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

**ROMANS-045**. **PRISCILLA AND AQUILA by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus; 4. (Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but so all the churches of the Gentiles:) 5. Likewise greet the church that is in their house."*

*Romans 16:3-5*

It has struck me that this wedded couple present, even in the scanty notices that we have of them, some interesting points which may be worth while gathering together.

Now, to begin with, we are told that Aquila was a Jew. We are not told whether Priscilla was a Jewess or no. So far as her name is concerned, she may have been, and very probably was, a Roman, and, if so, we have in their case a mixed marriage such as was not uncommon then, and of which Timothy's parents give another example. She is sometimes called Prisca, which was her proper name, and sometimes Priscilla, an affectionate diminutive. The two had been living in Rome, and had been banished under the decree of the Emperor, just as Jews have been banished from England and from every country in Europe again and again. They came from Rome to Corinth, and were, perhaps, intending to go back to Aquila's native place, Pontus, when Paul met them in the latter city, and changed their whole lives. His association with them began in a purely commercial partnership. But as they abode together and worked at their trade, there would be many earnest talks about the Christ, and these ended in both husband and wife becoming disciples. The bond thus knit was too close to be easily severed, and so, when Paul sailed across the Aegean for Ephesus, his two new friends kept with him, which they would be the more ready to do, as they had no settled home. They remained with him during his somewhat lengthened stay in the great Asiatic city; for we find in the first Epistle to the Corinthians which was written from Ephesus about that time, that the Apostle sends greetings from Priscilla and Aquila and the Church which is in their house. But when Paul left Ephesus they seem to have stayed behind, and afterwards to have gone their own way.

About a year after the first Epistle to the Corinthians was sent from Ephesus, the Epistle to the Romans was written, and we find there the salutation to Priscilla and Aquila which is my text. So this wandering couple were back again in Rome by that time, and settled down there for a while. They are then lost sight of for some time, but probably they returned to Ephesus. Once more we catch a glimpse of them in Paul's last letter, written some seven or eight years after that to the Romans. The Apostle knows that death is near, and, at that supreme moment, his heart goes out to these two faithful companions, and he sends them a parting token of his undying love. There are only two messages to friends in the second Epistle to Timothy, and one of these is to Prisca and Aquila. At the mouth of the valley of the shadow of death he remembered the old days in Corinth, and the, to us, unknown instance of devotion which these two had shown, when, for his life, they laid down their own necks.

Such is all that we know of Priscilla and Aquila. Can we gather any lessons from these scattered notices thus thrown together?

**I. Here is an object lesson as to the hallowing effect of Christianity on domestic life and love.**

Did you ever notice that in the majority of the places where these two are named, if we adopt the better readings, Priscilla's name comes first? She seems to have been the better man of the two; and Aquila drops comparatively into the background. Now, such a couple, and a couple in which the wife took the foremost place, was an absolute impossibility in heathenism. They are a specimen of what Christianity did in the primitive age, all over the Empire, and is doing to-day, everywhere--lifting woman to her proper place. These two, yoked together in all exercise of noble end, and helping one another in Christian work, and bracketed together by the Apostle, who puts the wife first, as his fellow-helpers in Christ Jesus, stands before us as a living picture of what our sweet and sacred family life and earthly loves may be glorified into, if the light from heaven shines down upon them, and is thankfully received into them.

Such a house as the house of Prisca and Aquila is the product of Christianity, and such ought to be the house of every professing Christian. For we should all make our homes as tabernacles of the righteous, in which the voice of joy and rejoicing is ever heard. Not only wedded love, but family love, and all earthly love, are then most precious, when into them there flows the ennobling, the calming, the transfiguring thought of Christ and His love to us.

Again, notice that, even in these scanty references to our two friends, there twice occurs that remarkable expression the church that is in their house. Now, I suppose that that gives us a little glimpse into the rudimentary condition of public worship in the primitive church. It was centuries after the time of Priscilla and Aquila before circumstances permitted Christians to have buildings devoted exclusively to public worship. Up to a very much later period than that which is covered by the New Testament, they gathered together wherever was most convenient. And, I suppose, that both in Rome and Ephesus, this husband and wife had some room--perhaps the workshop where they made their tents, spacious enough for some of the Christians of the city to meet together in. One would like people who talk so much about the Church, and refuse the name to individual societies of Christians, and even to an aggregate of these, unless it has bishops, to explain how the little gathering of twenty or thirty people in the workshop attached to Aquila's house, is called by the Apostle without hesitation the church which is in their house. It was a part of the Holy Catholic Church, but it was also a Church, complete in itself, though small in numbers. We have here not only a glimpse into the manner of public worship in early times, but we may learn something of far more consequence for us, and find here a suggestion of what our homes ought to be. The Church that is in thy house--fathers and mothers that are responsible for your homes and their religious atmosphere, ask yourselves if any one would say that about your houses, and if they could not, why not?

