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

**PSALMS-017**. **THE TWO GUESTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."*

*Psalm 30:5*

A word or two of exposition is necessary in order to bring out the force of this verse. There is an obvious antithesis in the first part of it, between His anger and His favour. Probably there is a similar antithesis between a moment and life. For, although the word rendered life does not unusually mean a lifetime it may have that signification, and the evident intention of contrast seems to require it here. So, then, the meaning of the first part of my text is, the anger lasts for a moment; the favour lasts for a lifetime. The perpetuity of the one, and the brevity of the other, are the Psalmist's thought.

Then, if we pass to the second part of the text, you will observe that there is there also a double antithesis. Weeping is set over against joy; the night against the morning. And the first of these two contrasts is the more striking if we observe that the word joy means, literally, a joyful shout, so that the voice which was lifted in weeping is conceived of as now being heard in exultant praise. Then, still further, the expression may endure literally means may come to lodge. So that Weeping and Joy are personified. Two guests come; one, dark-robed and approaching at the fitting season for such, the night. The other bright, coming with all things fresh and sunny, in the dewy morn. The guest of the night is Weeping; the guest that takes its place in the morning is Gladness.

The two clauses, then, of my text suggest substantially the same thought, and that is the persistence of joy and the transitoriness of sorrow. The one speaks of the succession of emotions in the man; the other, of the successive aspects of the divine dealings which occasion these. The whole is a leaf out of the Psalmist's own experience. The psalm commemorates his deliverance from some affliction, probably a sickness. That is long gone past; and the tears that it caused have long since dried up. But this shout of joy of his has lasted all these centuries, and is like to be immortal. Well for us if we can read our life's story with the same cheery confidence as he did his, and have learned like him to discern what is the temporary and what the permanent element in our experience!

**I. Note, first, the proportion of joy and sorrow in an ordinary life.**

The Psalmist expresses, as I have said, the same idea in both clauses. In the former the anger is contemplated not so much as an element in the divine mind, as in its manifestations in the divine dealings. I shall have a word or two, presently, to say about the Scriptural conception of the anger of God and its relation to the favour of God; but for the present I take the two clauses as being substantially equivalent.

Now is it true--is it not true?--that if a man rightly regards the proportionate duration of these two diverse elements in his life, he must come to the conclusion that the one is continuous and the other is but transitory? A thunderstorm is very short when measured against the long summer day in which it crashes; and very few days have them. It must be a bad climate where half the days are rainy. If we were to take the chart and prick out upon it the line of our sailing, we should find that the spaces in which the weather was tempestuous were brief and few indeed as compared with those in which it was sunny and calm.

But then, man looks before and after, and has the terrible gift that by anticipation and by memory he can prolong the sadness. The proportion of solid matter needed to colour the Irwell is very little in comparison with the whole of the stream. But the current carries it, and half an ounce will stain miles of the turbid stream. Memory and anticipation beat the metal thin, and make it cover an enormous space. And the misery is that, somehow, we have better memories for sad hours than for joyful ones, and it is easier to get accustomed to blessings, as we call them, and to lose the poignancy of their sweetness because they become familiar, than it is to apply the same process to our sorrows, and thus to take the edge off them. The rose's prickles are felt in the flesh longer than its fragrance lives in the nostrils, or its hue in the eye. Men have long memories for their pains as compared with their remembrance of their sorrows.

So it comes to be a piece of very homely, well-worn, and yet always needful, practical counsel to try not to magnify and prolong grief, nor to minimise and abbreviate gladness. We can make our lives, to our own thinking, very much what we will. We cannot directly regulate our emotions, but we can regulate them, because it is in our own power to determine which aspect of our life we shall by preference contemplate.

Here is a room, for instance, papered with a paper with a dark background and a light pattern on it. Well, you can manoeuvre your eye about so as either to look at the black background--and then it is all black, with only a little accidental white or gilt to relieve it here and there; or you can focus your eye on the white and gold, and then that is the main thing, and the other is background. We can choose, to a large extent, what we shall conceive our lives to be; and so we can very largely modify their real character.

There's nothing either good or bad

But thinking makes it so.

They who will can surround themselves with persistent gladness, and they who will can gather about them the thick folds of an everbrooding and enveloping sorrow. Courage, cheerfulness, thankfulness, buoyancy, resolution, are all closely connected with a sane estimate of the relative proportions of the bright and the dark in a human life.

**II. And now consider, secondly, the inclusion of the moment in the life.**

I do not know that the Psalmist thought of that when he gave utterance to my text, but whether he did it or not, it is true that the moment spent in anger is a part of the life that is spent in the favour. Just as within the circle of a life lies each of its moments, the same principle of inclusion may be applied to the other contrast presented here. For as the moment is a part of the life, the danger is a part of the love. The favour holds the anger within itself, for the true Scriptural idea of that terrible expression and terrible fact, the wrath of God, is that it is the necessary aversion of a perfectly pure and holy love from that which does not correspond to itself. So, though sometimes the two may be set against each other, yet at bottom, and in reality, they are one, and the anger is but a mode in which the favour manifests itself. God's love is plastic, and if thrown back upon itself, grieved and wounded and rejected, becomes the anger which ignorant men sometimes seem to think it contradicts. There is no more antagonism between these two ideas when they are applied to God than when they are applied to you parents in your relations to a disobedient child. You know, and it knows, that if there were no love there would be little anger. Neither of you suppose that an irate parent is an unloving parent. If ye, being evil, know how, in dealing with your children, to blend wrath and love, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven be one and the same Father when His love manifests itself in chastisement and when it expands itself in blessings!

