms. In the highest form it is Christ versus the World, And that conflict must be fought out in our own souls first. Our religion should lead not only to accept and rely on what Christ does for us, but to do and dare for Christ. He has given Himself for us, and has thereby won the right to recruit us as His soldiers. We have to fight against ourselves to establish His reign over ourselves.

And then we have to give our personal service in the great battle for right and truth, for establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. There come national crises when every man must take up arms, but in Christ's kingdom that is a permanent obligation. There the nation is the army. Each subject is not only His servant but His soldier. The metaphor is well worn, but it carries everlasting truth, and to take it seriously to heart would revolutionise our lives.

**II. The reason for standing aloof.**

Reuben abode in the sheepfolds to hear the pipings to the flocks. For Dan his ships, for Asher his havens held them apart. Reuben and the other trans-Jordanic tribes held loosely by the national unity. They had fallen in love with an easy life of pastoral wealth, they did not care to venture anything for the national good. It is still too true that like reasons are largely operative in producing like results. It is seldom from the wealthy and leisurely classes that the bold fighters for great social reformations are recruited. Times of commercial prosperity are usually times of stagnation in regard to these. Reuben lies lazily listening to the drowsy tinklings that lull not only the distant folds but himself to inglorious slumber, while Zebulon and Naphtali are venturing their lives on the high places of the field. The love of ease enervates many a one who should be doing valiantly for the Captain of his salvation. The men of Reuben cared more for their sheep than for their nation. They were not minded to hazard these by listening to Deborah's call. And what their flocks were to that pastoral tribe, their business is to shoals of professing Christians. The love of the world depletes the ranks of Christ's army, and they are comparatively few who stick by the colours and are ready, aye ready for service, as the brave motto of one English regiment has it. The lives of multitudes of so-called Christians are divided between strained energy in their business or trade or profession and self-regarding repose. No doubt competition is fierce, and, no doubt, a Christian man is bound, whatsoever his hand finds to do, to do it with his might, and, no doubt, rest is as much a duty as work. But must not loyalty to Jesus have become tepid, if a servant of His has so little interest in the purposes for which He gave His life that he can hear no call to take active part in promoting them, nor find rest in the work by which he becomes a fellow-worker with his Lord?

**III. The recreant's brave resolves which came to nothing.**

The indignant question of our text is, as it were, framed between two clauses which contrast Reuben's indolent holding aloof with his valorous resolves. By the watercourses of Reuben there were great resolves of heart... . At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Resolves came first, but they were not immediately acted on, and as the Reubenites sate among the sheepfolds and felt the charm of their peaceful lives, the native hue of resolution was sicklied o'er, and doubts of the wisdom of their gallant determination crept in, and their valour oozed out. And so for all their fine resolves, they had no share in the fight nor in the triumph.

So let us lay the warning of that example to heart, and if we are stirred by noble impulses to take our place in the ranks of the fighters for God, let us act on these at once. Emotions evaporate very soon if they are not used to drive the wheels of conduct. The Psalmist was wise who delayed not, but made haste and delayed not to keep God's commandments. Many a man has over and over again resolved to serve God in some specific fashion, and to enlist in the effective force of Christ's army, and has died without ever having done it.

**IV. The question in the hour of victory. Why?'**

Deborah asks it with vehement contempt.

That victory is certain. Are you to have part in it?

The question will be asked on the judgment day by Christ, and by our own consciences. And he was speechless.

To be neutral is to be on the side of the enemy, against whom the stars fight, and whom Kishon sweeps away.

Who is on the Lord's side?--Who?