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

**HOSEA-005. DESTRUCTION AND HELP by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help."*

*Hosea 13:9 (A.V.)*

*"It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against Me, against thy Help."*

*Hosea 13:9 (R.V.)*

These words are obscure by reason of their brevity. Literally they might be rendered, Thy destruction for, in, or against Me; in, or against thy Help. Obviously, some words must be supplied to bring out any sense. Our Authorised Version has chosen the supplement is, which fails to observe the second occurrence with thy Help of the preposition, and is somewhat lax in rendering the for of the second clause by the neutral but. It is probably better to read, as the Revised Version, with most modern interpreters, Thou art against Me, against thy Help, and to find in the second clause the explanation, or analysis, of the destruction announced in the first. So we have here the wail of the parental love of God over the ruin which Israel has brought on itself, and that parental love is setting forth Israel's true condition, in the hope that they may discern it. Thus, even the rebuke holds enclosed a promise and a hope. Since God is their help, to depart from Him has been ruin, and the return to Him will be life. Hosea, or rather the Spirit that spake through Hosea, blended wonderful tenderness with unflinching decision in rebuke, and unwavering certainty in foretelling evil with unfaltering hope in the promise of possible blessing. His words are set in the same key as the still more wonderfully tender ones that Jesus uttered as He looked across the valley from Olivet to the gleaming city on the other side, and wailed, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Therefore your house is left unto you desolate.

We may note here

**I. The loving discovery of ruin.**

It is strange that men should need to be told, and that with all emphasis, the evil case in which they are; and stranger still that they should resent the discovery and reject it. This pathetic pleading is the voice of a divine Father trying to convince His son of misery and danger; and the obscurity of the text is as if that voice was choked with sobs, and could only speak in broken syllables the tragical word in which all the evil of Israel's sin is gathered up--his destruction, or corruption. It gathers up in one terrible picture the essential nature of sin and the death of the soul, which is its wages--inward misery and unrest, outward sorrows, the decay of mental and moral powers, the spreading taint which eats its way through the whole personality of a man who has sinned, and pauses not till it has reduced his corpse to putrefaction. All these, and a hundred more effects of sin, are crowded together in that one word thy destruction.

It is strange that it needs God's voice, and that in its most piercing tones, to convince men of ruin brought by sin. A mortifying limb is painless. There is no consciousness in the drugged sleep which becomes heavier and heavier till it ends in death. There is no surer sign of the reality and extent of the corruption brought about by sin, than man's ignorance of it. There is no more tragical proof that a man is wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked than his vehement affirmation, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and his self-complacent rejection of the counsel to buy refined gold, and white garments, and eye-salve to anoint his eyes. So obstinately unconscious are we of our ruin that even God's voice, whether uttered in definite words, or speaking in sharp sorrows and punitive acts, but too often fails to pierce the thick layer of self complacency in which we wrap ourselves, and to pierce the heart with the arrow of conviction. Indeed we may say that the whole process of divine education of a soul, conducted through many channels of providences, has for its end mainly this--to convince His wandering children that to be against Him, against their Help, is their destruction.

But, perhaps, the strangest of all is the attitude which we often take up of resenting the love that would reveal our ruin. It is stupid of the ox to kick against its driver's goad; but that is wise in comparison with the action of the man who is angry with God because He warns that departure from Him is ruin. Many of us treat Christianity as if it had made the mischief which it reveals, and would fain mend; and we all need to be reminded that it is cruel kindness to conceal unpleasant truths, and that the Gospel is no more to be blamed for the destruction which it declares than is the signalman with his red flag responsible for the broken-down viaduct to which the train is rushing that he tries to save.

**II. The loving appeal to conscience as to the cause.**

Israel's destruction arose from the fact of Israel having turned against God, its Help. Sin is suicide. God is our Help, and only Help. His will is love and blessing. His only relation to our sin is to hate it, and fight against it. In conflict of love with lovelessness one of His chiefest weapons is to drive home to our consciousness the conviction of our sin. When He is driven to punish, it is our wrongdoing that forces Him to what Isaiah calls, His strange act. The Heavenly Father is impelled by His love not to spare the rod, lest the sparing spoil the child. An earthly father suffers more punishment than he inflicts upon the little rebel whom, unwillingly and with tears, he may chastise; and God's love is more tender, as it is more wise, than that of the fathers of our flesh who corrected us. He doth not willingly afflict nor is soon angry; and of all the mercies which He bestows upon us, none is more laden with His love than the discipline by which He would make us know, through our painful experience, that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord, and that His fear is not in us. In its essence and depth, separation from God is death to the creature that wrenches itself away from the source of life; and all the weariness and pains of a godless life are, if we take them as He meant them, the very angels of His presence.

Just as the sole reason for our sorrows lies in our wrongdoing, the sole cause of our wrongdoing is in ourselves. It is because Israel is against Me that Israel's destruction rushes down upon it. It could have defended its hankering after Assyria and idols, by wise talk about political exigencies and the wisdom of trying to turn possibly powerful enemies into powerful allies, and the folly of a little nation, on a narrow strip of territory between the desert and the sea, fancying itself able to sustain itself uncrushed between the upper millstone of Assyria on the north, and the under one, Egypt, on the south. But circumstances are never the cause, though they may afford the excuse of rebellion against our Helper, God; and all the modern talk about environments and the like, is merely a cloak cast round, but too scanty to conceal the ugly fact of the alienated will. All the excuses for sin, which either modern scientific jargon about laws, or hyper-Calvinistic talk about divine decrees, alleges, are alike shattered against the plain fact of conscience, which proclaims to every evil-doer, Thou art the man! We shall get no further and no deeper than the truth of our text: It is thy destruction that thou art against Me.

The pleading God has from the beginning spoken words as tender as they are stern, and as stern as they are tender. His voice to the sons of men has from of old asked the unanswerable question, Why should ye be stricken any more? and has answered it, so far as answer is possible, by the fact, which is as mysterious as it is undeniable, Ye will revolt more and more. God calls upon man to judge between Him and His vineyard, and asks, What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done unto it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? The fault lay not in the vine-dresser, but in some evil influence that had found its way into the life and sap of the vine, and bore fruits in an unnatural product, which could not have been traced to the vine-dresser's action. So God stands, as with clean hands, declaring that He is pure from the blood of all men; that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; and His word to the men on whom falls the whole weight of His destroying power is, Thou hast procured this unto thyself.

**III. The loving forbearance which still offers restoration.**

He still claims to be Israel's Help. Separation from Him has all but destroyed the rebellious; but it has not in the smallest degree affected the fulness of His power, nor the fervency of His desire to help. However earth may be shaken by storms, or swathed in mist that darkens all things and shuts out heaven, the sun is still in its tabernacle and pouring down its rays through the cloudless blue that is above the enfolding cloud. Our text has wrapped up in it the broad gospel that all our self-inflicted destruction may be arrested, and all the evil which brought it about swept away. God is ready to prove Himself our true and only Helper in that, as our prophet says, He will ransom us from the power of the grave; and, even when death has laid its cold hand upon us, will redeem us from it, and destroy the destruction which had fixed its talons in us. All the guilt is ours; all the help is His; His work is to conquer and cast out our sins, to heal our sicknesses, to soothe our sorrows. And He has Himself vindicated His great name of our Help when He has revealed Himself as the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.