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

**2 SAMUEL-019. THE ROYAL JUBILEE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. 4. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain."*

*2 Samuel 23:3,4*

One of the Psalms ascribed to David sounds like the resolves of a new monarch on his accession. In it the Psalmist draws the ideal of a king, and says such things as, I will behave myself wisely, in a perfect way. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I hate the work of them that turn aside. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. That psalm we may regard as the first words of the king when, after long, weary years, the promise of Samuel's anointing was fulfilled, and he sat on the throne.

My text comes from what purports to be the last words of the same king.

He looks back, and again the ideal of a monarch rises before him. The psalm, for it is a psalm, though it is not in the Psalter, is compressed to the verge of obscurity; and there may be many questions raised about its translation and its bearing. These do not need to occupy us now, but the words which I have selected for my text may, perhaps, best be represented to an English reader in some such sentence as this--If (or when) one rules over men justly, ruling in the fear of God, then it shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds. With such a monarch all the interests of his people will prosper. His reign will be like the radiant dawn of a cloudless day, and his land like the spring pastures when the fresh, green grass is wooed out of the baked earth by the combined influence of rain and sunshine. David's little kingdom was surrounded by giant empires, in which brute force, wielded by despotic will, ground men down, or squandered their lives recklessly. But the King of Israel had learned, partly by the experience of his own reign, and partly by divine inspiration, that such rulers are not true types of a monarch after God's own heart. This ideal king is neither a warrior nor a despot. Two qualities mark him, Justice and Godliness. Pharaoh and his like, oppressors, were as the lightning which blasts and scorches. The true king was to be as the sunshine that vitalises and gladdens. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth.

We do not need to ask the question here, though it might be very relevant on another occasion, whether this portraiture is a mere ideal, floating in vacuo, or whether it is a direct prophecy of that expected Messianic king who was to realise the divine ideal of sovereignty. At all events we know that, in its highest and deepest significance, the picture of my text has lived and breathed human breath, in Jesus Christ, who both in His character and in His influence on the world, fulfilled the ideal that floated before the eyes of the aged king.

I do not need to follow the course of thought in this psalm any farther. You will have anticipated my motive for selecting this text now. It seems to me to gather up, in vivid and picturesque form, the thoughts and feelings which to-day are thrilling through an Empire, to which the most extended dominion of these warrior kings of old was but a speck. On such an occasion as this I need not make any apology, I am sure, for diverging from the ordinary topics of pulpit address, and associating ourselves with the many millions who to-day are giving thanks for Queen Victoria.

My text suggests two lines along which the course of our thoughts may run. The one is the personal character of this ideal monarch; the other is its effects on his subjects.

**I.** Now, with regard to the former, the pulpit is, in my judgment, not the place either for the discussion of current events or the pronouncing of personal eulogiums. But I shall not be wandering beyond my legitimate province, if I venture to try to gather into a few words the reasons, in the character and public life of our Queen, for the thankfulness of this day. Our text brings out, as I have said, two great qualities as those on which a throne is to be established, Justice and Godliness. Now, the ancient type of monarch was the fountain of justice, in a very direct sense; inasmuch as it was his office, not only to pronounce sentence on criminals, but to give decisions on disputed questions of right. These functions have long ceased to be exercised by our monarchs, but there is still room for both of those qualities--the Justice which holds an even balance between parties and strifes, the Righteousness which has supreme regard to the primary duties that press alike upon prince and pauper, and the Godliness which, as I believe, is the root from which all righteousness, as between man and man, and as between prince and subject, must ever flow. Morality is the garb of religion; religion is the root of morality. He, and only he, will hold an even balance and discharge his obligations to man, whose life is rooted in, and his acts under the continual influence of, the fear of God which has in it no torment, but is the parent of all things good.