Thus we come to the truth which breathes uniformity and simplicity through all the various methods of the divine hand, that howsoever He changes and reverses His dealings with us, they are one and the same. You may get two diametrically opposite motions out of the same machine. The same power will send one wheel revolving from right to left, and another from left to right, but they are co-operant to grind out at the far end the one product. It is the same revolution of the earth that brings blessed lengthening days and growing summer, and that cuts short the sun's course and brings declining days and increasing cold. It is the same motion which hurls a comet close to the burning sun, and sends it wandering away out into fields of astronomical space, beyond the ken of telescope, and almost beyond the reach of thought. And so one uniform divine purpose, the favour which uses the anger, fills the life, and there are no interruptions, howsoever brief, to the steady continuous flow of His outpoured blessings. All is love and favour. Anger is masked love, and sorrow has the same source and mission as joy. It takes all sorts of weathers to make a year, and all tend to the same issue, of ripened harvests and full barns. O brethren! if we understand that God means something better for us than happiness, even likeness to Himself, we should understand better how our deepest sorrows and bitterest tears, and the wounds that penetrate deepest into our bleeding hearts, all come from the same motive, and are directed to the same end as their most joyful contraries. One thing the Lord desires, that we may be partakers of His holiness, and so we may venture to give an even deeper meaning to the Psalmist's words than he intended, and recognise that the moment is an integral part of the life, and the anger a mode of the manifestation of the favour.

**III. Lastly, notice the conversion of the sorrow into joy.**

I have already explained the picturesque image of the last part of my text, which demands a little further consideration. There are two figures presented before us, one dark robed and one bright garmented. The one is the guest of the night, the other is the guest of the morning. The verb which occurs in the first clause of the second half of my text is not repeated in the second, and so the words may be taken in two ways. They may either express how Joy, the morning guest, comes, and turns out the evening visitant, or they may suggest how we took Sorrow in when the night fell, to sit by the fireside, but when morning dawned--who is this, sitting in her place, smiling as we look at her? It is Sorrow transfigured, and her name is changed into Joy. Either the substitution or the transformation may be supposed to be in the Psalmist's mind.

Both are true. No human heart, however wounded, continues always to bleed. Some gracious vegetation creeps over the wildest ruin. The roughest edges are smoothed by time. Vitality asserts itself; other interests have a right to be entertained and are entertained. The recuperative powers come into play, and the pang departs and poignancy is softened. The cutting edge gets blunt on even poisoned spears by the gracious influences of time. The nightly guest, Sorrow, slips away, and ere we know, another sits in her place. Some of us try to fight against that merciful process and seem to think that it is a merit to continue, by half artificial means, the first moment of pain, and that it is treason to some dear remembrances to let life have its way, and to-day have its rights. That is to set ourselves against the dealings of God, and to refuse to forgive Him for what His love has done for us.

But the other thought seems to me to be even more beautiful, and probably to be what was in the Psalmist's mind--viz. the transformation of the evil, Sorrow itself, into the radiant form of Joy. A prince in rags comes to a poor man's hovel, is hospitably received in the darkness, and being received and welcomed, in the morning slips off his rags and appears as he is. Sorrow is Joy disguised.

If it be accepted, if the will submit, if the heart let itself be untwined, that its tendrils may be coiled closer round the heart of God, then the transformation is sure to come, and joy will dawn on those who have done rightly--that is, submissively and thankfully--by their sorrows. It will not be a joy like what the world calls joy--loud-voiced, boisterous, ringing with idiot laughter; but it will be pure, and deep, and sacred, and permanent. A white lily is fairer than a flaunting peony, and the joy into which sorrow accepted turns is pure and refining and good.

So, brethren! remember that the richest vintages are grown on the rough slopes of the volcano, and lovely flowers blow at the glacier's edge; and all our troubles, big and little, may be converted into gladnesses if we accept them as God meant them. Only they must be so accepted if they are to be thus changed.

But there may be some hearts recoiling from much that I have said in this sermon, and thinking to themselves, Ah! there are two kinds of sorrows. There are those that can be cured, and there are those that cannot. What have you got to say to me who have to bleed from an immedicable wound till the end of my life? Well, I have to say this--look beyond earth's dim dawns to that morning when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, to them that love His name, with healing in His wings. If we have to carry a load on an aching back till the end, be sure that when the night, which is far spent, is over, and the day which is at hand hath broken, every raindrop will be turned into a flashing rainbow when it is smitten by the level light, and every sorrow rightly borne be represented by a special and particular joy.

Only, brother! if a life is to be spent in His favour, it must be spent in His fear. And if our cares and troubles and sorrows and losses are to be transfigured hereafter, then we must keep very near Jesus Christ, who has promised to us that His joy will remain with us, and that our sorrows shall be turned into joys. If we trust to Him, the voices that have been raised in weeping will be heard in gladness, and earth's minor will be transposed by the great Master of the music into the key of Heaven's jubilant praise. If only we look not at the things seen, but at the things which are not seen, then our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; and the weight will be no burden, but will bear up those who are privileged to bear it.