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

**ISAIAH-083. CAN WE MAKE SURE OF TO-MORROW by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."*

*Isaiah 56:12*

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON

These words, as they stand, are the call of boon companions to new revelry. They are part of the prophet's picture of a corrupt age when the men of influence and position had thrown away their sense of duty, and had given themselves over, as aristocracies and plutocracies are ever tempted to do, to mere luxury and good living. They are summoning one another to their coarse orgies. The roystering speaker says, Do not be afraid to drink; the cellar will hold out. To-day's carouse will not empty it; there will be enough for to-morrow. He forgets to-morrow's headaches; he forgets that on some tomorrow the wine will be finished; he forgets that the fingers of a hand may write the doom of the rioters on the very walls of the banqueting chamber.

What have such words, the very motto of insolent presumption and short-sighted animalism, to do with New Year's thoughts? Only this, that base and foolish as they are on such lips, it is possible to lift them from the mud, and take them as the utterance of a lofty and calm hope which will not be disappointed, and of a firm and lowly resolve which may ennoble life. Like a great many other sayings, they may fit the mouth either of a sot or of a saint. All depends on what the things are which we are thinking about when we use them. There are things about which it is absurd and worse than absurd to say this, and there are things about which it is the soberest truth to say it. So looking forward into the merciful darkness of another year, we may regard these words as either the expressions of hopes which it is folly to cherish, or of hopes that it is reasonable to entertain.

**I. This expectation, if directed to any outward things, is an illusion and a dream.**

These coarse revellers into whose lips our text is put only meant by it to brave the future and defy to-morrow in the riot of their drunkenness. They show us the vulgarest, lowest form which the expectation can take, a form which I need say nothing about now.

But I may just note in passing that to look forward principally as anticipating pleasure or enjoyment is a very poor and unworthy thing. We weaken and lower every day, if we use our faculty of hope mainly to paint the future as a scene of delights and satisfactions. We spoil to-day by thinking how we can turn it to the account of pleasure. We spoil to-morrow before it comes, and hurt ourselves, if we are more engaged with fancying how it will minister to our joy, than how we can make it minister to our duty. It is base and foolish to be forecasting our pleasures; the true temper is to be forecasting our work.

But, leaving that consideration, let us notice how useless such anticipation, and how mad such confidence, as that expressed in the text is, if directed to anything short of God.

We are so constituted as that we grow into a persuasion that what has been will be, and yet we can give no sufficient reason to ourselves of why we expect it. The uniformity of the course of nature is the corner-stone, not only of physical science, but, in a more homely form, of the wisdom which grows with experience, We all believe that the sun will rise to-morrow because it rose to-day, and on all the yesterdays. But there was a today which had no yesterday, and there will be a to-day which will have no to-morrow. The sun will rise for the last time. The uniformity had a beginning and will have an end.

So, even as an axiom of thought, the anticipation that things will continue as they have been because they have been, seems to rest on an insufficient basis. How much more so, as to our own little lives and their surroundings! There the only thing which we may be quite sure of about to-morrow is that it will not be as this day. Even for those of us who may have reached, for example, the level plateau of middle life, where our position and tasks are pretty well fixed, and we have little more to expect than the monotonous repetition of the same duties recurring at the same hour every day--even for such each day has its own distinctive character. Like a flock of sheep they seem all alike, but each, on closer inspection, reveals a physiognomy of its own. There will be so many small changes that even the same duties or enjoyments will not be quite the same, and even if the outward things remained absolutely unaltered, we who meet them are not the same. Little variations in mood and tone, diminished zest here, weakened power there, other thoughts breaking in, and over and above all the slow, silent change wrought on us by growing years, make the perfect reproduction of any past impossible. So, however familiar may be the road which we have to traverse, however uneventfully the same our days may sometimes for long spaces in our lives seem to be, though to ourselves often our day's work may appear as a mill-horse round, yet in deepest truth, if we take into account the whole sum of the minute changes in it and in us, it may be said of each step of our journey, Ye have not passed this way heretofore.

But, besides all this, we know that these breathing-times when we have no changes, are but pauses in the storm, landing-places in the ascent, the interspaces between the shocks. However hope may tempt us to dream that the future is like the present, a deeper wisdom lies in all our souls which says No. Drunken bravery may front that darkness with such words as these of our text, but the least serious spirit, in its most joyous moods, never quite succeeds in forgetting the solemn probabilities, possibilities, and certainties which lodge in the unknown future. So to a wise man it is ever a sobering exercise to look forward, and we shall be nearest the truth if we take due account, as we do today, of the undoubted fact that the only thing certain about to-morrow is that it will not be as this day.

There are the great changes which come to some one every day, which may come to any of us any day, which will come to all of us some day. Some of us will die this year; on a day in our new diaries some of us will make no entry, for we shall be gone. Some of us will be smitten down by illness; some of us will lose our dearest; some of us will lose fortune. Which of us it is to be, and where within these twelve months the blow is to fall, are mercifully hidden. The only thing that we certainly know is that these arrows will fly. The thing we do not know is whose heart they will pierce. This makes the gaze into the darkness grave and solemn. There is ever something of dread in Hope's blue eyes.

