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

**ISAIAH-084. FLIMSY GARMENTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Their webs shall not become garments."*

*Isaiah 59:6*

*"I counsel thee to buy of me ... white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear."*

*Revelation 3:18*

The force of these words of the prophet is very obvious. He has been pouring out swift, indignant denunciation on the evil-doers in Israel; and, says he, they hatch cockatrice's eggs and spin spiders webs, pointing, as I suppose, to the patient perseverance, worthy of a better cause, which bad men will exercise in working out their plans. Then with a flash of bitter irony, led on by his imagination to say more than he had meant, he adds this scathing parenthesis, as if he said, Yes, they spin spiders webs, elaborate toil and creeping contrivance, and what comes of it all! The flimsy foul thing is swept away by God's besom sooner or later. A web indeed! but they will never make a garment out of it. It looks like cloth, but it is useless. That is the old lesson that all sin is profitless and comes to nothing.

I venture to connect with that strongly figurative declaration of the essential futility of godless living, our second text, in which Jesus uses a similar figure to express one aspect of His gifts to the believing soul. He is ready to clothe it, so that being clothed, it will not be found naked.

**I. Sin clothes no man even here.**

Notice in passing what a hint there is of the toil and trouble that men are so willing to take in a wrong course. Hatching and spinning both suggest protracted, sedulous labour. And then the issue of it all is-- nothing.

Take the plainest illustrations of this truth first--the breach of common laws of morality, the indulgence, for instance, in dissipation. A man gets a certain coarse delight out of it, but what does he get besides? A weakened body, a tyrannous craving, ruined prospects, oftenest poverty and shame, the loss of self-respect and love; of moral excellences, of tastes for what is better. He is not a beast, and he cannot live for pure animalism without injuring himself.

Then take actual breaches of human laws. How seldom these pay, even in the lowest sense. Thieves are always poor. The same experience of futility dogs all coarse and palpable breaches of morality. It is always true that He that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

The reasons are not far to seek. This is, on the whole, God's world, a world of retribution. Things are, on the whole, on the side of goodness. God is in the world, and that is an element not to be left out in the calculation. Society is on the side of goodness to a large extent. The constitution of a man's own soul, which God made, works in the same direction. Young men who are trembling on the verge of youthful yieldings to passion, are tempted to fancy that they can sow sin and not reap suffering or harm. Would that they settled it in their thoughts that he who fires a fuse must expect an explosion!

But the same rule applies to every godless form of life. Take our Manchester temptation, money or success in business. Take ambition. Take culture, literary fame. Take love and friendship. What do they all come to, if godless? I do not point to the many failures, but suppose success: would that make you a happy man? If you won what you wanted, would it be enough? What garments for your conscience, for your sense of sin, for your infinite longings would success in any godless course provide? You would have what you wanted, and what would it bring with it? Cares and troubles and swift satiety, and not seldom incapacity to enjoy what you had won with so much toil. If you gained the prize, you would find clinging to it something that you did not bargain for, and that took most of the dazzle away from it.

**II. The rags are all stripped off some day.**

Death is a becoming naked as to the body, and as to all the occupations that terminate with bodily life. It necessarily involves the loss of possessions, the cessation of activities, the stripping off of self-deceptions, and exposure to the gaze of the Judge, without defence. The godless soul will be found naked and ashamed. All works of darkness, laden with rich blossom or juicy fruit though they have seemed to be, will then be seen to be in tragic truth fruitless. A life's spinning and weaving, and not a rag to cover the toiler after all! Is that productive labour?

**III. Christ will clothe you.**

White raiment. Pure character. Covering before the Judge. Festal robe of Victory.

Buy--how? By giving up self.