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

**ROMANS-042**. **TWO FOUNTAINS, ONE STREAM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"4.* *That we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.... 13. The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope."*

*Romans 15:4, 13*

There is a river in Switzerland fed by two uniting streams, bearing the same name, one of them called the white, one of them the grey, or dark. One comes down from the glaciers, and bears half-melted snow in its white ripple; the other flows through a lovely valley, and is discoloured by its earth. They unite in one common current. So in these two verses we have two streams, a white and a black, and they both blend together and flow out into a common hope. In the former of them we have the dark stream--through patience and comfort, which implies affliction and effort. The issue and outcome of all difficulty, trial, sorrow, ought to be hope. And in the other verse we have the other valley, down which the light stream comes: The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.

So both halves of the possible human experience are meant to end in the same blessed result; and whether you go round on the one side of the sphere of human life, or whether you take the other hemisphere, you come to the same point, if you have travelled with God's hand in yours, and with Him for your Guide.

Let us look, then, at these two contrasted origins of the same blessed gift, the Christian hope.

**I. We have, first of all, the hope that is the child of the night, and born in the dark.**

Whatsoever things, says the Apostle, were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience,--or rather the brave perseverance--and consolation--or rather perhaps encouragement--of the Scriptures might have hope. The written word is conceived as the source of patient endurance which acts as well as suffers. This grace Scripture works in us through the encouragement which it ministers in manifold ways, and the result of both is hope.

So, you see, our sorrows and difficulties are not connected with, nor do they issue in, bright hopefulness, except by reason of this connecting link. There is nothing in a man's troubles to make him hopeful. Sometimes, rather, they drive him into despair; but at all events, they seldom drive him to hopefulness, except where this link comes in. We cannot pass from the black frowning cliffs on one side of the gorge to the sunny tablelands on the other without a bridge--and the bridge for a poor soul from the blackness of sorrow, and the sharp grim rocks of despair, to the smiling pastures of hope, with all their half-open blossoms, is builded in that Book, which tells us the meaning and purpose of them all; and is full of the histories of those who have fought and overcome, have hoped and not been ashamed.

Scripture is given for this among other reasons, that it may encourage us, and so may produce in us this great grace of active patience, if we may call it so.

The first thing to notice is, how Scripture gives encouragement--for such rather than consolation is the meaning of the word. It is much to dry tears, but it is more to stir the heart as with a trumpet call. Consolation is precious, but we need more for well-being than only to be comforted. And, surely, the whole tone of Scripture in its dealing with the great mystery of pain and sorrow, has a loftier scope than even to minister assuagement to grief, and to stay our weeping. It seeks to make us strong and brave to face and to master our sorrows, and to infuse into us a high-hearted courage, which shall not merely be able to accept the biting blasts, but shall feel that they bring a glow to the cheek and oxygen to the blood, while wrestling with them builds up our strength, and trains us for higher service. It would be a poor aim to comfort only; but to encourage--to make strong in heart, resolved in will, and incapable of being overborne or crushed in spirit by any sorrows--that is a purpose worthy of the Book, and of the God who speaks through it.

This purpose, we may say, is effected by Scripture in two ways. It encourages us by its records, and by its revelation of principles.

Who can tell how many struggling souls have taken heart again, as they pondered over the sweet stories of sorrow subdued which stud its pages, like stars in its firmament? The tears shed long ago which God has put in His bottle, and recorded in His book, have truly been turned into pearls. That long gallery of portraits of sufferers, who have all trodden the same rough road, and been sustained by the same hand, and reached the same home, speaks cheer to all who follow them. Hearts wrung by cruel partings from those dearer to them than their own souls, turn to the pages which tell how Abraham, with calm sorrow, laid his Sarah in the cave at Macpelah; or how, when Jacob's eyes were dim that he could not see, his memory still turned to the hour of agony when Rachael died by him, and he sees clear in its light her lonely grave, where so much of himself was laid; or to the still more sacred page which records the struggle of grief and faith in the hearts of the sisters of Bethany. All who are anyways afflicted in mind, body, or estate find in the Psalms men speaking their deepest experiences before them; and the grand majesty of sorrow that marks the patience of Job, and the flood of sunshine that bathes him, revealing the end of the Lord, have strengthened countless sufferers to bear and to hold fast, and to hope. We are all enough of children to be more affected by living examples than by dissertations, however true, and so Scripture is mainly history, revealing God by the record of His acts, and disclosing the secret of human life by telling us the experiences of living men.