True, the ministry of change is blessed and helpful; true, the darkness which hides the future is merciful and needful, if the present is not to be marred. But helpful and merciful as they are, they invest the unknown to-morrow with a solemn power which it is good, though sobering, for us to feel, and they silence on every lip but that of riot and foolhardy debauchery the presumptuous words, To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

**II. But yet there is a possibility of so using the words as to make them the utterance of a sober certainty which will not be put to shame.**

So long as our hope and anticipations creep along the low levels of earth, and are concerned with external and creatural good, their language can never rise beyond, To-morrow may be as this day. Oftenest they reach only to the height of the wistful wish, May it be as this day! But there is no need for our being tortured with such slippery possibilities. We may send out our hope like Noah's dove, not to hover restlessly over a heaving ocean of change, but to light on firm, solid certainty, and fold its wearied wings there. Forecasting is ever close by foreboding. Hope is interwoven with fear, the golden threads of the weft crossing the dark ones of the warp, and the whole texture gleaming bright or glooming black according to the angle at which it is seen. So is it always until we turn our hope away from earth to God, and fill the future with the light of His presence and the certainty of His truth. Then the mists and doubts roll away; we get above the region of perhaps into that of surely; the future is as certain as the past, hope as assured of its facts as memory, prophecy as veracious as history.

Looking forward, then, let us not occupy ourselves with visions which we know may or may not come true. Let us not feed ourselves with illusions which may make the reality, when it comes to shatter them, yet harder to bear. But let us make God in Christ our hope, and pass from peradventures to certitudes; from To-morrow may he as this day--would that it might, to It shall be, it shall be, for God is my expectation and my hope. We have an unchanging and an inexhaustible God, and He is the true guarantee of the future for us. The more we accustom ourselves to think of Him as shaping all that is contingent and changeful in the nearest and in the remotest to-morrow, and as being Himself the immutable portion of our souls, the calmer will be our outlook into the darkness, and the more bright will be the clear light of certainty which burns for us in it.

To-day's wealth may be to-morrow's poverty, to-day's health to-morrow's sickness, to-day's happy companionship of love to-morrow's aching solitude of heart, but to-day's God will be to-morrow's God, to-day's Christ will be to-morrow's Christ. Other fountains may dry up in heat or freeze in winter, but this knows no change, in summer and winter it shall be. Other fountains may sink low in their basins after much drawing, but this is ever full, and after a thousand generations have drawn from it, its stream is broad and deep as ever. Other springs may be left behind on the march, and the wells and palm-trees of each Elim on our road may be succeeded by a dry and thirsty land where no water is, but this spring follows us all through the wilderness, and makes music and spreads freshness ever by our path. We can forecast nothing beside; we can be sure of this, that God will be with us in all the days that lie before us. What may be round the next headland we know not; but this we know, that the same sunshine will make a broadening path across the waters right to where we rock on the unknown sea, and the same unmoving mighty star will burn for our guidance. So we may let the waves and currents roll as they list--or rather as He wills, and be little concerned about the incidents or the companions of our voyage, since He is with us. We can front the unknown to-morrow, even when we most keenly feel how solemn and sad are the things it may bring.

It can bring with it nothing

But He will bear us through.

If only our hearts be fixed on God and we are feeding our minds and wills on Him, His truth and His will, then we may be quite certain that, whatever goes, our truest riches will abide, and whoever leaves our little company of loved ones, our best Friend will not go away. Therefore, lifting our hopes beyond the low levels of earth, and making our anticipations of the future the reflection of the brightness of God thrown on that else blank curtain, we may turn into the worthy utterance of sober and saintly faith, the folly of the riotous sensualist when he said, To-morrow shall be as this day.

The past is the mirror of the future for the Christian; we look back on all the great deeds of old by which God has redeemed and helped souls that cried to Him, and we find in them the eternal laws of His working. They are all true for to-day as they were at first; they remain true forever. The whole history of the past belongs to us, and avails for our present and for our future. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God.

To-day's experience runs on the same lines as the stories of the years of old, which are the years of the right hand of the Most High. Experience is ever the parent of hope, and the latter can only build with the bricks which the former gives. So the Christian has to lay hold on all that God's mercy has done in the ages that are gone by, and because He is a faithful Creator to transmute history into prophecy, and triumph in that the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Nor only does the record of what He has been to others come in to bring material for our forecast of the future, but also the remembrance of what He has been to ourselves. Has He been with us in six troubles? We may be sure He will not abandon us at the seventh. He is not in the way of beginning to build and leaving His work unfinished. Remember what He has been to you, and rejoice that there has been one thing in your lives which, you may be sure, will always be there. Feed your certain hopes for to-morrow on thankful remembrances of many a yesterday. Forget not the works of God, that you may set your hopes on God. Let our anticipations base themselves on memory, and utter themselves in the prayer, Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. Then the assurance that He whom we know to be good and wise and strong will shape the future, and Himself be the Future for us, will take all the fear out of that forward gaze, will condense our light and unsubstantial hopes into solid realities, and set before us an endless line of days, in each of which we may gain more of Him whose face has brightened the past and will brighten the future, till days shall end and time open into eternity.

