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

**NUMBERS-003. HOBAB by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Moses said unto Hobab ...Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."*

*Numbers 10:29*

There is some doubt with regard to the identity of this Hobab. Probably he was a man of about the same age as Moses, his brother-in-law, and a son of Jethro, a wily Kenite, a Bedouin Arab. Moses begs him to join himself to his motley company, and to be to him in the wilderness instead of eyes. What did Moses want a man for, when he had the cloud? What do we want common-sense for, when we have God's Spirit? What do we want experience and counsel for, when we have divine guidance promised to us? The two things work in together. The cloud led the march, but it was very well to have a man that knew all about the oases and the wells, the situation of which was known only to the desert-born tribes, and who could teach the helpless slaves from Goshen the secrets of camp life. So Moses pressed Hobab to change his position, to break with his past, and to launch himself into an altogether new and untried sort of life.

And what does he plead with him as the reason? We will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. Probably Hobab looked rather shy at the security, for I suppose he was no worshipper of Jehovah, and he said, No; I had rather go home to my own people and my own kindred and my father's house where I fit in, and keep to my own ways, and have something a little more definite to lay hold of than your promise, or the promise of your Jehovah that lies behind it. These are not solid, and I am going back to my tribe. But Moses pressed and he at last consented, and the following verses suggest that the arrangement was made satisfactorily, and that the journeyings began prosperously. In the Book of Judges we find traces of the presence of Hobab's descendants as incorporated among the people of Israel. One of them came to be somebody, the Jael who struck the tent-peg through the temples of the sleeping Sisera, for she is called the wife of Heber the Kenite. Probably, then, in some sense Hobab must have become a worshipper of Jehovah, and have cast in his lot with his brother-in-law and his people. I do not set Hobab up as a shining example. We do not know much about his religion. But it seems to me that this little glimpse into a long-forgotten and unimportant life may teach us two or three things about the venture of faith, the life of faith, and the reward of faith.

**I. The venture of faith.**

I have already said that Hobab had nothing in the world to trust to except Moses word, and Moses report of God's Word. We will do you good; God has said that He will do good to us, and you shall have your share in it. It was a grave thing, and, in many circumstances, would have been a supremely foolish thing, credulous to the verge of insanity, to risk all upon the mere promise of one in Moses position, who had so little in his own power with which to fulfil the promise; and who referred him to an unseen divinity, somewhere or other; and so drew bills upon heaven and futurity, and did not feel himself at all bound to pay them when they fell due, unless God should give him the cash to do it with. But Hobab took the plunge, he ventured all upon these two promises--Moses word, and God's word that underlay it.

Now that is just what we have to do. For, after all talking about reasons for belief, and evidences of religion, and all the rest of it, it all comes to this at last--will you risk everything on Jesus Christ's bare word? There are plenty of reasons for doing so, but what I wish to bring out is this, that the living heart and root of true Christianity is neither more nor less than the absolute and utter reliance upon nothing else but Christ, and therefore on His word. He did not even condescend to give reasons for that reliance, for His most solemn assurance was just this, Verily, verily, I say unto you. That is as much as to say, If you do not see in Me, without any more argument, reason enough for believing Me, you do not see Me at all.

Christ did not argue--He asserted, and in default of all other proof, if I might venture to say so, He put His own personality into the scales and said, There, that will outweigh everything. So no wonder that they were astonished at His doctrine,--not so much at the substance of it as at the tone of it, for He taught them with authority.

But what right had He to teach them with authority? What right has He to present Himself there in front of us and proclaim, I say unto you, and there is an end of it'? The heart and essence of Christian faith is doing, in a far sublimer fashion, precisely what this wild Arab did, when he uprooted himself from the conditions in which his life had grown up, and flung himself into an unknown future, on bare trust in a bare word. Jesus Christ asks us to do the same by Him. Whether His word comes to us revealing, or commanding, or promising, it is absolute, and, for His true followers, ends all controversy, all hesitation, all reluctance. When He commands it is ours to obey and live. And when He promises it is for us to twine all the tendrils of our expectations round that faithful word, and by faith to make the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast. The venture of faith takes a word for the most solid thing in the universe, and the Incarnate Word of God for the basis of all our hope, the authority for all our conduct, the Master-light of all our seeing.