But Scripture has another method of ministering encouragement to our often fainting and faithless hearts. It cuts down through all the complications of human affairs, and lays bare the innermost motive power. It not only shows us in its narratives the working of sorrow, and the power of faith, but it distinctly lays down the source and the purpose, the whence and the whither of all suffering. No man need quail or faint before the most torturing pains or most disastrous strokes of evil, who holds firmly the plain teaching of Scripture on these two points. They all come from my Father, and they all come for my good. It is a short and simple creed, easily apprehended. It pretends to no recondite wisdom. It is a homely philosophy which common intellects can grasp, which children can understand, and hearts half paralysed by sorrow can take in. So much the better. Grief and pain are so common that their cure had need to be easily obtained. Ignorant and stupid people have to writhe in agony as well as wise and clever ones, and until grief is the portion only of the cultivated classes, its healing must come from something more universal than philosophy; or else the nettle would be more plentiful than the dock; and many a poor heart would be stung to death. Blessed be God! the Christian view of sorrow, while it leaves much unexplained, focuses a steady light on these two points; its origin and its end. He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness, is enough to calm all agitation, and to make the faintest heart take fresh courage. With that double certitude clear before us, we can face anything. The slings and arrows which strike are no more flung blindly by an outrageous fortune, but each bears an inscription, like the fabled bolts, which tells what hand drew the bow, and they come with His love.

Then, further, the courage thus born of the Scriptures produces another grand thing--patience, or rather perseverance. By that word is meant more than simply the passive endurance which is the main element in patience, properly so called. Such passive endurance is a large part of our duty in regard to difficulties and sorrows, but is never the whole of it. It is something to endure and even while the heart is breaking, to submit unmurmuring, but, transcendent as that is, it is but half of the lesson which we have to learn and to put in practice. For if all our sorrows have a disciplinary and educational purpose, we shall not have received them aright, unless we have tried to make that purpose effectual, by appropriating whatsoever moral and spiritual teaching they each have for us. Nor does our duty stop there. For while one high purpose of sorrow is to deaden our hearts to earthly objects, and to lift us above earthly affections, no sorrow can ever relax the bonds which oblige us to duty. The solemn pressure of I ought, is as heavy on the sorrowful as on the happy heart. We have still to toil, to press forward, in the sweat of our brow, to gain our bread, whether it be food for our bodies, or sustenance for our hearts and minds. Our responsibilities to others do not cease because our lives are darkened. Therefore, heavy or light of heart, we have still to stick to our work, and though we may never more be able to do it with the old buoyancy, still to do it with our might.

It is that dogged persistence in plain duty, that tenacious continuance in our course, which is here set forth as the result of the encouragement which Scripture gives. Many of us have all our strength exhausted in mere endurance, and have let obvious duties slip from our hands, as if we had done all that we could do when we had forced ourselves to submit. Submission would come easier if you took up some of those neglected duties, and you would be stronger for patience, if you used more of your strength for service. You do well if you do not sink under your burden, but you would do better if, with it on your shoulders, you would plod steadily along the road; and if you did, you would feel the weight less. It seems heaviest when you stand still doing nothing. Do not cease to toil because you suffer. You will feel your pain more if you do. Take the encouragement which Scripture gives, that it may animate you to bate no jot of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer right onward.

And let the Scripture directly minister to you perseverance as well as indirectly supply it through the encouragement which it gives. It abounds with exhortations, patterns, and motives of such patient continuance in well-doing. It teaches us a solemn scorn of ills. It, angel-like, bears us up on soft, strong hands, lest we bruise ourselves on, or stumble over, the rough places on our roads. It summons us to diligence by the visions of the prize, and glimpses of the dread fate of the slothful, by all that is blessed in hope, and terrible in foreboding, by appeals to an enlightened self-regard, and by authoritative commands to conscience, by the pattern of the Master, and by the tender motives of love to Him to which He, Himself, has given voice. All these call on us to be followers of them who, through faith and perseverance, inherit the promises.

But we have yet another step to take. These two, the encouragement and perseverance produced by the right use of Scripture, will lead to hope.

It depends on how sorrow and trial are borne, whether they produce a dreary hopelessness which sometimes darkens into despair, or a brighter, firmer hope than more joyous days knew. We cannot say that sorrow produces hope. It does not, unless we have this connecting link--the experience in sorrow of a God-given courage which falters not in the onward course, nor shrinks from any duty. But if, in the very press and agony, I am able, by God's grace, to endure nor cease to toil, I have, in myself, a living proof of His power, which entitles me to look forward with the sure confidence that, through all the uproar of the storm, He will bring me to my harbour of rest where there is peace. The lion once slain houses a swarm of bees who lay up honey in its carcase. The trial borne with brave persistence yields a store of sweet hopes. If we can look back and say, Thou hast been with me in six troubles, it is good logic to look forward and say, and in seven Thou wilt not forsake me. When the first wave breaks over the ship, as she clears the heads and heels over before the full power of the open sea, inexperienced landsmen think they are all going to the bottom, but they soon learn that there is a long way between rolling and foundering, and get to watch the highest waves towering above the bows in full confidence that these also will slip quietly beneath the keel as the others have done, and be left harmless astern.

