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

**ISAIAH-086. WALLS AND GATES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise."*

*Isaiah 60:18*

The prophet reaches the height of eloquence in his magnificent picture of the restored Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. To him the city stands for the embodiment of the nation, and his vision of the future is moulded by his knowledge of the past. Israel and Jerusalem were to him the embodiments of the divine idea of God's dwelling with men, and of a society founded on the presence of God in its midst. We are not forcing meanings on his words which they will not bear, when we see in the society of men redeemed by Christ the perfect embodiment of his vision. Nor is the prophet of the New Testament doing so when he casts his vision of the future which is to follow Resurrection and Judgment into a like form, and shows us the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.

The end of the world's history is to be, not a garden but a city, a visible community, bound together because God dwells in it, and yet not having lost the blessed characteristics of the Garden from which man set out on his long and devious march.

The Christian form of the prophet's vision is the Christian Society, and in that society, each individual member possesses his own portion of the common blessings, so that the great words of this text have a personal as well as a general application. We shall best bring out their rich contents by simply taking them as they stand, and considering what is promised by the two eloquent metaphors, which liken salvation to the walls and praise to the gates of the City of God.

**I. Salvation is to be the city's wall.**

Another prophet foretold that the returning exiles would dwell in a Jerusalem that had no walls, for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about; and Isaiah sang, We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. There is no need for material defences for the community or the individual whom God defends. Would that the Church had lived up to the height of that great thought! Would that we each believed it true in regard to our own lives! There are three ways in which this promise may be viewed. We may think of salvation as meaning God's purpose to save. And then the comfort and sense of security will be derived from the thought that what He intends He performs, and that nothing can traverse that purpose except our own rebellions self-will. They whom God designs to keep are kept; they whom God wills to save are saved, unless they oppose His will, which opposition is in itself to be lost, and leads to ultimate and irreparable loss.

We may think of salvation as an actually begun work. Then the comfort and sense of security will be derived from that great work by which salvation has begun to be ours. The work of Christ keeps us from all danger, and no foes can make a breach in that wall, nor reach those who stand safe behind its strong towers.

We may think of salvation as a personal experience, and then the comfort and sense of security will be derived from that blessed consciousness of possessing in some measure at least the spirit, not of bondage, but of a son. The consciousness of having salvation is our best defence against spiritual foes and our best shield against temporal calamities.

It is good for us to live by faith, to be thrown back on our unseen protector, to feel with the psalmist, Thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety, though alone, and to see the wall great and high that is drawn round our defenceless tent pitched on the sands of the flat desert.

**II. Praise is to be the city's gate.**

As to the Church, this prophecy anticipates the Apostle's teaching that the whole divine work of Redemption, from its fore-ordination before the foundation of the world, to its application to each sinful soul, is to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory or, as he elsewhere expands and enriches the expression, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

We are secretaries of His praise. A gate is that by which the safe inhabitants go out into the region beyond, and the outgoings of the active life of every Christian should be such as to make manifest the blessings that he enjoys within the shelter of the city's walls. Only if our hidden life is blessed with a begun salvation will our outward life be vocal with the music of praise. The gate will be praise if, and only if, the wall is salvation.

And praise is the gate by which we should go out into the world, even when the world into which we go is dark and the ways rough and hard. If we have the warm glow of a realised salvation in our hearts, sorrows that are but for a moment will not silence the voice of praise, though they may cast it into a minor key. The praise that rises from a sad heart is yet more melodious in God's ear than that which carols when all things go well. The bird that sings in a darkened cage makes music to its owner. Songs in the night have a singular pathos and thrill the listeners. When we take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, we shall offer to Him the sacrifices of thanksgiving, though He may recall some of the precious gifts that He gave. For He never takes away the wall of salvation which He has built around us, and as long as that wall stands, its gates will be praise. Submission, recognition of His will, and even silence because Thou didst it, are praise to His ear.