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

**ISAIAH-003. WHAT SIN DOES TO MEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"30.* *Ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. 31. And the strong shall be as tow, and His work as a spark; and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."*

*Isaiah 1:30-31*

The original reference of these words is to the threatened retribution for national idolatry, of which oaks and gardens were both seats. The nation was, as it were, dried up and made inflammable; the idol was as the spark or the occasion for destruction. But a wider application, which comes home to us all, is to the fatal results of sin. These need to be very plainly stated, because of the deceitfulness of sin, which goes on slaying men by thousands in silence.

That grim wolf with privy paw

Daily devours apace.

**I. Sin withers.**

We see the picture of a blasted tree in the woods, while all around are in full leaf, with tiny leaves half developed and all brown at the edges. The prophet draws another picture, that of a garden not irrigated, and therefore, in the burning East, given over to barrenness.

Sin makes men fruitless and withered.

It involves separation from God, the source of all fruitfulness (Ps. 1.).

Think of how many pure desires and innocent susceptibilities die out of a sinful soul. Think of how many capacities for good disappear. Think of how dry and seared the heart becomes. Think of how conscience is stifled.

All sin--any sin--does this.

Not only gross, open transgressions, but any piece of godless living will do it.

Whatever a man does against his conscience--neglect of duty, habitual unveracity, idleness--in a word, his besetting sin withers him up.

And all the while the evil thing that is drawing his life-blood is growing like a poisonous, blotched fungus in a wine-cask.

**II. Sin makes men inflammable.**

As tow or tinder.

A subsidiary reference may be intended to the sinful man as easily catching fire at temptation. But the main thought is that sin makes a man ready for destruction, whose end is to be burned.

The materials for retribution are laid up in a man's nature by wrong-doing. The conspirators store the dynamite in a dark cellar. Conscience and memory are charged with explosives.

If tendencies, habits, and desires become tyrannous by long indulgence and cannot be indulged, what a fierce fire would rage then!

We have only to suppose a man made to know what is the real moral character of his actions, and to be unable to give them up, to have hell.

All this is confirmed by occasional glimpses which men get of themselves. Our own characters are the true Medusa-head which turns a man into stone when he sees it.

What, then, are we really doing by our sins? Piling together fuel for burning.

**III. Sin burns up.**

Work as a spark. The evil deeds brought into contact with the doer work destruction. That is, if, in a future life or at any time, a man is brought face to face with his acts, then retribution begins. We shake off the burden of our actions by want of remembrance. But that power of ignoring the past may be broken down at any time. Suppose it happens that in another world it can no longer be exercised, what then?

Evil deeds are the occasion of the divine retribution. They are a spark. It is they who light the pyre, not God. The prophet here protests in God's name against the notion that He is to be blamed for punishing. Men are their own self-tormentors. The sinful man immolates himself. Like Isaac, he carries the wood and lays the pile for his own burning.

Christ severs the connection between us and our evil. He restores beauty and freshness to the blighted tree, planting it as by the river of water, so that it bringeth forth its fruit in its season, and its leaf also doth not wither.