**II. We may get here another object lesson as to the hallowing of common life, trade, and travel.**

It does not appear that, after their stay in Ephesus, Aquila and his wife were closely attached to Paul's person, and certainly they did not take any part as members of what we may call his evangelistic staff. They seem to have gone their own way, and as far as the scanty notices carry us, they did not meet Paul again, after the time when they parted in Ephesus. Their gipsy life was probably occasioned by Aquila's going about--as was the custom in old days when there were no trades-unions or organised centres of a special industry--to look for work where he could find it. When he had made tents in Ephesus for a while, he would go on somewhere else, and take temporary lodgings there. Thus he wandered about as a working man. Yet Paul calls him his fellow worker in Christ Jesus; and he had, as we saw, a Church in his house. A roving life of that sort is not generally supposed to be conducive to depth of spiritual life. But their wandering course did not hurt these two. They took their religion with them. It did not depend on locality, as does that of a great many people who are very religious in the town where they live, and, when they go away for a holiday, seem to leave their religion, along with their silver plate, at home. But no matter whether they were in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome, Aquila and Priscilla took their Lord and Master with them, and while working at their camel's-hair tents, they were serving God.

Dear brethren, what we want is not half so much preachers such as my brethren and I, as Christian tradesmen and merchants and travellers, like Aquila and Priscilla.

**III. Again, we may see here a suggestion of the unexpected issues of our lives.**

Think of that complicated chain of circumstances, one end of which was round Aquila and the other round the young Pharisee in Jerusalem. It steadily drew them together until they met in that lodging at Corinth. Claudius, in the fullness of his absolute power, said, Turn all these wretched Jews out of my city. I will not have it polluted with them any more. Get rid of them! So these two were uprooted, and drifted to Corinth. We do not know why they chose to go thither; perhaps they themselves did not know why; but God knew. And while they were coming thither from the west, Paul was coming thither from the east and north. He was prevented by the Spirit from speaking in Asia, and driven across the sea against his intention to Neapolis, and hounded out of Philippi and Thessalonica and Beræa; and turned superciliously away from Athens; and so at last found himself in Corinth, face to face with the tentmaker from Rome and his wife. Then one of the two men said, Let us join partnership together, and set up here as tent-makers for a time. What came out of this unintended and apparently chance meeting?

The first thing was the conversion of Aquila and his wife; and the effects of that are being realised by them in heaven at this moment, and will go on to all eternity.

So, in the infinite complexity of events, do not let us worry ourselves by forecasting, but let us trust, and be sure that the Hand which is pushing us is pushing us in the right direction, and that He will bring us, by a right, though a roundabout way, to the City of Habitation. It seems to me that we poor, blind creatures in this world are somewhat like a man in a prison, groping with his hand in the dark along the wall, and all unawares touching a spring which moves a stone, disclosing an aperture that lets in a breath of purer air, and opens the way to freedom. So we go on as if stumbling in the dark, and presently, without our knowing what we do, by some trivial act we originate a train of events which influences our whole future.

Again, when Aquila and Priscilla reached Ephesus they formed another chance acquaintance in the person of a brilliant young Alexandrian, whose name was Apollos. They found that he had good intentions and a good heart, but a head very scantily furnished with the knowledge of the Gospel. So they took him in hand, just as Paul had taken them. If I may use such a phrase, they did not know how large a fish they had caught. They had no idea what a mighty power for Christ was lying dormant in that young man from Alexandria who knew so much less than they did. They instructed Apollos, and Apollos became second only to Paul in the power of preaching the Gospel. So the circle widens and widens. God's grace fructifies from one man to another, spreading onward and outward. And all Apollos converts, and their converts, and theirs again, right away down the ages, we may trace back to Priscilla and Aquila.

So do not let us be anxious about the further end of our deeds--viz. their results; but be careful about the nearer end of them--viz. their motives; and God will look after the other end. Seeing that thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or how much any of them will prosper, let us grasp all opportunities to do His will and glorify His name.

**IV. Further, here we have an instance of the heroic self-devotion which love to Christ kindles.**

For my sake they laid down their own necks. We do not know to what Paul is referring: perhaps to that tumult in Ephesus, where he certainly was in danger. But the language seems rather more emphatic than such danger would warrant. Probably it was at some perilous juncture of which we know nothing (for we know very little, after all, of the details of the Apostle's life), in which Aquila and Priscilla had said, Take us and let him go. He can do a great deal more for God than we can do. We will put our heads on the block, if he may still live. That magnanimous self-surrender was a wonderful token of the passionate admiration and love which the Apostle inspired, but its deepest motive was love to Christ and not to Paul only.

Faith in Christ and love to Him ought to turn cowards into heroes, to destroy thoughts of self, and to make the utmost self-sacrifice natural, blessed, and easy. We are not called upon to exercise heroism like Priscilla's and Aquila's, but there is as much heroism needed for persistently Christian life, in our prosaic daily circumstances, as has carried many a martyr to the block, and many a tremulous woman to the pyre. We can all be heroes; and if the love of Christ is in us, as it should be, we shall all be ready to yield ourselves living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service.

Long years after, the Apostle, on the further edge of life, looked back over it all; and, whilst much had become dim, and some trusted friends had dropped away, like Demas, he saw these two, and waved them his last greeting before he turned to the executioner--Salute Prisca and Aquila. Paul's Master is not less mindful of His friends love, or less eloquent in the praise of their faithfulness, or less sure to reward them with the crown of glory. Whoso confesseth Me before men, him will I also confess before the angels in heaven.