The Apostle, in this very same letter, has another word parallel to this, in which he describes the issues of rightly-borne suffering when he says, Tribulation worketh perseverance--the same word that is used here--and perseverance worketh the proof in our experience of a sustaining God; and the proof in our experience of a sustaining God works hope. We know that of ourselves we could not have met tribulation, and therefore the fact that we have been able to meet and overcome it is demonstration of a mightier power than our own, working in us, which we know to be from God, and therefore inexhaustible and ever ready to help. That is foundation firm enough to build solid fabrics of hope upon, whose bases go down to the centre of all things, the purpose of God, and whose summits, like the upward shooting spire of some cathedral, aspire to, and seem almost to touch, the heavens.

So hope is born of sorrow, when these other things come between. The darkness gives birth to the light, and every grief blazes up a witness to a future glory. Each drop that hangs on the wet leaves twinkles into rainbow light that proclaims the sun. The garish splendours of the prosperous day hide the stars, and through the night of our sorrow there shine, thickly sown and steadfast, the constellations of eternal hopes. The darker the midnight, the surer, and perhaps the nearer, the coming of the day. Sorrow has not had its perfect work unless it has led us by the way of courage and perseverance to a stable hope. Hope has not pierced to the rock, and builds only things that can be shaken, unless it rests on sorrows borne by God's help.

**II. So much then for the genealogy of one form of the Christian hope.**

But we have also a hope that is born of the day, the child of sunshine and gladness; and that is set before us in the second of the two verses which we are considering, The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.

So then, the darkness and the light are both alike to our hope, in so far as each may become the occasion for its exercise. It is not only to be the sweet juice expressed from our hearts by the winepress of calamities, but that which flows of itself from hearts ripened and mellowed under the sunshine of God-given blessedness.

We have seen that the bridge by which sorrow led to hope, is perseverance and courage; in this second analysis of the origin of hope, joy and peace are the bridge by which Faith passes over into it. Observe the difference: there is no direct connection between affliction and hope, but there is between joy and hope. We have no right to say, Because I suffer, I shall possess good in the future; but we have a right to say, Because I rejoice--of course with a joy in God--I shall never cease to rejoice in Him. Such joy is the prophet of its own immortality and completion. And, on the other hand, the joy and peace which are naturally the direct progenitors of Christian hope, are the children of faith. So that we have here two generations, as it were, of hope's ancestors;--Faith produces joy and peace, and these again produce hope.

Faith leads to joy and peace. Paul has found, and if we only put it to the proof, we shall also find, that the simple exercise of simple faith fills the soul with all joy and peace. Gladness in all its variety and in full measure, calm repose in every kind and abundant in its still depth, will pour into my heart as water does into a vessel, on condition of my taking away the barrier and opening my heart through faith. Trust and thou shalt be glad. Trust, and thou shalt be calm. In the measure of thy trust shall be the measure of thy joy and peace.

Notice, further, how indissolubly connected the present exercise of faith is with the present experience of joy and peace. The exuberant language of this text seems a world too wide for anything that many professing Christians ever know even in the moments of highest elevation, and certainly far beyond the ordinary tenor of their lives. But it is no wonder that these should have so little joy, when they have so little faith. It is only while we are looking to Jesus that we can expect to have joy and peace. There is no flashing light on the surface of the mirror, but when it is turned full to the sun. Any interruption in the electric current is registered accurately by an interruption in the continuous line perforated on the telegraph ribbon; and so every diversion of heart and faith from Jesus Christ is recorded by the fading of the sunshine out of the heart, and the silencing of all the song-birds. Yesterday's faith will not bring joy to-day; you cannot live upon past experience, nor feed your souls with the memory of former exercises of Christian faith. It must be like the manna, gathered fresh every day, else it will rot and smell foul. A present faith, and a present faith only, produces a present joy and peace. Is there, then, any wonder that so much of the ordinary experience of ordinary Christians should present a sadly broken line--a bright point here and there, separated by long stretches of darkness? The gaps in the continuity of their joy are the tell-tale indicators of the interruptions in their faith. If the latter were continuous, the former would be unbroken. Always believe, and you will always be glad and calm.

