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

**ISAIAH-039. MIRAGE OR LAKE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the glowing sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water."*

*Isaiah 35:6b-7*

What a picture is painted in these verses! The dreary wilderness stretches before us, monotonous, treeless, in some parts bearing a scanty vegetation which flourishes in early spring and dies before fierce summer heats, but for the most part utterly desolate, the sand blinding the eyes, the ground cracked and gaping as if athirst for the rain that will not fall; over it the tantalising mirage dancing in mockery, and amid the hot sand the yelp of the jackals. What does this dead land want? One thing alone--water. Could that be poured upon it, all would be changed; nothing else will do any good. And it comes. Suddenly it bursts from the sand, and streams bring life along the desert. It gathers into placid lakes, with their whispering reeds and nodding rushes, and the thick cool grass round their margins. The foul beasts that wandered through dry places seeking rest are drowned out. So full of blessed change will be the coming of the Lord, of which all this context speaks. Mark that this burst of waters is when the Lord shall come, and that it is the reason for the restoration of lost powers in men, and especially for a chorus of praise from dumb lips. This, then, is the central blessing. It is not merely a joyful transformation, but it is the reason for a yet more joyful transformation (chap. xliv. 3). Recall Christ's words to the Samaritan woman and in the Temple on the great day of the Feast.

Then this is pre-eminently a description of the work of Christ.

**I. Christ brings the Supernatural Communication of a New Life.**

We may fairly regard this metaphor as setting forth the very deepest characteristic of the gospel. Consider man's need, as typified in the image of the desert. Mark that the supply for that need must come from without; that coming from without, it must be lodged in the heart of the race; that the supernatural communication of a new life and power is the very essence of the work of Christ; that such a communication is the only thing adequate to produce these wondrous effects.

**II. This new life slakes men's thirst.**

The pangs and tortures of the waterless wilderness. The thirst of human souls; they long, whether they know it or not, for--

* Truth for Understanding.
* Love for Heart.
* Basis and Guidance for Will and Effort.
* Cleansing for Conscience.
* Adequate objects for their powers.

They need that all these should be in One.

The gnawing pain of our thirst is not a myth; it is the secret of man's restlessness. We are ever on the march, not only because change is the law of the world, nor only because effort and progress are the law for civilised men, but because, like caravans in the desert, we have to search for water.

In Christ it is slaked; all is found there.

**III. The Communication of this New Life turns Illusions into Realities.**

The mirage shall become a pool. Life without Christ is but a long illusion. Sin makes a mock of fools. How seldom are hopes fulfilled, and how still less frequently are they, when fulfilled, as good as we painted them! The prismatic splendours of the rain bow, which gleam before us and which we toil to catch, are but grey rain-drops when caught. Joys attract and, attained, have incompleteness and a tang of bitterness. The fish is never so heavy when landed on the sward as it felt when struggling on our hook. All is vanity--yes, if creatures and things temporal are pursued as our good. But nothing is vanity, if we have the life in us which Jesus comes to give. His Gospel gives solid, unmingled joys, sure promises which are greater when fulfilled than when longed for, certain hopes whose most brilliant colours are duller than those of the realities. The half has not been told of the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

* Sure Promises.
* A certain Hope.

**IV. This New Life gives Fruitfulness.**

It stimulates all our nature. A godless life is in a very tragic sense barren, and a wilderness. There is in it nothing really worth doing, nor anything that will last. Christ gives Power, Motive, Pattern, and makes a life of holy activity possible. The works done by men apart from Him are, if measured by the whole relations and capacities of the doers, unfruitful works, however they may seem laden with ruddy clusters. It is only lives into which that river of God which is full of water flows that bring forth fruit, and whose fruit remains. The desert irrigated becomes a garden of the Lord.

Note, too, how this river drowns out wild beasts. The true way of conquering evil is to turn the river into it. Cultivate, and weeds die. The expulsive power of a new affection is the most potent instrument for perfecting character.

What is the use of water if we do not drink? We may perish with thirst even on the river's bank. If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink.