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

**PROVERBS-010. WISDOM'S GIFT by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance."*

*Proverbs 8:21*

The word here rendered substance is peculiar. Indeed, it is used in a unique construction in this passage. It means being or existence, and seems to have been laid hold of by the Hebrew thinkers, from whom the books commonly called the Wisdom Books come, as one of their almost technical expressions. Substance may be used in our translation in its philosophical meaning as the supposed reality underlying appearances, but if we observe that in the parallel following clause we find treasures, it seems more likely that in the text, it is to be taken in its secondary, and much debased meaning of wealth, material possessions. But the prize held out here to the lovers of heavenly wisdom is much more than worldly good. In deepest truth, the being which is theirs is God Himself. They who love and seek the wisdom of this book possess Him, and in possessing Him become possessed of their own true being. They are owners and lords of themselves, and have in their hearts a fountain of life, because they have God dwelling with and in them.

**I. The quest which always finds.**

Those who love wisdom might be a Hebrew translation of philosopher, and possibly the Jewish teachers of wisdom were influenced by Greece, but their conception of wisdom has a deeper source than the Greek had, and what they meant by loving it was a widely different attitude of mind and heart from that of the Greek philosopher. It could never be said of the disciples of a Plato that their quest was sure to end in finding what they sought. Many a man then, and many a man since, and many a man to-day, has followed knowledge, like a sinking star, and has only caught a glimmer of a far-off and dubious light. There is only one search which is certain always to find what it seeks, and that is the search which knows where the object of it is, and seeks not as for something the locality of which is unknown, but as for that which the place of which is certain. The manifold voices of human aims cry, Who will show us any good? The seeker who is sure to find is he who prays, Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. The heart that truly and supremely affects God is never condemned to seek in vain. The Wisdom of this book herself is presented as proclaiming, They that seek me earnestly shall find me, and humble souls in every age since then have set to their seal that the word is true to their experience. For there are two seekers in every such case, God and man. The Father seeketh such to worship Him, and His love goes through the world, yearning and searching for hearts that will turn to Him. The shepherd seeks for the lost sheep, and lays it on his shoulders to bear it back to the fold. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the seeking love of God. And the human seeker finds God, or rather is found by God, for no aspiration after Him is vain, no longing unresponded to, no effort to find Him unresponded to. We have as much of God as we wish, as much as our desires have fitted us to receive. The all-penetrating atmosphere enters every chink open to it, and no seeking soul has ever had to say, I sought Him but found Him not.

Is there any other quest of which the same can be said? Are not all paths of human effort strewed with the skeletons of men who have fretted and toiled away their lives in vain attempts to grasp aims that have eluded their grip? Do we not all know the sickness of disappointed effort, or the sadder sickness of successful effort, which has secured the apparent good and found it not so good after all? The Christian life is, amid all the failures of human effort, the only life in which the seeking after good is but a little less blessed than the finding of it is, and in which it is always true that he that seeketh findeth. Nor does such finding deaden the spirit of seeking, for in every finding there is a fresh discovery of new depths in God, and a consequent quickening of desire to press further into the abyss of His Being, so that aspiration and fruition ever beget each other, and the upward, Godward progress of the soul is eternal.

**II. The finding that is always blessed.**

We have seen that being is the gift promised to the lovers of wisdom, and that the promise may either be referred to the possession of God, who is the fountain of all being, or to the true possession of ourselves, which is a consequence of our possession of Him. In either aspect, that possession is blessedness. If we have God, we have real life. We truly own ourselves when we have God. We really live when God lives in us, the life of our lives. We are ourselves, when we have ceased to be ourselves, and have taken God to be the Self of ourselves.

Such a life, God-possessing, brings the one good which corresponds to our whole nature. All other good is fragmentary, and being fragmentary is inadequate, as men's restless search after various forms of good but too sadly proves. Why does the merchantman wander over sea and land seeking for many goodly pearls? Because he has not found one of great price, but tries to make up by their number for the insufficiency of each. But the soul is made, not to find its wealth in the manifold but in the one, and no aggregation of incompletenesses will make up completeness, nor any number of partial satisfactions of this and the other appetite or desire make a man feel that he has enough and more than enough. We must have all good in one Person, if we are ever to know the rest of full satisfaction. It will be fatal to our blessedness if we have to resort to a hundred different sources for different supplies. The true blessedness is simple and yet infinitely complex, for it comes from possessing the one Person in whom dwell for us all forms of good, whether good be understood as intellectual or moral or emotional. That which cannot be everything to the soul that seeks is scarcely worth the seeking, and certainly is not wisely proposed as the object of a life's search, for such a life will be a failure if it fails to find its object, and scarcely less tragically, though perhaps less conspicuously, a failure if it finds it. All other good is but apparent; God is the one real object that meets all man's desires and needs, and makes him blessed with real blessedness, and fills the cup of life with the draught that slakes thirst and satisfies the thirstiest.

**III. The blessedness that always lasts.**

He who finds God, as every one of us may find Him, in Christ, has found a Good that cannot change, pass, or grow stale. His blessedness will always last, as long as he keeps fast hold of that which he has, and lets no man take his crown.

For the Christian's good is the only one that does not intend to grow old and pall. We can never exhaust God. We need never grow weary of Him. Possession robs other wealth of its glamour, and other pleasures of their poignant sweetness. We grow weary of most good things, and those which we have long had, we generally find get somewhat faded and stale. Habit is a fatal enemy to enjoyment. But it only adds to the joy which springs from the possession of God in Christ. Swedenborg said that the oldest angels look the youngest, and they who have longest experience of the joy of fellowship with God are they who enjoy each instance of it most. We can never drink the chalice of His love to the dregs, and it will be fresh and sparkling as long as we have lips that can absorb it. He keeps the good wine till the last.

The Christian's good is the only good which cannot be taken away. Loss and change beggars the millionaire sometimes, and the possibility of loss shadows all earthly good with pale foreboding. Everything that is outside the substance of the soul can be withdrawn, but the possession of God in Christ is so intimate and inward, so interwoven with the very deepest roots of the Christian's personal being, that it cannot be taken out from these by any shocks of time or change. There is but one hand that can end that possession and that is his own. He can withdraw himself from God, by giving himself over to sin and the world. He can empty the shrine and compel the indwelling deity to say, as the legend told was heard in the Temple the night before Roman soldiers desecrated the Holy of Holies: Let us depart. But besides himself, neither things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature has power to take away that faithful God to whom a poor soul clings, and in whom whoso thus clings finds its unchangeable good.

The Christian's good is the only one from which we cannot be taken. A grim psalm paints for us the life and end of men who trust in the multitude of their possessions, and whose inward thought is that they have founded families that will last. It tells how this their way is folly, and yet is approved with acclamations by the crowd. It lets us see the founder of a family, the possessor of broad acres, going down to the grave, carrying nothing away, stripped of his glory and with Death for his shepherd, who has driven his flock from pleasant pastures here into the dreariness of Sheol. But that shepherd has a double office. Some he separates from all their possessions, hopes, and joys. Some he, stern though his aspect and harsh though his guidance, leads up to the green pastures of God, and as the last messenger of the love of God in Christ, unites the souls that found God amid the distractions of earth with the God whom they will know better and possess more fully and blessedly, amid the unending felicities and progressive blessednesses of Heaven.