We shall not be flatterers if we thankfully recognise in our Sovereign Lady the presence of both these qualities. I have spoken of the first inaugural words of the King of Israel, and the resolutions that he made. It is recorded that when, to the child of eleven years of age, the announcement was made that she stood near in the line of succession to the throne, the tremulous young lips answered, It is a great responsibility; but I will be good. And all round the world to-day her subjects attest that the aged monarch has kept the little maiden's vow. Contrast that life with the lives of the other women who have sat on the throne of England. Think of the brilliant Queen, whose glories our greatest poets were not ashamed to sing, with the Tudor masterfulness in her, and not a little of the Tudor grossness and passion, and remember the blots that stained her glories. Think of her sister, the morbidly melancholy tool of priests, who goes down the ages branded with an epithet only too sadly earned. Think of another woman that ruled over England in name, the weak instrument of base intrigues. And then turn to this life which we are looking upon to-day. Think of the nameless scandals, the hideous immorality of the reigns that preceded hers, and you will not wonder that every decent man and every modest woman was thankful that, with the young girl, there came a breath of purer air into the foul atmosphere. I am old enough to remember hearing, as a boy, the talk of my elders as to the probabilities of insurrection if, instead of our Queen, there had come to the throne the brother of her two predecessors. The hopes of those early days have been more than fulfilled.

It is not for us to determine the religious character of others, and that is too sacred a region for us to enter; but this we may say, that in all these sixty years of diversified trial, there has been no act known to us outsiders inconsistent with the highest motive, the fear of the Lord; and some of us who have worshipped in the humble Highland church where she has bowed have felt that on the throne of Britain sat a Christian.

Nor need we forget how, from that root of fear of God, there has come that wondrous patience and faithfulness to duty, the form of Justice which is possible for a constitutional monarch. We have little notion of how pressing and numerous and continual the royal duties must necessarily be. They have been discharged, even when the blow that struck all sunshine out of life left an irrepressible shrinking from pageantry and pomp. Joys come; joys go. Duties abide, and they have been done.

Nor can we forget, either, how the very difficult position of a constitutional monarch, with the semblance of power and the reality of narrow restrictions, has been filled. Our Sovereign has never set herself against the will of the people, expressed by its legitimate representatives, even when that will may have imposed upon her the sanction of changes which she did not approve. And that is much to say. We have seen young despots whose self-will has threatened to wreck a nation's prosperity.

Nor can we forget how all the immense influence of position and personality has been thrown on the side of purity and righteousness. Even we outsiders know how, more than once or twice, she has steadfastly set her face against the admission to her presence of men and women of evil repute, and has in effect repeated David's proclamation against vice and immorality at his accession: He that worketh wickedness shall not dwell within my house.

Nor must we forget, either, the simplicity, the beauty, the tenderness of her wedded and family life, her love of rural quiet, and of wholesome communion with Nature, and her eagerness to take her people into her confidence, as set forth in the book which, whatever its literary merits, speaks of her earnest appreciation of Nature and her wish for the sympathy of her subjects.

Then came the bolt from the blue, that sudden crash that wrecked the happiness of a life. Many of us, I have no doubt, remember that dreary December Sunday morning when, while the nation was standing in expectation of another calamity from across the Atlantic, there flashed through the land the news of the Prince's death; thrilling all hearts, and bringing all nearer to her, the lonely widow, than they had ever been in her days of radiant happiness. How pathetically, silently, nobly, devoutly, that sorrow has been borne, it is not for us to speak. She has become one of the great company of sad and lonely hearts, and in her sadness has shown an eager desire to send messages of sympathy to all whom she could reach, who were in like darkness and sorrow.

Brethren, I have ventured to diverge so far from the ordinary run of pulpit ministrations because I feel that to-day all of us, whatever may be our political or ecclesiastical relationships and proclivities, are one in thanking God for the monarch whose life has been without a stain, and her reign without a blot.

**II.** Now let me say a word as to the other line of thought which my text suggests, the effect of such a reign on the condition of the subject.

