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

**HOSEA-007. THE DEW AND THE PLANTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"5. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. 6. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree ..."*

*Hosea 14:5, 6*

Like his brethren, Hosea was a poet as well as a prophet. His little prophecy is full of similes and illustrations drawn from natural objects; scarcely any of them from cities or from the ways of men; almost all of them from Nature, as seen in the open country, which he evidently loved, and where he had looked upon things with a clear and meditative eye. This whole chapter is full of emblems drawn from the vegetable world. The lily, the cedar, the olive, are in my text. And there follow, in the subsequent verses, the corn, and the vine, and the green fir-tree.

The words which I have read, no doubt originally had simply a reference to the numerical increase of the people and their restoration to their land, but they may be taken by us quite fairly as having a very much deeper and more blessed reference than that. For they describe the uniform condition of all spiritual life and growth, I will be as the dew unto Israel; and then they set forth some of the manifold aspects of that growth, and the consequences of receiving that heavenly dew, under the various metaphors to which I have referred. It is in that higher signification that I wish to look at them now.

**I. The first thought that comes out of the words is that for all life and growth of the spirit there must be a bedewing from God.**

I will be as the dew unto Israel. Now, scholars tell us that the kind of moisture that is meant in these words is not what we call dew, of which, as a matter of fact, there falls, in Palestine, little or none at the season of the year referred to in my text, but that the word really means the heavy night-clouds that come upon the wings of the south-west wind, to diffuse moisture and freshness over the parched plains, in the very height and fierceness of summer. The metaphor of my text becomes more beautiful and striking, if we note that, in the previous chapter, where the Prophet was in his threatening mood, he predicts that an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness--the burning sirocco, with death upon its wings--and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up. We have then to imagine the land gaping and parched, the hot air having, as with invisible tongue of flame, licked streams and pools dry, and having shrunken fountains and springs. Then, all at once there comes down upon the baking ground and on the faded, drooping flowers that lie languid and prostrate on the ground in the darkness, borne on the wings of the wind, from the depths of the great unfathomed sea, an unseen moisture. You cannot call it rain, so gently does it diffuse itself; it is liker a mist, but it brings life and freshness, and everything is changed. The dew, or the night mist, as it might more properly be rendered, was evidently a good deal in Hosea's mind; you may remember that he uses the image again in a remarkably different aspect, where he speaks of men's goodness as being like a morning cloud, and the early dew that passes away.

The natural object which yields the emblem was all inadequate to set forth the divine gift which is compared to it, because as soon as the sun has risen, with burning heat, it scatters the beneficent clouds, and the sunbeams like swords threaten to slay the tender green shoots. But this mist from God that comes down to water the earth is never dried up. It is not transient. It may be ours, and live in our hearts. Dear brethren, the prose of this sweet old promise is If I depart, I will send Him unto you. If we are Christian people, we have the perpetual dew of that divine Spirit, which falls on our leaves and penetrates to our roots, and communicates life, freshness, and power, and makes growth possible--more than possible, certain--for us. I--Myself through My Son, and in My Spirit--I will be--an unconditional assurance--as the dew unto Israel.

Yes! That promise is in its depth and fulness applicable only to the Christian Israel, and it remains true to-day and for ever. Do we see it fulfilled? One looks round upon our congregations, and into one's own heart, and we behold the parable of Gideon's fleece acted over again--some places soaked with the refreshing moisture, and some as hard as a rock and as dry as tinder and ready to catch fire from any spark from the devil's forge and be consumed in the everlasting burnings some day. It will do us good to ask ourselves why it is that, with a promise like this for every Christian soul to build upon, there are so few Christian souls that have anything like realised its fulness and its depth. Let us be quite sure of this--God has nothing to do with the failure of His promise, and let us take all the blame to ourselves.

I will be as the dew unto Israel. Who was Israel? The man that wrestled all night in prayer with God, and took hold of the angel and prevailed and wept and made supplication to Him. So Hosea tells us; and as he says in the passage where he describes the Angel's wrestling with Jacob at Peniel, there He spake with us--when He spake, He spake with him who first bore the name. Be you Israel, and God will surely be your dew; and life and growth will be possible. That is the first lesson of this great promise.

**II. The second is, that a soul thus bedewed by God will spring into purity and beauty.**

We go back to Hosea's vegetable metaphors. He shall grow as the lily is his first promise. If I were addressing a congregation of botanists, I should have something to say about what kind of a plant is meant, but that is quite beside the mark for my present purpose. It is sufficient to notice that in this metaphor the emphasis is laid upon the two attributes which I have named--beauty and purity. The figure teaches us that ugly Christianity is not Christ's Christianity. Some of us older people remember that it used to be a favourite phrase to describe unattractive saints that they had grace grafted on a crab stick. There are a great many Christian people whom one would compare to any other plant rather than a lily. Thorns and thistles and briers are a good deal more like what some of them appear to the world. But we are bound, if we are Christian people, by our obligations to God, and by our obligations to men, to try to make Christianity look as beautiful in people's eyes as we can. That is what Paul said, Adorn the teaching; make it look well, inasmuch as it has made you look attractive to men's eyes. Men have a fairly accurate notion of beauty and goodness, whether they have any goodness or any beauty in their own characters or not. Do you remember the words: Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, whatsoever things are venerable ... if there be any praise--from men--think on these things? If we do not keep that as the guiding star of our lives, then we have failed in one very distinct duty of Christian people--namely, to grow more like a lily, and to be graceful in the lowest sense of that word, as well as grace full in the highest sense of it. We shall not be so in the lower, unless we are so in the higher. It may be a very modest kind of beauty, very humble, and not at all like the flaring reds and yellows of the gorgeous flowers that the world admires. These are often like a great sunflower, with a disc as big as a cheese. But the Christian beauty will be modest and unobtrusive and shy, like the violet half buried in the hedge-bank, and unnoticed by careless eyes, accustomed to see beauty only in gaudy, flaring blooms. But unless you, as a Christian, are in your character arrayed in the "beauty of holiness, and the holiness of beauty, you are not quite the Christian that Jesus Christ wants you to be; setting forth all the gracious and sweet and refining influences of the Gospel in your daily life and conduct. That is the second lesson of our text.