**III. Looked at in another aspect, these words may be taken as the vow of a firm and lowly resolve.**

There is a future which we can but very slightly influence, and the less we look at that the better every way. But there is also a future which we can mould as we wish--the future of our own characters, the only future which is really ours at all--and the more clearly we set it before ourselves and make up our minds as to whither we wish it to be tending, the better. In that region, it is eminently true that to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. The law of continuity shapes our moral and spiritual characters. What I am to-day, I shall increasingly be to-morrow. The awful power of habit solidifies actions into customs, and prolongs the reverberation of every note once sounded, along the vaulted roof of the chamber where we live. To-day is the child of yesterday and the parent of to-morrow.

That solemn certainty of the continuance and increase of moral and spiritual characteristics works in both good and bad, but with a difference. To secure its full blessing in the gradual development of the germs of good, there must be constant effort and tenacious resolution. So many foes beset the springing of the good seed in our hearts--what with the flying flocks of light-winged fugitive thoughts ever ready to swoop down as soon as the sower's back is turned and snatch it away, what with the hardness of the rock which the roots soon encounter, what with the thick-sown and quick-springing thorns--that if we trust to the natural laws of growth and neglect careful husbandry, we may sow much but we shall gather little. But to inherit the full consequences of that same law working in the growth and development of the evil in us, nothing is needed but carelessness.

Leave it alone for a year or two and the fruitful field will be a forest, a jungle of matted weeds, with a straggling blossom where cultivation had once been.

But if humbly we resolve and earnestly toil, looking for His help, we may venture to hope that our characters will grow in goodness and in likeness to our dear Lord, that we shall not cast away our confidence nor make shipwreck of our faith, that each new day shall find in us a deeper love, a perfecter consecration, a more joyful service, and that so, in all the beauties of the Christian soul and in all the blessings of the Christian life, to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. To him that hath shall be given. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more until the noontide of the day.

So we may look forward undismayed, and while we recognise the darkness that wraps to-morrow in regard to all mundane affairs, may feed our fortitude and fasten our confidence on the double certainties that we shall have God and more of God for our treasure, that we shall have likeness to Him and more of likeness in our characters. Fleeting moments may come and go. The uncertain days may exercise their various ministry of giving and taking away, but whether they plant or root up our earthly props, whether they build or destroy our earthly houses, they will increase our riches in the heavens, and give us fuller possession of deeper draughts from the inexhaustible fountain of living waters.

How dreadfully that same law of the continuity and development of character works in some men there is no need now to dwell upon. By slow, imperceptible, certain degrees the evil gains upon them. Yesterday's sin smooths the path for to-day's. The temptation once yielded to gains power. The crack in the embankment which lets a drop or two ooze through is soon a great hole which lets in a flood. It is easier to find a man who has never done a wrong thing than to find a man who has done it only once. Peter denied his Lord thrice, and each time more easily than the previous time. So, before we know it, the thin gossamer threads of single actions are twisted into a rope of habit, and we are tied with the cords of our sins. Let no man say, Just for once I may venture on evil; so far I will go and no farther. Nay, to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

How important, then, the smallest acts become when we think of them as thus influencing character! The microscopic creatures, thousands of which will go into a square inch, make the great white cliffs that beetle over the wildest sea and front the storm. So, permanent and solid character is built up out of trivial actions, and this is the solemn aspect of our passing days, that they are making us.

We might well tremble before such a thought, which would be dreadful to the best of us, if it were not for pardoning mercy and renewing grace. The law of reaping what we have sown, or of continuing as we have begun, may be modified as far as our sins and failures are concerned. The entail may be cut off, and to-morrow need not inherit to-day's guilt, nor to-day's habits. The past may be all blotted out through the mercy of God in Christ. No debt need be carried forward to another page of the book of our lives, for Christ has given Himself for us, and He speaks to us all--Thy sins be forgiven thee. No evil habit need continue its dominion over us, nor are we obliged to carry on the bad tradition of wrongdoing into a future day, for Christ lives, and if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things are become new.

So then, brethren, let us humbly take the confidence which these words may be used to express, and as we stand on the threshold of a new year and wait for the curtain to be drawn, let us print deep on our hearts the uncertainty of our hold of all things here, nor seek to build nor anchor on these, but lift our thoughts to Him, who will bless the future as He has blessed the past, and will even enlarge the gifts of His love and the help of His right hand. Let us hope for ourselves not the continuance or increase of outward good, but the growth of our souls in all things lovely and of good report, the daily advance in the love and likeness of our Lord.

So each day, each succeeding wave of the ocean of time shall cast up treasures for us as it breaks at our feet. As we grow in years, we shall grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, until the day comes when we shall exchange earth for heaven. That will be the sublimest application of this text, when, dying, we can calmly be sure that though to-day be on this side and to-morrow on the other bank of the black river, there will be no break in the continuity, but only an infinite growth in our life, and heaven's to-morrow shall be as earth's to-day, and much more abundant.