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

**DEUTERONOMY-012. AT THE BUSH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush."*

*Deuteronomy 33:16*

I Think this is the only reference in the Old Testament to that great vision which underlay Moses call and Israel's deliverance. It occurs in what is called the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death, although modern opinion tends to decide that this hymn is indeed much more recent than the days of Moses. There seems a peculiar appropriateness in this reference being put into the mouth of the ancient Lawgiver, for to him even Sinai, with all its glories, cannot have been so impressive and so formative of his character as was the vision granted to him when solitary in the wilderness. It is to be noticed that the characteristic by which God is designated here never occurs elsewhere than in this one place. It is intended to intensify the conception of the greatness, and preciousness, and all-sufficiency of that goodwill. If it is that of Him that dwelt in the bush, it is sure to be all that a man can need. I need not remind you that the words occur in the blessing pronounced on Joseph--that is, the two tribes which represented Joseph--in which all the greatest material gifts that could be desired by a pastoral people are first called down upon them, and then the ground of all these is laid in the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush. The blessing--let it come on the head of Joseph.

So then here, first, is a great thought as to what for us all is the blessing of blessings--God's goodwill. Goodwill-the word, perhaps, might bear a little stronger rendering. Goodwill is somewhat tepid. A man may have a good enough will, and yet no very strong emotion of favour or delight, and may do nothing to carry his goodwill into action. But the word that is employed here, and is a common enough one in Scripture, always carries with it a certain intensity and warmth of feeling. It is more than goodwill; it is more than favour; perhaps delight would be nearer the meaning. It implies, too, not only the inward sentiment of complacency, but also the active purpose of action in conformity with it, on God's part. Now it needs few words to show that these two things, which are inseparable, do make the blessing of blessings for every one of us--the delight, the complacency, of God in us, and the active purpose of good in God for us. These are the things that will make a man happy wherever he is.

If I might dwell for a moment upon other scriptural passages, I would just recall to you, as bringing up very strongly and beautifully the all-sufficiency and the blessed effects of having this delight and loving purpose directed towards us like a sunbeam, the various great things that a chorus of psalmists say that it will do for a man. Here is one of their triumphant utterances: Thou wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield. That crystal battlement, if I may so vary the figure, is round a man, keeping far away from him all manner of real evil, and filling his quiet heart as he stands erect behind the rampart, with the sense of absolute security. That is one of the blessings that God's favour or goodwill will secure for us. Again, we read: By Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. He that knows himself to be the object of the divine delight, and who by faith knows himself to be the object of the divine activity in protection, stands firm, and his purposes will be carried through, because they will be purposes in accordance with the divine mind, and nothing has power to shake him. So he that grasps the hand of God can say, not because of his grasp, but because of the Hand that he holds, The Lord is at my right hand; I shall not be greatly moved. By Thy favour Thou hast made our mountain to stand strong. And again, in another analogous but yet diversified representation, we read: In Thee shall we rejoice all the day, and in Thy favour shall our horn be exalted. That is the emblem, not only of victory, but of joyful confidence, and so he who knows himself to have God for his friend and his helper, can go through the world keeping a sunny face, whatever the clouds may be, erect and secure, light of heart and buoyant, holding up his chin above the stormiest waters, and breasting all difficulties and dangers with a confidence far away from presumption, because it is the consequence of the realisation of God's presence. So the goodwill of God is the chiefest good.

Now, if we turn to the remarkable designation of the divine nature which is here, consider what rivers of strength and of blessedness flow out of the thought that for each of us the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush may be our possession.

What does that pregnant designation of God say? That was a strange shrine for God, that poor, ragged, dry desert bush, with apparently no sap in its gray stem, prickly with thorns, with no beauty that we should desire it, fragile and insignificant, yet it was God's house. Not in the cedars of Lebanon, not in the great monarchs of the forest, but in the forlorn child of the desert did He abide. The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush may dwell in you and me. Never mind how small, never mind how sapless, never mind how lightly esteemed among men, never mind though we make a very poor show by the side of the oaks of Bashan or the cedars of Lebanon. It is all right; the Fire does not dwell in them. Unto this man will I look, and with him will I dwell, who is of a humble and a contrite heart, and who trembleth at My word. Let no sense of poverty, weakness, unworthiness, ever draw the faintest film of fear across our confidence, for even with us He will sojourn. For it is the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush that we evoke for ours.

