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

**JUDGES-005. LOVE MAKES SUNS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."*

*Judges 5:51*

These are the closing words of Deborah, the great warrior-prophetess of Israel. They are in singular contrast with the tone of fierce enthusiasm for battle which throbs through the rest of the chant, and with its stern approval of the deed of Jael when she slew Sisera. Here, in its last notes, we have an anticipation of the highest and best truths of the Gospel. Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in His might. If we think of the singer, of the age and the occasion of the song, such purely spiritual, lofty words must seem very remarkable.

**I. Note, then, first of all, how here we have a penetrating insight into the essence of religion.**

This woman had been nourished upon a more or less perfect edition of what we know as the Mosaic Law. Her faith had been fed by forms. She moved amidst a world full of the cruelties and dark conceptions of a mysterious divine power which torture heathenism apart from Christianity. She had forced her way through all that, and laid hold of the vital centre. And there, a way out amidst cruelty and murder, amidst the unutterable abominations and terrors of heathenism, in the centre of a rigid system of ceremonial and retaliation, the woman's heart spoke out, and taught her what was the great commandment. Prophetess she was, fighter she was, she could burst into triumphant approval of Jael's bloody deed; and yet with the same lips could speak this profound word. She had learned that Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, summed up all duty, and was the beginning of all good in man. That precept found an echo in her heart. Whatever part in her religious development may have been played by the externalisms of ceremonial, she had pierced to the core of religion. Advanced modern critics admit the antiquity of Deborah's song, and this closing stanza witnesses to the existence, at that early period, of a highly spiritual conception of the bond between God and man. Deborah had got as far, in a moment of exaltation and insight, as the teaching of the Apostle John, although her thought was strangely blended with the fierceness of the times in which she lived. Her approval of Jael's deed by no means warrants our approving it, but we may thankfully see that though she felt the fierce throbbing of desire for vengeance, she also felt this--Them that love Him; that is the Alpha and the Omega of all.

Our love must depend on our knowledge. Deborah's knowledge was a mere skeleton outline as compared with ours. Contrast the fervour of emotional affection that manifestly throbbed in her heart with the poor, cold pulsations which we dignify by the name of love, and the contrast may put us to shame. There is a religion of fear which dominates hundreds of professing Christians in this land of ours. There is a religion of duty, in which there is no delight, which has many adherents amongst us. There is a religion of form, which contents itself with the externals of Christianity, and that is the religion of many men and women in all our churches. And I may further say, there is a religion of faith, in its narrower and imperfect sense, which lays hold of and believes a body of Christian truth, and has never passed through faith into love. Not he who believes that God is, and comes to Him with formal service and an alienated or negligent heart; not he who recognises the duty of worship, and discharges it because his conscience pricks him, but has no buoyancy within bearing him upwards towards the object of his love; not he who cowers before the dark shadow which some call God; but he who, knowing, trusts, and who, knowing and trusting the love which God hath to us, pulses back the throbs of a recipient heart, and loves Him in return--he, and he only, is a worshipper. Let us learn the lesson that Deborah learnt below the palm-trees of Lapidoth, and if we want to understand what a religious man is, recognise that he is a man who loves God.

**II. Further, note the grand conception of the character which such a love produces.**

Let them be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. Think of the fierce Eastern sun, with sunbeams like swords, that springs up from the East, and rushes to the zenith, and nothing is hid from the heat thereof--a sun the like of which we, in our cloudy skies, never see nor feel, but which, to the Oriental, is the very emblem of splendour and of continuous, victorious power. There are two things here, radiance and energy, light and might.

As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength. Deborah was a prophetess, and people say, What did she prophesy? Well, she prophesied the heart of religion--as I have tried to show--in reference to its essence, and, as one sees by this phrase, in reference to its effects. What is her word but a partial anticipation of Christ's saying, Ye are the light of the world; and of His disciple's utterance, Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light?