Now, of course, in the narrowly limited domain of that strange creation, a constitutional monarchy, there is far less opportunity for the Sovereign's direct influence on the Subject than there was in the ancient kingdoms of which David was thinking in his psalm. The marvellous progress of Britain during these sixty years is due, not to our Sovereign, but to a multitude of strenuous workers and earnest thinkers in a hundred different departments, as well as to the evolution of the gifts that come down to us from our ancient inheritance of freedom. But we shall much mistake if, for that reason, we set aside the monarch's character and influence as of no account in the progress

A supposition, which is a violent one, may be made which will set this matter in clearer light. Suppose that during these sixty years we had had a king on the throne of England like some of the kings we have had. The sentiment of loyalty is not now of such a character as that it will survive a vicious sovereign. If we had had such a monarch as I have hinted at, the loyalty of the good would for all these years have been suffering a severe strain, and the forces that make for evil would have been disastrously strengthened. Dangers escaped are unnoticed, but one twelvemonth of the reign of a profligate would shake the foundations of the monarchy, and would open the floodgates of vice; and we should then know how much the nation owed to the Queen whose life was pure, and who cast all her influence on the side of things that are lovely and of good report.

Take another supposition. Suppose that during these years of wonderful transition, when the whole aspect of English politics and society has been transformed, we had had a king like George III., who set his opinion against the nation's will constitutionally expressed. Then no man knows with what storm and tumult, with what strife and injury, the inevitable transition would have been effected. Be sure of this, that the wise self-effacement of our Sovereign during these critical years of change is largely the reason why they have been years of peace, in which the new has mingled itself with the old without revolution or disturbance. It is due to her in a very large degree that

Freedom broadens slowly down

From precedent to precedent.

I need not dilate on the changed Britain that she looks out upon and rules to-day. I need not speak--there will be many voices to do that, in not altogether agreeable notes, for there will be a dash of too much self-complacency in them--about progress in material wealth, colonial expansion, the increase of education, the gentler manners, the new life that has been breathed over art and literature, the achievements in science and philosophy, the drawing together of classes, the bridging over of the great gulf between rich and poor by some incipient and tentative attempts at sympathy and brotherhood.

Nor need I dwell upon the ecclesiastical signs of the times, in which, mingled as they are, there is at least this one great good, that never since the early days have so large a proportion of Christian men been seeking after the things that make for peace, and realising the oneness of all believers who hold the Headship of Christ.

All this review falls more properly into other hands than mine. Only I would put in a caution--do not let us mingle self-conceit with our congratulations; and, above all, do not let us rest and be thankful. There is much to be done yet. Listening ears can catch on every side vague sounds that tell of unrest and of the stirrings into wakefulness of

The spirit of the years to come,

Yearning to mix itself with life.

I seem to hear all around me the rushing in the dark of a mighty current that is bearing down upon us. Great social questions are rapidly coming to the front--the questions of distribution of wealth, abolition of privilege, the relations of labour and capital, and many others are clamant to be dealt with at least, if not solved. There Is much to be done before Jesus Christ is throned as King of England. War has to be frowned down; the brotherhood of man has to be realised, temperance has to be much more largely practised than it is.

I need not go over the catalogue of desiderata, of agenda--things that have to be done--in the near future. Only this I would say--Christian men and women are the last people who should be ready to rest and be thankful, for the principles of the Gospel that we profess, which have never been applied to the life of nations as they ought to be, will solve the questions which make the despair of so many in this generation. We shall best express our thankfulness for these past sixty years by each of us taking our part in the great movement which, in the inevitable drift of things to democracy, is going to cast the kingdom old into another mould, and which will, I pray, make our people more of what John Milton long ago called them, God's Englishmen. We have taught the nations many things. Our Parliament is called the Mother of Parliaments. Ours is

The land where, girt with friends or foes,

A man may say the thing he will.

It has taught the nations a tempered freedom, and that a monarchy may be a true republic. May we rise to the height of our privileges and responsibilities, and teach our subject peoples, not only mechanics, science, law, free trade, but a loftier morality, and the name of Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice!

We, members of the free Churches of England, come seldom under the notice of royalty, and have little acquaintance with courts, but we yield to none in our recognition of the virtues and in our sympathy with the sorrows of the Sovereign Lady, the good woman, who rules these lands, and we all heartily thank God for her to-day, and pray that for long years still to come the familiar letters V.R. may stand, as they have stood to two generations, as the symbol of womanly purity and of the faithful discharge of queenly duty.

Sermon preached on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.