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

**ROMANS-050**. **TERTIUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"I, Tertius, who write the epistle, salute you in the Lord."*

*Romans 16:22 (R.V.)*

One sometimes sees in old religious pictures, in some obscure corner, a tiny kneeling figure, the portrait of the artist. So Tertius here gets leave to hold the pen for a moment on his own account, and from Corinth sends his greeting to his unknown brethren in Rome. Apparently he was a stranger to them, and needed to introduce himself. He is never heard of before or since. For one brief moment he is visible, like a star of a low magnitude, shining out for a moment between two banks of darkness and then swallowed up. Judging by his name, he was probably a Roman, and possibly had some connection with Italy, but clearly was a stranger to the Church in Rome. We do not know whether he was a resident in Corinth, where he wrote this epistle, or one of Paul's travelling companions. Probably he was the former, as his name never recurs in any of Paul's letters. One can understand the impulse which led him for one moment to come out of obscurity and to take up personal relations with those who had so long enjoyed his pen. He would fain float across the deep gulf of alienation a thread of love which looked like gossamer, but has proved to be stronger than centuries and revolutions.

This humble and modest greeting is an expression of a sentiment which the world may smile at, but which, being in the Lord, partakes of immortality. No doubt the world's hate drove more closely together all the disciples in primitive times; but the yearning of Tertius for some little corner in the love of his Roman brethren might well influence us to-day. There ought to be an effort of imagination going out towards unknown brethren. Christian love is not meant to be kept within the limits of sight and personal knowledge; it should overleap the narrow bounds of the communities to which we belong, and expatiate over the whole wide field. The great Shepherd has prescribed for us the limits to the very edge of which our Christian love should consciously go forth, and has rebuked the narrowness to which we are prone, when He has said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. We are all too prone to let identities of opinion and of polity, or even the accident of locality, set bounds to our consciousness of brotherhood; and the example of this little gush of affection, that reaches out a hand across the ocean and grasps the hands of unknown partakers in the common life of the one Lord, may well shame us out of our narrowness, and quicken us into a wide perception and deepened feeling towards all who in every place call up Jesus Christ as their Lord--both their Lord and ours.

Another lesson which we may learn from Tertius characterisation of himself is the dignity of subordinate work towards a great end. His office as amanuensis was very humble, but it was quite as necessary as Paul's inspired fervour. It is to him that we owe our possession of the Epistle; it is to him that Paul owed it that he was able to record in imperishable words the thoughts that welled up in his mind, and would have been lost if Tertius had not been at his side. The power generated in the boilers does its work through machines of which each little cog-wheel is as indispensable as the great shafts. Members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. Every note in a great concerted piece of music, and every instrument, down to the triangle and the little drum in the great orchestra, is necessary. This lesson of the dignity of subordinate work needs to be laid to heart both by those who think themselves to be capable of more important service, and by those who have to recognise that the less honourable tasks are all for which they are fit. To the former it may preach humility, the latter it may encourage. We are all very ignorant of what is great and what is small in the matter of our Christian service, and we have sometimes to look very closely and to clear away a great many vulgar misconceptions before we can clearly discriminate between mites and talents. We know not which may prosper, whether this or that; and in our ignorance of what it may please God to bring out of any service faithfully rendered to Him, we had better not be too sure that true service is ever small, or that the work that attracts attention and is christened by men great is really so in His eyes. It is well to have the noble ambition to desire earnestly the greater gifts, but it is better to follow the more excellent way, and to seek after the love which knows nothing of great or small, and without which prophecy and the knowledge of all mysteries, and all conspicuous and all the shining qualities profit nothing.

We can discern in Tertius words a little touch of what we may call pride in his work. No doubt he knew it to be subordinate, but he also knew it to be needful; and no doubt he had put all his strength into doing it well. No man will put his best into any task which he does not undertake in such a spirit. It is a very plain piece of homely wisdom that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well. Without a lavish expenditure of the utmost care and effort, our work will tend to be slovenly and unpleasing to God, and man, and to ourselves. We may be sure there were no blots and bits of careless writing in Tertius manuscript, and that he would not have claimed the friendly feelings of his Roman brethren, if he had not felt that he had put his best into the writing of this epistle. The great word of King David has a very wide application. I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.

Tertius salutation may suggest to us the best thing by which to be remembered. All his life before and after the hours spent at Paul's side has sunk in oblivion. He wished to be known only as having written the Epistle. Christian souls ought to desire to live chiefly in the remembrance of those to whom they have been known as having done some little bit of work for Jesus Christ. We may well ask ourselves whether there is anything in our lives by which we should thus wish to be remembered. All our many activities will sink into silence; but if the stream of our life, which has borne along down its course so much mud and sand, has brought some grains of gold in the form of faithful and loving service to Christ and men--these will not be lost in the ocean, but treasured by Him. What we do for Jesus and to spread the knowledge of His name is the immortal part of our mortal lives, and abides in His memory and in blessed results in our own characters, when all the rest that made our busy and often stormy days has passed into oblivion. All that we know of Tertius who wrote this Epistle is that he wrote it. Well will it be for us if the summary of our lives be something like that of his!