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

**ISAIAH-022. THE GRASP THAT BRINGS PEACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; yea, let him make peace with Me."*

*Isaiah 27:5*

Lyrical emotion makes the prophet's language obscure by reason of its swift transitions from one mood of feeling to another. But the main drift here is discernible. God is guarding Israel, His vineyard, and before Him its foes are weak as thorns and briers, whose end is to be burned. With daring anthropomorphism, the prophet puts into God's mouth a longing for the enemies to measure their strength against His, a warrior's eagerness for the fight. But at once this martial tone gives place to the tender invitation of the text, and the infinite divine willingness to be reconciled to the enemy speaks wooingly and offers conditions of peace. All this has universal application to our relations to God.

**I. The Hostility.**

That our relations with God are strained, and that men are enemies of God, is often repelled as exaggeration, if not as directly false. And, no doubt, the Scripture representation has often been so handled as to become caricature rather than portraiture. Scripture does not deny the lingering presence in men of goodness, partial and defective, nor does it assert that conscious antagonism to God is active in godless men. But it does assert that God is not in all their thoughts, and that their wills are not subject to the law of God. And in such a case as man's relations to God, indifference and forgetfulness cannot but rest upon divergence of will and contrast of character. Why do men not like to retain God in their knowledge, but because they feel that the thought of Him would spoil the feast, like the skeleton in the banqueting chamber? Beneath the apparent indifference lie opposition of will, meeting God's Thou shalt with man's I will not; opposition of moral nature, impurity shrinking from perfect purity; opposition of affection, the warmth of human love being diverted to other objects than God.

**II. The entreating Love that is not turned aside by hostility.**

The antagonism is wholly on man's part.

True, man's opposition necessarily turns certain sides of the divine character to present a hostile front to him. Not only God's physical attributes, if we may so call them, but the moral attributes which guide the energies of these, namely, His holiness and His righteousness, and the acts of His sovereignty which flow from these, must be in opposition to the man who has set himself in opposition to God. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil. If it were not, He would not be God.

But still, God's love enfolds all men in its close and tender clasp. As the context says, in close connection with the threat to burn the briers and thorns, Fury is not in Me. Man's hostility does not rouse God's. He wars against the sin because He still loves the sinner. His love must come with a rod, but, at the same time, it comes with the spirit of meekness. It gives its enemy all that it can; but it cannot give all that it would.

He stoops to sue for our amity. It is the creditor who exhausts beseechings on His debtor, so much does He wish to agree with His adversary quickly. The tender pleading of the Apostle was but a faint echo of the marvellous condescension of God, when he, in God's stead, besought: Be ye reconciled to God.

**III. The grasp which ends alienation.**

The word for strength here means a stronghold or fortified place, which serves as an asylum or refuge. There may be some mingling of an allusion to the fugitive's taking hold of the horns of the altar, and so being safe from the vengeance of his pursuers. If we may take this double metaphor as implied in the text, it vividly illustrates the essence of the faith which brings us into peace with God. That faith is the flight of the soul to God, and, in another aspect, it is the clinging of the soul to Him. How much more these two metaphors tell of the real nature of faith than many a theological treatise! They speak of the urgency of the peril from which it seeks deliverance. A fugitive with the hot breath of the avenger of blood panting behind him, and almost feeling the spear-point in his back, would not let the grass grow under his feet. They speak of the energetic clutch of faith, as that of the man gripping the horns of the altar. They suggest that faith is something much more vital than intellectual assent or credence, namely, an act of the whole man realising his need and casting himself on God.

And they set in clear light what is the connection between faith and salvation. It is not the hand that grasps the altar that secures safety, but the altar itself. It is not the flight to the fortress, but the massive walls themselves, which keeps those who hunt after the fugitive at bay. It is not my faith, but the God on whom my faith fastens, that brings peace to my conscience.

**IV. The peace that this grasp brings.**

In Christ God has put away all His wrath, and turned Himself from the fierceness of His anger. And He was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. It is a one-sided warfare that men wage with Him, and when we abandon our opposition to Him, the war is ended. We might say that God, clasped by faith and trusted in and loved, is the asylum from God opposed and feared. His moral nature must be against evil, but faith unites us to Jesus, and, by union with Him, we receive the germ of a nature which has no affinity with evil, and which God wholly delights in and loves. To those who live by the life, and growingly bear the image of His Son, the divine Nature turns a face all bright and favouring, and His moral and physical attributes are all enlisted on their side. The fortress looks grim to outsiders gazing up at its strong walls and frowning battlements, but to dwellers within, these give security, and in its inmost centre is a garden, with flowers and a springing fountain, whither the noise of fighting never penetrates. We have but to cease to be against Him, and to grasp the facts of His love as revealed in the Cross of Christ, the sacrifice who taketh away the sin of the world, and we are at peace with God. Being at peace with Him, the discords of our natures warring against themselves are attuned into harmony, and we are at peace within. And when God and we are at one, and we are at one with ourselves, then all things will be on our side, and will work together for good. To such a man the ancient promise will be fulfilled: Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.