**III. The third is, that a God-bedewed soul that has been made fair and pure by communion with God, ought also to be strong.**

He "shall cast forth his roots like Lebanon." Now I take it that simile does not refer to the roots of that giant range that slope away down under the depths of the Mediterranean. That is a beautiful emblem, but it is not in line with the other images in the context. As these are all dependent on the promise of the dew, and represent different phases of the results of its fulfilment, it is natural to expect thus much uniformity in their variety, that they shall all be drawn from plant-life. If so, we must suppose a condensed metaphor here, and take "Lebanon" to mean the forest which another prophet calls "the glory of Lebanon." The characteristic tree in these, as we all know, was the cedar.

It is named in Hebrew by a word which is connected with that for "strength." It stands as the very type and emblem of stability and vigour. Think of its firm roots by which it is anchored deep in the soil. Think of the shelves of massive dark foliage. Think of its unchanged steadfastness in storm. Think of its towering height; and thus arriving at the meaning of the emblem, let us translate it into practice in our own lives. "He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Beauty? Yes! Purity? Yes! And braided in with them, if I may so say, the strength which can say "No!" which can resist, which can persist, which can overcome; power drawn from communion with God. "Strength and beauty" should blend in the worshippers, as they do in the "sanctuary" in God Himself. There is nothing admirable in mere force; there is often something sickly and feeble, and therefore contemptible in mere beauty. Many of us will cultivate the complacent and the amiable sides of the Christian life, and be wanting in the manly "thews that throw the world," and can fight to the death. But we have to try and bring these two excellences of character together, and it needs an immense deal of grace and wisdom and imitation of Jesus Christ, and a close clasp of His hand, to enable us to do that. Speak we of strength? He is the type of strength. Of beauty? He is the perfection of beauty. And it is only as we keep close to Him that our lives will be all fair with the reflected loveliness of His, and strong with the communicated power of His grace--"strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." Brethren, if we are to set forth anything, in our daily lives, of this strength, remember that our lives must be rooted in, as well as bedewed by, God. Hosea's emblems, beautiful and instructive as they are, do not reach to the deep truth set forth in still holier and sweeter words; "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." The union of Christ and His people is closer than that between dew and plant. Our growth results from the communication of His own life to us. Therefore is the command stringent and obedience to it blessed, "Abide in Me, for apart from Me ye can do"--and are--"nothing." Let us remember that the loftier the top of the tree and the wider the spread of its shelves of dark foliage, if it is steadfastly to stand, unmoved by the loud winds when they call, the deeper must its roots strike into the firm earth. If your life is to be a fair temple-palace worthy of God's dwelling in, if it is to be impregnable to assault, there must be quite as much masonry underground as above, as is the case in great old buildings and palaces. And such a life must be a life "hid with Christ in God," then it will be strong. When we strike our roots deep into Him, our branch also shall not wither, and our leaf shall be green, and all that we do shall prosper. The wicked are not so. They are like chaff--rootless, fruitless, lifeless, which the wind driveth away.

**IV. Lastly, the God-bedewed soul, beautiful, pure, strong, will bear fruit.**

That is the last lesson from these metaphors. "His beauty shall be as the olive-tree." Anybody that has ever seen a grove of olives knows that their beauty is not such as strikes the eye. If it was not for the blue sky overhead, that rays down glorifying light, they would not be much to look at or talk about. The tree has a gnarled, grotesque trunk which divides into insignificant branches, bearing leaves mean in shape, harsh in texture, with a silvery underside. It gives but a quivering shade and has no massiveness, nor symmetry. Ay! but there are olives on the branches. And so the beauty of the humble tree is in what it grows for man's good. After all, it is the outcome in fruitfulness which is the main thing about us. God's meaning, in all His gifts of dew, and beauty, and purity, and strength, is that we should be of some use in the world.

The olive is crushed into oil, and the oil is used for smoothing and suppling joints and flesh, for nourishing and sustaining the body as food, for illuminating darkness as oil in the lamp. And these three things are the three things for which we Christian people have received all our dew, and all our beauty, and all our strength--that we may give other people light, that we may be the means of conveying to other people nourishment, that we may move gently in the world as lubricating, sweetening, soothing influences, and not irritating and provoking, and leading to strife and alienation. The question after all is, Does anybody gather fruit off us, and would anybody call us trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified? That is lesson four from this text. May we all open our hearts for the dew from heaven, and then use it to produce in ourselves beauty, purity, strength, and fruitfulness!