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

**ISAIAH-046. HAVE YE NOT? HAST THOU NOT? by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Have ye not known, have ye not heard? hath it not been told yon from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?... Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard?"*

*Isaiah 40:21, 28*

The recurrence of the same form of interrogation in these two verses is remarkable. In the first case the plural is used, in the second the singular, and we may reasonably conclude that as Israel is addressed in the latter, the nations outside the sphere illumined by Revelation are appealed to in the former. The context of the two passages confirms this reference, for the witness of Creation and History is summoned in the former section, and that of God's inward dealings with trustful souls is brought out in the latter.

**I. What Nature and History tell men about God.**

Observe that emphatic told you; then the witness here appealed to is truly a Revelation, though a silent one. There is no speech nor language, yet their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.

The general idea of the divine nature, as revealed from the beginning and from the foundation of the earth, is that of Majesty transcending all comparison.

The contrast is drawn between Him and men, in the magnificent image of Him as throned above the circle of the earth, and so far above that all the busy tribes of men are as grasshoppers, their restless activity but aimless leaping, and the tumult of the peoples only as a meaningless chirping.

God's creative and sustaining power is further set forth by that great image of His stretching out the heavens as a curtain, and spreading them out as a tent to dwell in. As easily as travellers set up their tents when the day's march is done, did He stretch the great expanse above the low earth; and all its depths and spaces are, in comparison with Him, thin, transient, and as easily rolled up and put aside as the stuff that makes a nomad's home for a night. Nor are the two implied thoughts that the heavens are a veil screening Him from men even while they tell of Him to men, and that they are His lofty dwelling-place, to be left out of view.

But in verse 26 we have a more specific and grander exhibition of God's relation to the Universe. The stars, in number numberless, are conceived of as a great army drilled and directed by Him. And that metaphor, familiar to us as it is, and condensed into the divine title so frequent in this prophetic book, is pregnant with great truths.

It speaks of God as the Imperator, the Commander, exercising supreme authority by the word of His power, and of creation as obedient thereto. For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in the heavens. The Commander needs but to speak, and so mystic is the power of His uttered will, that effects on the material universe follow that altogether immaterial energy.

It speaks of the harmony and order of the whole Creation. By number and by name He sways and ranks them. All things work together. They are an ordered whole--a kosmos, not a chaos. Modern science is slowly establishing by experiment the truth which is enshrined in that old name, the Lord of hosts, that all things in the physical universe are a unity.

It speaks of the perfectness of God's knowledge of each item in the mighty whole. He calleth them all by name. Thereby are expressed authority, ownership, particular knowledge of, and relation to, each individual of the overwhelming aggregate. God knows all, because He knows each.

It speaks of the inexhaustible energy of His sustaining power, and the consequent strength of His creatures. Preservation is a continued creation. The prophet saw much deeper than the mechanical view of the creative act. To him God was, to use more modern language, immanent as well as transcendent. True, He sits above the circle of the earth, but as truly He is working on His creatures, and it is by His communicated strength that they are strong. If any being--star, or insect--were separated utterly from Him, it would crumble into nothingness.

But the appeal to Creation is singularly interrupted by an appeal to History. The prophet drops from the serene expanse of the silent yet eloquent heavens to the stormy scenes of changing dynasties and revolutions of earth's kingdoms. How calm the one, how tumultuous the other! How the one witnesses to Him by its apparently unchanging continuance! how the other witnesses by its swift mutations! In the one, He is revealed as Preserver; in the other, the most clear demonstration of His power is given in His destroying of rebel kingdoms. But in these acts by which ancient and firmly rooted dynasties are rooted up or withered as by the simoom, He reveals a side of His nature to which the calm heavens bore no witness. He is the moral Governor of the world, The history of the world is the judgment of the world, and when hoary iniquities are smitten to death, the Holy One is revealed as the righteous Judge. And the conjoint witness of creation and of history attests that none can be likened to Him.

**II. What Revelation tells Israel about God.**

It is noteworthy that in the section of which our first text is the centre, there is no mention of the divine Name, and even the well-known title, the Holy One of Israel, is truncated, so as to leave out reference to the people of Revelation; whereas in this section He is not only designated as God and Creator, but as Jehovah, the God who has made a covenant with Israel, and made known His will and to some extent His nature. The distinct climax in the divine Names itself implies a nobler relation to men, and a clearer revelation than was declared in the former part of this prophecy. It is the fitting preparation for the loftier and infinitely more tender and touching aspect of the divine nature which shines with lambent, inviting lustre within the sphere of Revelation.

The distinctive glory of the long process of God's self-manifestation to Israel is that, while it emphasises all that nature and history affirm of Him, it sets Him forth as restoring the weak, as well as sustaining the strong. The sad contrast between the untroubled and unwearied strength of the calm heavens and the soon-exhausted strength of struggling and often beaten men strikes the poet prophet's sensitive soul. He did not know, what modern astronomy teaches us, that change, convulsions, ruin, are not confined to earth, but that stars as well as men faint and fail, dwindle and die. The scriptural view of Nature is not that of the scientist, but that of the poet and of the devout man. It lies quite apart from the scientific attitude, and has as good a right to exist as it has. The contrast of heaven and earth is for the prophet the contrast of strength with weakness, of joyful harmony with moral disorder, of punctual, entire obedience with rebellion and the clash of multitudes of anarchic self-willed men.

But there is a sadder contrast still--namely, that between God and the wretched weaklings that men have made of themselves. He fainteth not, neither is weary. Strange anomaly that in His universe there should be the faint and them that have no might! The only explanation of such an exception to the order of Creation is that men have broken loose from Creation's dependence on God, and that therefore the inflow of sustaining strength has been checked. In other words, man's weakness comes from man's sin.

Hence to restore strength to those whose power has been drained away by sin is God's divinest work. It is more to restore than to sustain. It takes less energy to keep a weight stationary at a height than to roll it up again if it falls to the bottom. Since sin is the cause of our weakness, the first step to deliver from the weakness is to deliver from the sin. If we are ever to be restored, hearts, consciences, averted wills must be dealt with--and but One Hand can deal with these.

And not only does God outdo all His mightiest works in the work of restoring strength to the faint, but He crowns that restoration by making the restored weakling like Himself. He fainteth not, neither is weary. They, too, shall ran and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. In the long drawn out grind of monotonous marching along the common path of daily small duties and uneventful life, they shall not faint; in the rare occasional spurts, occurring in every man's experience, when extraordinary tax is laid on heart and limbs, they shall not be weary. And they will be able both to walk and to run, because they soar on wings as eagles. And they do all because they wait on the Lord. Communion with Him buoys us above this low earth, and bears us up into the heavenly places, and, living there, we shall be fit for the slow hours of commonplace plodding and for the crowded moments of great crises.