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

**PSALMS-042**. **A SONG OF DELIVERANCE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For Thou hast delivered my soul from death: hast Thou not delivered my feet from falling? that I may walk before God in the light of the living."*

*Psalm 56:13 (R.V.)*

According to the ancient Jewish tradition preserved in the superscription of this psalm, it was written at the lowest ebb of David's fortunes, when the Philistines took him in Gath, and as you may remember, he saved himself by adding the fox's hide to the lion's skin, and by pretending to be an idiot, degraded as well as delivered himself. Yet immediately after, if we accept the date given by the superscription, the triumphant confidence and devout hope of this psalm animated his mind. How unlike the true man was to what he appeared to be to Achish and his Philistines! It is strange that the inside and the outside should correspond so badly; but yet, thank God! it is possible. We note,

**I. The deliverance realised by faith before it is accomplished in fact.**

You will observe that I have made a slight alteration in the translation of the words. In our Authorised Version they stand thus: Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt Thou not deliver my feet from falling? as if some prior deliverance was the basis upon which the Psalmist rested his expectation of that which was still to come. But there is no authority in the original for that variation of tenses, and both clauses obviously refer to the same period and the same deliverance. Therefore we must read: Thou hast delivered my soul from death: hast Thou not delivered, etc.; the question being equivalent to a strong affirmation, Yea, Thou hast delivered my feet from falling. This reference of both clauses to the same period and the same delivering act, is confirmed by the quotation of these words in a very much later psalm, the 116th, where we read, with an addition, Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.

So, then, the Psalmist is so sure of the deliverance that is coming that he sings of it as past. He is still in the very thick of the trouble and the fight, and yet he says, It is as good as over. Thou hast delivered.

How does he come to that confidence? Simply because his future is God; and whoever has God for his future can turn else uncertain hopes into certain confidences, and make sure of this, that however Achish and his giant Philistines of Gath, wielding Goliath's arms, spears like a weaver's beam, and brazen armour, may compass him about, in the name of the Lord he will destroy them. They are all as good as dead, though they are alive and hostile at this moment. In the midst of trouble we can fling ourselves into the future, or rather draw the future into the present, and say, Thou hast delivered my soul from death. It is safe to reckon on to-morrow when we reckon on God. We to-day have the same reasons for the same confidence; and if we will go the right way about it, we, too, may bring June's sun into November's fogs, and bask in the warmth of certain deliverance even when the chill mists of trouble enfold us.

But then note, too, here, the substance of this future intervention which, to the Psalmist's quiet faith, is present:--My soul from death, and after that he says, My feet from falling, which looks very like an anticlimax and bathos. But yet, just because to deliver the feet from falling is so much smaller a thing than delivering a life from death, it comes here to be a climax and something greater. The storm passes over the man. What then? After the storm has passed, he is not only alive, but he is standing upright. It has not killed him. No, it has not even shaken him. His feet are as firm as ever they were, and just because that is a smaller thing, it is a greater thing for the deliverance to have accomplished than the other. God does not deliver by halves; He does not leave the delivered man maimed, or thrown down, though living.

Remember, too, the expansion of the text in the psalm to which I have already referred, one of a much later date, which by quoting these words really comments upon them. The later Psalmist adds a clause. Mine eyes from tears, and we may follow on in the same direction, and note the three spheres in which the later poet hymns the delivering hand of God as spiritualising for us all our deeper Christian experience. Thou hast delivered my soul from death, in that great redemption by which the Son has died that we may never know either the intensest bitterness of physical death, or the true death of which it is the shadow and the emblem. Thou hast delivered mine eyes from tears; God wipes away tears here, even before we come to the time when He wipes away all tears from off all faces, and no eyes are delivered from tears, except eyes that have looked through tears to God. And my feet from falling--redeeming grace which saves the soul; comforting grace which lightens sorrow; upholding grace which keeps us from sins--these are the elements of what God has done for us all, if our poor feeble trust has rested on Him.

How did David get to this confidence? Why, he prayed himself into it. If you will read the psalm, you will see very clearly the process by which a man comes to that serene, triumphant trust that the battle is won even whilst it is raging around him. The previous portion of the psalm falls into two parts, on which I need only make this one remark, that in both we have first of all an obvious disquieting fact, and then a flash of victorious confidence. Let me just read a word or two to you. The Psalmist begins in a very minor key. Be merciful unto me, O God! for man would swallow me up--that is Achish and his Philistines. He fighting daily oppresseth me; mine enemies daily would swallow me up. He reiterates the same thought with the dreary monotony of sorrow, for there be many that fight against me, O Thou most High! But swiftly his note changes into What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. In God I will praise His word; that is to say, His promise of deliverance, in God I have put my trust. He has climbed to the height, but only for a moment, for down he drops again, and begins anew the old miserable complaint. The sorrow is too clinging to be cast off at one struggle. It has been dammed out for the moment, but the flood rushes too heavily, and away goes the dam, and back pours the black water. Every day they wrest my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil. And he goes on longer on his depressing key this second time than he did the first, but he rises above it once more in the same fashion, and the refrain with which he had closed the first part of the psalm closes the second. In God will I praise His word; in the Lord will I praise His word. Now he has won the height and keeps it, and breaks into a paean of victory in words of the text.

That is to say, pray yourselves into confidence, and if it does not come at first, pray again. If the consolation seems to glide away, even whilst you are laying hold of it, grasp it once more, and close your fingers more tightly on it. Do not be afraid of going down into the depths a second time, but be sure that you try to rise out of them at the same point as before, by grasping the assurance that in God, in His strength, and by His grace, you will be able to set your seal to the truth of His great promise. Thus will you rise to this confidence which calleth things that are not as though they were, and brings the to-morrow that is sure to dawn with all its brightness and serenity into the turbulent, tempestuous, and clouded atmosphere of to-day. We shall one day escape from all that burdens, and tries, and tasks us; and until then this blessed assurance, the fruit of prayer, is like the food that the ravens brought to the prophet in the ravine, or the bread and water that the angel awoke him to partake of when he was faint in the wilderness. The true answer to David's prayer was the immediate access of confidence unshaken, though the outward answer was a long time in coming, and years lay between him and the cessation of his persecutions and troubles. So we may have brooks by the way, in quiet confidence of deliverance ere yet the deliverance comes. Then note,

**II. The impulse to service which deliverance brings.**

That I may walk before God in the light of the living; that is God's purpose in all His deliverances, that we may thereby be impelled to trustful and grateful service. And David makes that purpose into a vow, for the words might almost as well be translated, I will walk before Him. Let us see to it that God's purpose is our resolve, and that we do not lose the good of any of the troubles or discipline through which He passes us; for the worst of all sorrows is a wasted sorrow.

Thou hast delivered my feet that I may walk. What are feet for? Walking. Further, notice the precise force of that phrase, that I may walk before God. It is not altogether the same as the cognate one which is used about Enoch, that he walked with God. That expresses communion as with a friend; this, the ordering of one's life before His eye, and in the consciousness of His presence as Judge and as Taskmaster. So you find the expression used in almost the only other occasion where it occurs in the Old Testament, where God says to Abraham, Walk before Me, and--because thou dost order thy life in the consciousness that I am looking at thee--be thou perfect. So, to walk before God is to live even in all the distracting activities of daily life, with the clear realisation, and the continued thought burning in our minds that we are doing them all in His presence. Think of what a regiment of soldiers on parade does as each file passes in front of the saluting point where the commanding officer is standing. How each man dresses up, and they pull themselves together, keeping step, sloping their rifles rightly. We are not on parade, but about business a great deal more serious than that. We are doing our fighting with the Captain looking at us, and that should be a stimulus, a joy and not a terror. Realise God's eye watching you, and sin, and meanness, and negligence, and selfishness, and sensuality, and lust, and passion, and all the other devils that are in you will vanish like ghosts at cockcrow. Walk before Me, and if you feel that I am beside you, you cannot sin. Walk before Me, and be thou perfect. Notice,

**III. The region in which that observance of the divine eye is to be carried on.**

In the light of the living, says the Psalmist. That seems to correspond to the first clause of his hope; just as the previous word that I have been commenting upon, walking before Him, corresponds to the second, where he speaks about his feet. Thou hast delivered my soul from death... . I will walk before Thee in the light of the living--where Thou dost still permit my delivered soul to be. And the phrase seems to mean the sunshine of human life contrasted with the darkness of Sheol.

The expression is varied in the 116th Psalm, which reads the land of the living. The really living are they who live in Jesus, and the real light of the living is the sunshine that streams on those who thus live, because they live in Him who not only pours His light upon their hearts, but, by pouring it, turns themselves into light in the Lord. We, too, may have the brightness of His face irradiating our faces and illuminating our paths, as with the beneficence of a better sunshine. The Psalmist points us the way thus to walk in light. He vows that, because his heart is full of the great mercies of his delivering God, he will order all his active life as under the consciousness of God's eye upon him, and then it will all be lightened as by a burst of sunshine. Our brightest light is the radiance from the face of God whom we try to love and serve, and the Psalmist's confidence is that a life of observance of His commandments in which gratitude for deliverance is the impelling motive to continual realisation of His presence, and an accordant life, will be a bright and sunny career. You will live in the sunshine if you live before His face, and however wintry the world may be, it will be like a clear frosty day. There is no frost in the sky, it does not go above the atmosphere, and high above, in serene and wondrous blue, is the blaze of the sunshine. Such a life will be a guided life. There will still remain many occasions for doubt in the region of belief, and for perplexity as to duty. There will often be need for patient and earnest thought as to both, and there will be no lack of calls for strenuous effort of our best faculties in order to apprehend what our Guide means us to do, and where He would have us go, but through it all there will be the guiding hand. As the Master, with perhaps a glance backwards to these words, said, He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. If He is in the light let us walk in the light, and to us it will be purity and knowledge and joy.