**II. Hobab suggests to us, secondly--**

The sort of life that follows the venture of faith. The hindrances to his joining Moses were plainly put by himself. He said in effect, I will not come; I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred. Why should I attach myself to a horde of strangers, and go wandering about the desert for the rest of my life, looking out for encampments for them, when I can return to where I have been all my days; and be surrounded by the familiar atmosphere of friends and relatives? But he bethought himself that there was a nobler life to live than that, and because he was stirred by the impulse of reliance on Moses and his promise, and perhaps by some germ of reliance on Moses God, he finally said, The die is cast. I choose my side. I will break with the past. I turn my back on kindred and home. Here I draw a broad line across the page, and begin over again in an altogether new kind of life. I identify myself with these wanderers; sharing their fortunes, hoping to share their prosperity, and taking their God for my God. He had perhaps not been a nomad before, for there still are permanent settlements as well as nomad encampments in Arabia, as there were in those days, and he and his relatives, from the few facts that we know of them, seem to have had a fixed home, with a very narrow zone of wandering round it. So Hobab, an old man probably, if he was anything like the age of his connection by marriage, Moses, who was eighty at this time, makes up his mind to begin a new career.

Now that is what we have to do. If we have faith in Christ and His promise, we shall not say, I am going back to my kindred and to my home. We shall be prepared to accept the conditions of a wanderer's life. We shall recognise and feel, far more than we ever have done, that we are indeed pilgrims and sojourners here. Dear Christian friends, we have no business to call ourselves Christ's men, unless the very characteristic of our lives is that we are drawn ever forward by the prospect of future good, and unless that future is a great deal more solid and more operative upon us, and tells more on our lives, than this intrusive, solid-seeming present that thrusts itself between us and our true home. That is a sure saying. The Christian obligation to live a life of detachment, even while diligent in duty, is not to be brushed aside as pulpit rhetoric and exaggeration, but it is the plainest teaching of the New Testament. I wish it was a little more exemplified in the daily life of the people who call themselves Christians.

If I am not living for the unseen and the future, what right have I to say that I am Christ's at all? If the shadows are more than the substance to me; if this condensed vapour and fog that we call reality has not been to our apprehension thinned away into the unsubstantial mist that it is, what have the principles of Christianity done for us, and what worth is Christ's word to us? If I believe Him, the world is--I do not say, as the sentimental poet put it, but a fleeting show, for man's illusion given;--but as Paul puts it, a glass which may either reveal or obscure the realities beyond; and according as we look at, or look through, the things seen and temporal, do we see, or miss, the things unseen and eternal. So, then, the life of faith has for its essential characteristic--because it is a life of reliance on Christ's bare word--that future good is consciously its supreme aim. That will detach us, as it did Hobab, from home and kindred, and make us feel that we are pilgrims and sojourners.

**III. Lastly, our story suggests to us--**

The rewards of faith.

Come with us, says Moses; we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee what goodness the Lord shall do unto us. He went, and neither he nor Moses ever saw the land, or at least never set their feet on it. Moses saw it from Pisgah, but probably Hobab did not even get so much as that.

So he had all his tramping through the wilderness, and all his work, for nothing, had he? Had he not better have gone back to Midian, and made use of the present reality, than followed a will-of-the-wisp that led him into a bog, if he got none of the good that he set out expecting to get? Then, did he make a mistake? Would he have been a wiser man if he had stuck to his first refusal? Surely not. It seems to me that the very fact of this great promise being given to this old--dare I call Hobab a saint'? --to this old saint, and never being fulfilled at all in this world, compels us to believe that there was some gleam of hope, and of certainty, of a future life, even in these earliest days of dim and partial revelation.

To me it is very illuminative, and very beautiful, that the dying Jacob bursts in his song into a sudden exclamation, I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord! It is as if he had felt that all his life long he had been looking for what had never come, and that it could not be that God was going to let him go down to the grave and never grasp the good that he had been waiting for all his days. We may apply substantially the same thoughts to Hobab, and to all his like, and may turn them to our own use, and argue that the imperfections of the consequences of our faith here on earth are themselves evidences of a future, where all that Christ has said shall be more than fulfilled, and no man will be able to say, Thou didst send me out, deluding me with promises which have all gone to water and have failed.

Hobab dying there in the desert had made the right choice, and if we will trust ourselves to Christ and His faithful word, and, trusting to Him, will feel that we are detached from the present and that it is but as the shadow of a cloud, whatever there may be wanting in the results of our faith here on earth, there will be nothing wanting in its results at the last. Hobab did not regret his venture, and no man ever ventures his faith on Christ and is disappointed. He that believeth shall not be confounded.