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

**ISAIAH-072. THE ARM OF THE LORD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"*

*Isaiah 53:1*

In the second Isaiah there are numerous references to the arm of the Lord. It is a natural symbol of the active energy of Jehovah, and is analogous to the other symbol of the Face of Jehovah, which is also found in this book, in so far as it emphasises the notion of power in manifestation, though the Face has a wider range and may be explained as equivalent to that part of the divine Nature which is turned to men. The latter symbol will then be substantially parallel with the Name. But there are traces of a tendency to conceive of the arm of the Lord as personified, for instance, where we read (ch. 63:12) that Jehovah caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses. Moses was not the true leader, but was himself led and sustained by the divine Power, dimly conceived as a person, ever by his side to sustain and direct. There seems to be a similar imperfect consciousness of personification in the words of the text, especially when taken in their close connection with the immediately following prophecy of the suffering servant. It would be doing violence to the gradual development of Revelation, like tearing asunder the just-opening petals of a rose, to read into this question of the sad prophet full-blown Christian truth, but it would be missing a clear anticipation of that truth to fail to recognise the forecasting of it that is here.

**I. We have here a prophetic forecast that the arm of the Lord is a person.**

The strict monotheism of the Old Testament does not preclude some very remarkable phenomena in its modes of conception and speech as to the divine Nature. We hear of the angel of His face, and again of the angel in whom is His Name. We hear of the angel to whom divine worship is addressed and who speaks, as we may say, in a divine dialect and does divine acts. We meet, too, with the personification of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, to which are ascribed characteristics and are attributed acts scarcely distinguishable from divine, and eminently associated in the creative work. Our text points in the same direction as these representations. They all tend in the direction of preparing for the full Christian truth of the personal Power of God. What was shown by glimpses at sundry times and in divers manners, with many gaps in the showing and much left all unshown, is perfectly revealed in the Son. The New Testament, by its teaching as to the Eternal Word, endorses, clears, and expands all these earlier dimmer adumbrations. That Word is the agent of the divine energy, and the conception of power as being exercised by the Word is even loftier than that of it as put forth by the arm, by as much as intelligent and intelligible utterance is more spiritual and higher than force of muscle. The apostolic designation of Jesus as the power of God and the wisdom of God blends the two ideas of these two symbols. The conception of Jesus Christ as the arm of the Lord, when united with that of the Eternal Word, points to a threefold sphere and manner of His operations, as the personal manifestation of the active power of God. In the beginning, the arm of the Lord stretched out the heavens as a tent to dwell in, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In His Incarnation, He carried into execution all God's purposes and fulfilled His whole will. From His throne He wields divine power, and rules the universe. The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself, and He works in the midst of humanity that redeeming work which none but He can effect.

**II. We have here a prophetic paradox that the mightiest revelation of the arm of the Lord is in weakness.**

The words of the text stand in closest connection with the great picture of the Suffering Servant which follows, and the pathetic figure portrayed there is the revealing of the arm of the Lord. The close bringing together of the ideas of majesty and power and of humiliation, suffering, and weakness, would be a paradox to the first hearers of the prophecy. Its solution lies in the historical manifestation of Jesus. Looking on Him, we see that the growing up of that root out of a dry ground was the revelation of the great power of God. In Jesus lowly humanity God's power is made perfect in man's weakness, in another and not less true sense than that in which the apostle spoke. There we see divine power in its noblest form, in its grandest operation, in its widest sweep, in its loftiest purpose. That humble man, lowly and poor, despised and rejected in life, hanging faint and pallid on the Roman cross, and dying in the dark, seems a strange manifestation of the glory of God, but the Cross is indeed His throne, and sublime as are the other forms in which Omnipotence clothes itself, this is, to human eyes and hearts, the highest of them all. In Jesus the arm of the Lord is revealed in its grandest operation. Creation and the continual sustaining of a universe are great, but redemption is greater. It is infinitely more to say, He giveth power to the faint, than to say, For that He is strong in might, not one faileth, and to principalities and powers in heavenly places who have gazed on the grand operations of divine power for ages, new lessons of what it can effect are taught by the redemption of sinful men. The divine power that is enshrined in Jesus weakness is power in its widest sweep, for it is to every one that believeth, and in its loftiest purpose, for it is unto salvation.

**III. We have here a prophetic lament that the power revealed to all is unseen by many.**

The text is a wail over darkened eyes, blind at noonday. The prophet's radiant anticipations of the Servant's exaltation, and of God's holy arm being made bare in the eyes of all nations, are clouded over by the thought of the incredulity of the multitude to our report. Jehovah had indeed made bare His arm, as a warrior throws back his loose robe, when he would strike. But what was the use of that, if dull eyes would not look? The report had been loudly proclaimed, but what was the use of that, if ears were obstinately stopped? Alas, alas! nothing that God can do secures that men shall see what He shows, or listen to what He speaks. The mystery of mysteries is that men can, the tragedy of tragedies is that they will, make any possible revelation of none effect, so far as they are concerned.

The Arm is revealed, but only by those who have believed our report does the prophet deem it to be actually beheld. Faith is the individual condition on which the perfected revelation becomes a revelation to me. The salvation of our God is shown in splendour to all the ends of the earth, but only they who exercise faith in Jesus, who is the power of God, will see that far-shining light. If we are not of those who believe the report, we shall, notwithstanding that He hath made bare His holy arm, be of those who grope at noonday as in the dark.