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

**PROVERBS-018. SATISFIED FROM SELF by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... A good man shall be satisfied from himself."*

*Proverbs 14:14*

At first sight this saying strikes one as somewhat unlike the ordinary Scripture tone, and savouring rather of a Stoical self-complacency; but we recall parallel sayings, such as Christ's words, The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water; and the Apostles, Then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone. We further note that the text has an antithetic parallel in the preceding clause, where the picture is drawn of a backslider in heart, as filled with his own ways; so that both clauses set forth the familiar but solemn thought that a man's deeds react upon the doer, and apart from all thoughts of divine judgment, themselves bring certain retribution. To grasp the inwardness of this saying we must note that--

**I. Goodness comes from godliness.**

There is no more striking proof that most men are bad than the notion which they have of what is good. The word has been degraded to mean in common speech little more than amiability, and is applied with little discrimination to characters of which little more can be said than that they are facile and indulgent of evil. A good fellow may be a very bad man. At the highest the epithet connotes merely more or less admirable motives and more or less admirable deeds as their results, whilst often its use is no more than a piece of unmeaning politeness. That was what the young ruler meant by addressing Christ as Good Master; and Christ's answer to him set him, and should set us, on asking ourselves why we call very ordinary men and very ordinary actions good. The scriptural notion is immensely deeper, and the scriptural employment of the word is immensely more restricted. It is more inward: it means that motives should be right before it calls any action good; it means that our central and all-influencing motive should be love to God and regard to His will. That is the Old Testament point of view as well as the New. Or to put it in other words, the good man of the Bible is a man in whom outward righteousness flows from inward devotion and love to God. These two elements make up the character: godliness is an inseparable part of goodness, is the inseparable foundation of goodness, and the sole condition on which it is possible. But from this conception follows, that a man may be truly called good, although not perfect. He may be so and yet have many failures. The direction of his aspirations, not the degree to which these are fulfilled, determines his character, and his right to be reckoned a good man. Why was David called a man after God's own heart, notwithstanding his frightful fall? Was it not because that sin was contrary to the main direction of his life, and because he had struggled to his feet again, and with tears and self-abasement, yet with unconquerable desire and hope, pressed toward the mark for the prize of his high calling? David in the Old Testament and Peter in the New bid us be of good cheer, and warn us against the too common error of thinking that goodness means perfection. The new moon with a ragged edge is even in its imperfections beautiful, and in its thinnest circlet prophesies the perfect round.

Remembering this inseparable connection between godliness and goodness we further note that--

**II. Godliness brings satisfaction.**

There is a grim contrast between the two halves of this verse. The former shows us the backslider in heart as filled with his own ways. He gets weary with satiety; with his doings he will be sick of them; and the things which at first delighted will finally disgust and be done without zest. There is nothing sadder than the gloomy faces often seen in the world's festivals. But, on the other hand, the godly man will be satisfied from within. This is no Stoical proclamation of self-sufficingness. Self by itself satisfies no man, but self, become the abiding-place of God, does satisfy. A man alone is like the chaff which the wind driveth away; but, rooted in God, he is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf does not wither. He has found all that he needs. God is no longer without him but within; and he who can say, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, has within him the secret of peace and the source of satisfaction which can never say I thirst. Such an inward self, in which God dwells and through which His sweet presence manifests itself in the renewed nature, sets man free from all dependence for blessedness on externals. We hang on them and are in despair if we lose them, because we have not the life of God within us. He who has such an indwelling, and he only, can truly say, All my possessions I carry with me. Take him and strip from him, film after film, possessions, reputation, friends; hack him limb from limb, and as long as there is body enough left to keep life in him, he can say, I have all and abound. Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better possession.

**III. Godly goodness brings inward satisfaction.**

No man is satisfied with himself until he has subjugated himself. What makes men restless and discontented is their tossing, anarchical desires. To live by impulse, or passion, or by anything but love to God, is to make ourselves our own tormentors. It is always true that he who loveth his life shall lose it, and loses it by the very act of loving it. Most men's lives are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, and whose tossing surges, alas! cast up mire and dirt, for their restless lives bring to the surface much that was meant to lie undisturbed in the depths.

But he who has subdued himself is like some still lake which heareth not the loud winds when they call, and mirrors the silent heavens on its calm surface. But further, goodness brings satisfaction, because, as the Psalmist says, in keeping Thy commandments there is great reward. There is a glow accompanying even partial obedience which diffuses itself with grateful warmth through the whole being of a man. And such goodness tends to the preservation of health of soul as natural, simple living to the health of the body. And that general sense of well-being brings with it a satisfaction compared with which all the feverish bliss of the voluptuary is poor indeed.

But we must not forget that satisfaction from one's self is not satisfaction with one's self. There will always be the imperfection which will always prevent self-righteousness. The good man after the Bible pattern most deeply knows his faults, and in that very consciousness is there a deep joy. To be ever aspiring onwards, and to know that our aspiration is no vain dream, this is joy. Still to press toward the mark, still to have the yet untroubled world which gleams before us as we move, and to know that we shall attain if we follow on, this is the highest bliss. Not the accomplishment of our ideal, but the cherishing of it, is the true delight of life.

Such self-satisfying goodness comes only through Christ. He makes it possible for us to love God and to trust Him. Only when we know the love wherewith He has loved us, shall we love with a love which will be the motive power of our lives. He makes it possible to live outward lives of obedience, which, imperfect as it is, has great reward. He makes it possible for us to attain the yet unattained, and to be sure that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. He has said, The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. Only when we can say, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, will it be true of us in its fullest sense, A good man shall be satisfied from himself.