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

**DEUTERONOMY-011. ISRAEL THE BROTHER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders."*

*Deuteronomy 33:12*

Benjamin was his father's favourite child, and the imagery of this promise is throughout drawn from the relations between such a child and its father. So far as the future history of the tribes is shadowed in these blessings of this great ode, the reference of the text may be to the tribe of Benjamin, as specially distinguished by Saul having been a member of it, and by the Temple having been built on its soil. But we find that each of the promises of the text is repeated elsewhere, with distinct reference to the whole nation. For example, the first one, of safe dwelling, reappears in verse 28 in reference to Israel; the second one, of God's protecting covering, is extended to the nation in many places; and the third, of dwelling between His shoulders, is in substance found again in chap. i. 31, the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son. So that we may give the text a wider extension, and take it as setting forth under a lovely metaphor, and with a restricted reference, what is true of all God's children everywhere and always.

**I. Who are the beloved of the Lord?**

The first answer to that question must be--all men. But these great blessings, so beautifully shadowed in this text, do not belong to all men; nor does the designation, the beloved of the Lord, belong to all men, but to those who have entered into a special relation to Him. In these words of the Hebrew singer there sound the first faint tones of a music that was to swell into clear notes, when Jesus said: If a man love Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. They who are knit by faith and love to God's only-begotten and beloved Son, by that union receive power to become the sons of God, and share in the love which is ever pouring out from the Father's heart on the Son of His love.

**II. What are their blessed privileges?**

The three clauses of the text express substantially the same idea, but with a striking variety of metaphors.

**(a)** They have a sure dwelling-place.

There is a very slight change of rendering of the first clause, which greatly increases its force, and preserves the figure that is obscured by the usual translation. We should read shall dwell safely on, rather than by, Him. And the effect of that small change in the preposition is to bring out the thought that God is regarded as the foundation on which His beloved build their house of life, and dwell in security and calm. If we are sons through the Son, we shall build our houses or pitch our tents on that firm ground, and, being founded on the Rock of ages, they will not fall when all created foundations reel to the overthrow of whatever is built on them. It is not companionship only, blessed as that is, that is promised here. We have a larger privilege than dwelling by Him, for if we love His Son, we build on God, and God dwelleth in us and we in Him.

What spiritual reality underlies the metaphor of dwelling or building on God? The fact of habitual communion.

Note the blessed results of such grounding of our lives on God through such habitual communion. We shall dwell safely. We may think of that as being objective safety--that is, freedom from peril, or as being subjective--that is, freedom from care or fear, or as meaning trustfully, confidently, as the expression is rendered in Psalm xvi. 9 (margin), which is for us the ground of both these. He who dwells in God trustfully dwells both safely and securely, and none else is free either from danger or from dread.

**(b)** They have a sure shelter.

God is for His beloved not only the foundation on which they dwell in safety, but their perpetual covering. They dwell safely because He is so. There are many tender shapes in which this great promise is presented to our faith. Sometimes God is thought of as covering the weak fugitive, as the arching sides of His cave sheltered David from Saul. Sometimes He is represented as covering His beloved, who cower under His wings, as the hen gathereth her chickens when hawks are in the sky. Sometimes He appears as covering them from tempest, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall, and the shadow of a great rock shields from its fury. Sometimes He is pictured as stretching out protection over His beloved's heads, as the Pillar of cloud lay, long-drawn-out, over the Tabernacle when at rest, and on all the Glory was a defence. But under whatever emblem the general idea of a covering shelter was conceived, there was always a correlative duty on our side. For the root-meaning of one of the Old Testament words for faith is fleeing to a refuge, and we shall not be safe in God unless by faith we flee for refuge to Him in Christ.

**(c)** They have a Father who bears them on His shoulders.

The image is the same as in chap. 1. already referred to. It recurs also in Isaiah (46:3-4), Even to hoar hairs will I carry you, and I have made and I will bear, yea, I will carry, and will deliver; and in Hosea (11:3), I taught Ephraim to go; I took them on My arms.

The image beautifully suggests the thought of the favourite child riding high and happy on the strong shoulder, which lifts it above rough places and miry ways. The prose reality is: My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

The Cross carries those who carry it. They who carry God in their hearts are carried by God through all the long pilgrimage of life. Because they are thus upheld by a strength not their own, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint, and though marches be long and limbs strained, they shall go from strength to strength till every one of them appears before God in Zion.