Again, what more does that name say? He that dwelt in the bush filled it with fire, and it burned and was not consumed. Now there is good ground to object to the ordinary interpretation, as if the burning of the bush which yet remains unconsumed was meant to symbolise Israel, or, in the New Testament application, the Church which, notwithstanding all persecution, still remains undestroyed. Our brethren of the Presbyterian churches have taken the Latin form of the words in the context for their motto--Nec Tamen Consumebatur. But I venture to think that that is a mistake; and that what is meant by the symbol is just what is expressed by the verbal revelation which accompanied it, and that was this: I AM THAT I AM. The fire that did not burn out is the emblem of the divine nature which does not tend to death because it lives, nor to exhaustion because it energises, nor to emptiness because it bestows, but after all times is the same; lives by its own energy and is independent. I am that I have become,--that is what men have to say. I am that I once was not, and again once shall not be, is what men have to say. I am that I am is God's name. And this eternal, ever-living, self-sufficing, absolute, independent, unwearied, inexhaustible God is the God whose favour is as inexhaustible as Himself, and eternal as His own being. Therefore the sons of men shall put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings, and, if they have the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush, will be able to say, Because Thou livest we shall live also.

What more does the name say? He that dwelt in the bush dwelt there in order to deliver; and, dwelling there, declared I have seen the affliction of My people, and am come down to deliver them. So, then, if the goodwill of that eternal, delivering God is with us, we, too, may feel that our trivial troubles and our heavy burdens, all the needs of our prisoned wills and captive souls, are known to Him, and that we shall have deliverance from them by Him. Brethren, in that name, with its historical associations, with its deep revelations of the divine nature, with its large promises of the divine sympathy and help, there lie surely abundant strengths and consolations for us all. The goodwill, the delight, of God, and the active help of God, may be ours, and if these be ours we shall be blessed and strong.

Do not let us forget the place in this blessing on the head of Joseph which my text holds. It is preceded by an invoking of the precious things of Heaven, and the precious fruits brought forth by the sun... of the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills, and the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof. They are all heaped together in one great mass for the beloved Joseph. And then, like the golden spire that tops some of those campaniles in Italian cities, and completes their beauty, above them all there is set, as the shining apex of all, the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush. That is more precious than all other precious things; set last because it is to be sought first; set last as in building some great structure the top stone is put on last of all; set last because it gathers all others into itself, secures that all others shall be ours in the measure in which we need them, and arms us against all possibilities of evil. So the blessing of blessings is the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.

In my text this is an invocation only; but we can go further than that. You and I can make sure that we have it, if we will. How to secure it? One of the texts which I have already quoted helps us a little way along t he road in answer to that question, for it says, Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous. With favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield. But it is of little use to tell me that if I am righteous God will bless me, and compass me with favour. If you will tell me how to become righteous, you will do me more good. And we have been told how to be righteous--If a man keep My commandments My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him. If we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ, and we can all do that if we like, by faith that trusts Him, and by love, the child of faith, that obeys Him, and grows daily more like Him--then, without a doubt, that delight of God in us, and that active purpose of good in God's mind towards us, will assuredly be ours; and on no other terms.

So, dear brethren, the upshot of my homily is just this--Men may strive and scheme, and wear their finger-nails down to the quick, to get some lesser good, and fail after all. The greatest good is certainly ours by that easy road which, however hard it may be otherwise, is made easy because it is so certain to bring us to what we want. Holiness is the condition of God's delight in us, and a genuine faith in Christ, and the love which faith evokes, are the conditions. So it is a very simple matter You never can be sure of getting the lower good You can be quite sure of getting the highest. You never can be certain that the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof will be yours, or that if they were, they would be so very precious; but you can be quite sure that the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush may lie like light upon your hearts, and be strength to your limbs.

And so I commend to you the words of the Apostle, Wherefore we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him. To minister to God's delight is the highest glory of man. To have the favour of Him that dwelt in the bush resting upon us is the highest blessing for man. He will say Well done! good and faithful servant. The Lord taketh pleasure--wonderful as it sounds--in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy, and that, hoping in His mercy, live as He would have them live.