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

**ISAIAH-024. A CROWN OF PRIDE OR A CROWN OF GLORY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"3.* *The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet; 4. And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up. 5. In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people."*

*Isaiah 28:3-5*

The reference is probably to Samaria as a chief city of Israel. The image is suggested by the situation of Samaria, high on a hill-side, crowning the valley, and by the rich vegetation and bright flowers which makes it even now one of the few lovely scenes in Palestine; and by the luxurious riot and sensual excess that were always characteristic of the northern kingdom.

The destruction of Samaria and of the kingdom, then, is here prophesied--the garland will fade, the hail will batter all its drooping flowerets, and it shall be trodden under foot. Look at that withered wreath that gleamed yesterday on some fair head, to-day flung into the ashpit or kicked about the street. That is a modern rendering of the prophet's imagery. But the reference goes further than merely to the city: the whole state of the nation is expressed by the symbol, as doomed to quick decay, fading in itself, and further smitten down by divine judgments.

There is a contrasted picture, that of the residue of the people to whom there is an amaranthine crown, a festal diadem glorious and beautiful, which can never fade, even God Himself. To them who love Him He is an ornament, and His presence is the consecration of the true joyful feast. They who are crowned by Him are crowned, not for idle revelry, but for strenuous toil (sit in judgment) and for brave purpose (turn the battle to the gate,) and their coronation day is ever the day when earthly garlands are withered, whether it be the crises and convulsions of nations and institutions, or times of personal trial, or in the hour of death or in the day of judgment.

Expanding then these thoughts, we have--

**I. All godless joys are but fading chaplets.**

Of course the first application of such words is to purely sensuous delights.

Men who seek to make life a mere revel and banquet.

Nothing is so short-lived as gratification of appetite. It is not merely that each act lasts but for a moment, but also that past gratifications leave no sort of solace to the appetite behind them; whereas past acquirements or deeds of goodness are a perpetual joy as well as the foundation of the present. There is something essentially isolated in each act of sensuous delight. No man can by so willing recall the taste of eaten food, nor slake his thirst by remembrance of former draughts, or cool himself by thinking of frosty Caucasus. But each such gratification is done when it is done, and there is an end of its power to gratify.

Further, the power of enjoyment wanes, though the lust for it waxes. Hence each act has less and less power of satisfying.

One sees blase young men of twenty-five. It was a man of under thirty-five who wrote, Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither. It was a used-up roue that was represented as saying, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. It was of sensuous pleasures that poor Burns wrote,--

Like the snowfall in the river,

A moment white,--then melts for ever.

When a people is given over to such excess, late or soon the fate of Samaria comes upon them. Think of the French Revolution or of the fall of Rome, and learn that the prophet was announcing a law for all nations, in his fiery denunciation, and one which holds good to-day as ever.

But we may generalise more widely. Every godless life is essentially transitory; of course, all life is so in one view. But suppose two men, working side by side at the same occupation, passing through the same circumstances. So far as physical changes go, these men are the same. Both lose much. Both leave behind much. Both cease to be interested in much that was dear to them. Both die at last, and leave it all. Is there any difference? The transitoriness is the same, and the eternal consequences are eternal alike in both; and yet there is a very solemn sense in which the one man's life has utterly perished, and the other's abides. Suppose a man, educated to be a first-rate man of business, dies. Which of his trained faculties will he have scope for in that new order of things? Or a student, or a lawyer, or a statesman?

Oh, it is not our natural mortality that makes these thoughts so awful; but it is the thought that the man who is doing these things is immortal. The head which wears the fading wreath will live for ever. What will ye do in the end?

**II. Godly life brings unfading joys.**

Communion with God yields abiding joys. The law of change remains the same. The law of death remains the same. But the motives which direct and impel the godly man are beyond the reach of change.

The habits which he contracts are for heaven as well as for earth. The treasures which he amasses will always be his.

His life in its essence and his work are one in all worlds. What a grand continuity, then, knits into one a godly life whether it is lived on earth or in heaven!

Communion with God gives beauty and ornament to the whole character. It brings the true refining and perfecting of the soul. No doubt many Christian men, as we see them, are but poor specimens of this effect of godliness; still, it is an effect produced in proportion to the depth and continuity of their communion. We might dwell on the effect on Will, Affections, Understanding, produced by dwelling in God. It is simple fact that the highest conceivable type of beauty is only reached through communion with God.

Communion with God gives power as well as gladness. The life of abiding with God is also one of strenuous effort and real warfare. In the context it is promised that God will be for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate.

The luxurious life of self-indulgence ends, as all selfish life must do, in the vanishing of delights. The life of joy in God issues, as all true joy does, in power for work and in power for conflict.

God doth anoint thee with His odorous oil, to wrestle, not to reign.

**III. There will be a coronation day.**

In that day, the day when the crown of pride shall be trodden under foot, the people of God are crowned with the diadem of beauty which is God Himself. That twofold work of that one day suggests--

* The double aspect of trials and sorrows.
* The double aspect of death.
* The double aspect of final Judgment.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.

To be crowned or discrowned in that day is the alternative set before each of us. Which of the two do we choose?