It is easy to see that this is the natural result of faith. The very act of confident reliance on another for all my safety and well-being has a charm to make me restful, so long as my reliance is not put to shame. There is no more blessed emotion than the tranquil happiness which, in the measure of its trust, fills every trustful soul. Even when its objects are poor, fallible, weak, ignorant dying men and women, trust brings a breath of more than earthly peace into the heart. But when it grasps the omnipotent, all-wise, immortal Christ, there are no bounds but its own capacity to the blessedness which it brings into the soul, because there is none to the all-sufficient grace of which it lays hold.

Observe again how accurately the Apostle defines for us the conditions on which Christian experience will be joyful and tranquil. It is in believing, not in certain other exercises of mind, that these blessings are to be realised. And the forgetfulness of that plain fact leads to many good people's religion being very much more gloomy and disturbed than God meant it to be. For a large part of it consists in sadly testing their spiritual state, and gazing at their failures and imperfections. There is nothing cheerful or tranquillising in grubbing among the evils of your own heart, and it is quite possible to do that too much and too exclusively. If your favourite subject of contemplation in your religious thinking is yourself, no wonder that you do not get much joy and peace out of that. If you do, it will be of a false kind. If you are thinking more about your own imperfections than about Christ's pardon, more about the defects of your own love to Him than about the perfection of His love to you, if instead of practising faith you are absorbed in self-examination, and instead of saying to yourself, I know how foul and unworthy I am, but I look away from myself to my Saviour, you are bewailing your sins and doubting whether you are a Christian, you need not expect God's angels of joy and peace to nestle in your heart. It is in believing, and not in other forms of religious contemplation, however needful these may in their places be, that these fair twin sisters come to us and make their abode with us.

Then, the second step in this tracing of the origin of the hope which has the brighter source is the consideration that the joy and peace which spring from faith, in their turn produce that confident anticipation of future and progressive good.

Herein lies the distinguishing blessedness of the Christian joy and peace, in that they carry in themselves the pledge of their own eternity. Here, and here only, the mad boast which is doomed to be so miserably falsified when applied to earthly gladness is simple truth. Here to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant. Such joy has nothing in itself which betokens exhaustion, as all the less pure joys of earth have. It is manifestly not born for death, as are they. It is not fated, like all earthly emotions or passions, to expire in the moment of its completeness, or even by sudden revulsion to be succeeded by its opposite. Its sweetness has no after pang of bitterness. It is not true of this gladness, that Hereof cometh in the end despondency and madness, but its destiny is to remain as long as the soul in which it unfolds shall exist, and to be full as long as the source from which it flows does not run dry.

So that the more we experience the present blessedness, which faith in Christ brings us, the more shall we be sure that nothing in the future, either in or beyond time, can put an end to it; and hence a hope that looks with confident eyes across the gorge of death, to the shining tablelands on the other side, and is as calm as certitude, shall be ours. To the Christian soul, rejoicing in the conscious exercise of faith and the conscious possession of its blessed results, the termination of a communion with Christ, so real and spiritual, by such a trivial accident as death, seems wildly absurd and therefore utterly impossible. Just as Christ's Resurrection seems inevitable as soon as we grasp the truth of His divine nature, and it becomes manifestly impossible that He, being such as He is--should be holden of death, being such as it is, so for His children, when once they come to know the realities of fellowship with their Lord, they feel the entire dissimilarity of these to anything in the realm which is subjected to the power of death, and to know it to be as impossible that these purely spiritual experiences should be reduced to inactivity, or meddled with by it, as that a thought should be bound with a cord or a feeling fastened with fetters. They, and death, belong to two different regions. It can work its will on this wide world, and all its fading sweets--but is powerless in the still place where the soul and Jesus hold converse, and all His joy passes into His servant's heart. I saw, not long since, in a wood a mass of blue wild hyacinths, that looked like a little bit of heaven dropped down upon earth. You and I may have such a tiny bit of heaven itself lying amidst all the tangle of our daily lives, if only we put our trust in Christ, and so get into our hearts some little portion of that joy that is unspeakable, and that peace that passeth understanding.

Thus, then, the sorrows of the earthly experience and the joys of the Christian life will blend together to produce the one blessed result of a hope that is full of certainty, and is the assurance of immortality. There is no rainbow in the sky unless there be both a black cloud and bright sunshine. So, on the blackest, thickest thunder-mass of our sorrows, if smitten into moist light by the sunshine of joy and peace drawn from Jesus Christ by faith, there may be painted the rainbow of hope, the many-coloured, steadfast token of the faithful covenant of the faithful God.