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

**JOHN-099**. **THE HIGH PRIEST'S PRAYER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou givest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

*John 17:20-26*

The remainder of this prayer reaches out to all generations of believers to the end. We may incidentally note that it shows that Jesus did not anticipate a speedy end of the history of the world or the Church; and also that it breathes but one desire, that for the Church's unity, as though He saw what would be its greatest peril. Characteristic, too, of the idealism of this Gospel is it that there is no name for that future community. It is not called church, or congregation, or the like--it is them also that believe on Me through their word, a great spiritual community, held together by common faith in Him whom the Apostles preached. Is not that still the best definition of Christians, and does not such a conception of it correspond better to its true nature than the formal abstraction, the Church?

We can but touch in the most inadequate fashion the profound words of this section of the prayer which would take volumes to expound fitly. We note that it contains four periods, in each of which something is asked or stated, and then a purpose to be attained by the petition or statement is set forth.

First comes the prayer for unity and what the answer to it will effect (v. 21). Now in this verse the unity of believers is principally regarded as resulting from the inclusion, if we may so say, of them all in the ineffable union of the Father and the Son. Jesus prays that they may all be one, and also that they also may be in us(Rev. Ver.). And their unity is no mere matter of formal external organisation nor of unanimity of creed, or the like, but it is a deep, vital unity. The pattern of it is the unity of the Father and the Son, and the power that brings it about is the abiding of all believers in us. The result of such a manifestation in the world of a multitude of men, in all of whom one life evidently moves, fusing their individualities while retaining their personalities, will be the world's conviction of the divine mission of Jesus. The world was beginning to feel its convictions moving slowly in that direction, when it exclaimed: Behold how these Christians love one another!The alienation of Christians has given barbs and feathers to its arrows of scorn. But it is the unity of the Spirit, not that of a, great corporation, that Christ's prayer desires.

The petitions for what would be given to believers passes for a moment into a statement of what Jesus had already given to them. He had begun the unifying gift, and that made a plea for its perfecting. The glorywhich He had given to these poor bewildered Galilaeans was but in a rudimentary stage; but still, wherever there is faith in Him, there is some communication of His life and Spirit, and some of that veiled and yet radiant glory, full of grace and truth, which shone through the covering when the Incarnate Word became flesh. It is the Christ-given Christ-likeness in each which knits believers into one. It is Christ in us and we in Christ that fuses us into one, and thereby makes each perfect. And such flashing back of the light of Jesus from a million separate crystals, all glowing with one light and made one in the light, would flash on darkest eyes the lustre of the conviction that God sent Christ, and that God's love enfolded those Christlike souls even as it enfolded Him.

Again (v. 24) comes a petition with its result. And here there is no mention of the effect of the answer on the world. For the moment the thoughts of isolation in, and a message to, the world fade away. The partially-possessed gloryseems to have led on Christ's thoughts to the calm home of perfection waiting for Him who was not of the worldand was sent into it, and for the humble ones who had taken Him for Lord. I will that--that is a strange tone for a prayer. What consciousness on Christ's part does it involve? The disciples are not now called them that should believe on Me, but that which Thou hast given Me, the individuals melt into the great whole. They are Christ's, not merely by their faith or man's preaching, but by the Father's gift. And the fact of that gift is used as a plea with Him, to perfect that which concerneththem, and to complete the unity of believers with Jesus by bringing them to be with Himin His triumphant session at the right hand. To beholdwill be the same as to share His glory, not only that which we beheld when He tabernacled among us, but that which He had in the pouring out on Him of God's love before the foundation of the world. Our dim eyes cannot follow the happy souls as they are lost in the blaze, but we know that they walk in light and are like Him, for they see Him as He is.

The last statement (vs. 25, 26) is not petition but vow, and, to our ears, promise. The contrast of the world and believers appears for the last time. What made the world a worldwas its not knowing God; what made believers isolated in, and having an errand to, the world, was that they knew(not merely believed, but knew by experience) that Jesus had been sent from God to make known His name. All our knowledge of God comes through Him; it is for us to recognise His divine mission, and then He will unveil, more and more, with blessed continuity of increasing knowledge, the Name, and with growing knowledge of it growing measures of God's love will be in us, and Jesus Himself will dwell in our hearts by faithmore completely and more blessedly through an eternity of wider knowledge and more fervent love.