It is too plain to need any talking about, that the direct tendency of what we venture to call love to God, meaning thereby the turning of the whole nature to Him, in aspiration, admiration, longing for likeness, and practical imitation, is to elevate, ennoble, and illuminate the whole character. It was said about one woman that to love her was an education. That was exaggeration; but it is below the truth about God. The true way to refine and elevate and educate is to cultivate love to God. And when we get near to Him, and hold by Him, and are continually occupied with Him; when our being is one continual aspiration after union with Him, and we experience the glow and rapture included in the simple word love, then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him.

That is what Paul meant when he said, Now are ye light in the Lord. Union with Him illuminates. The true radiance of saintly character will come in the measure in which we are in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Deborah's astronomy was not her strong point. The sun shines by its own light. We are planets, and are darkness in ourselves, and it is only the reflection of the central sun that ever makes us look silvery white and radiant before men. But though it be derived, it is none the less our light, if it has passed into us, as it surely will, and if it streams out from us, as it no less surely will, in the measure in which love to God dominates our whole lives.

If that is so, dear brethren, is not the shortest and the surest way to have our faces shining like that of Moses when he came down from the mountain, or like Stephen's when he saw the heavens opened, to keep near Jesus Christ? It is slow work to hammer bits of ore out of the rock with a chisel and a mallet. Throw the whole mass into the furnace, and the metal will come out separated from the dross. Get up the heat, and the light, which is the consequence of the heat, will take care of itself. In the Lord ye shall be light.

Is Deborah's aspiration fulfilled about me? Let each of us ask that. As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength--would anybody say that about my Christian character? Why not? Only because the springs have run low within is the stream low through the meadows. Only because the love is cold is the light feeble.

There is another thought here. There is power in sunlight as well as radiance. On that truth the prophetess especially lays a finger; as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength. She did not know what we know, that solar energy is the source of all energy on this earth, and that, just as in the deepest spiritual analysis there is no power but of God, so in the material region we may say that the only force is the force of the sun, which not only stimulates vegetation and brings light and warmth--as the pre-scientific prophetess knew--but in a hundred other ways, unknown to her and known to modern science, is the author of all change, the parent of all life, and the reservoir of all energy.

So we come to this thought: The true love of God is no weak, sentimental thing, such as narrow and sectional piety has often represented it to be, but it is a power which will invigorate the whole of a man, and make him strong and manly as well as gentle and gracious; being, indeed, the parent of all the so-called heroic and of all the so-called saintly virtues.

The sun goeth forth in his strength, rushing through the heavens to the zenith. As one of the other editions of this metaphor in the Old Testament has it, The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more until the noontide of the day. That light, indeed, declines, but that fact does not come into view in the metaphor of the progressive growth towards perfection of the man in whom is the all-conquering might of the true love of Jesus Christ.

Note the context of these words of our text, which, I said, presents so singular a contrast to them. It is a strange thing that so fierce a battle-chant should at the end settle down into such a sweet swan-song as this. It is a strange thing that in the same soul there should throb the delight in battle and almost the delight in murder, and these lofty thoughts. But let us learn the lesson that true love to God means hearty hatred of God's enemy, and that it will always have to be militant and sometimes stern and what people call fierce. Amidst the amenities and sentimentalities of modern life there is much necessity for remembering that the Apostle of love was a son of thunder, and that it was the lips which summoned Israel to the fight, and chanted hymns of triumph over the corpses borne down by the rushing Kishon, which also said: Let them that love Him be as the sun when he shineth forth in his strength. If you love God, you will surely be a strong man as well as an emotional and affectionate Christian.

That energy is to be continuous and progressive. The sun that Deborah saw day by day spring from his station in the east, and climb to his height in the heavens, and ray down his beams, has been doing that for millions of years, and it will probably keep doing it for uncounted periods still. And so the Christian man, with continuity unbroken and progressive brilliance and power, should shine more and more till the unsetting noontide of the day.

**III. That brings me to the last thought, which passes beyond the limits of the prophetess' vision. Here is a prophecy of which the utterer was unaware.**

There is a contrast drawn in the words of our text and in those immediately preceding. "So," says Deborah, after the fierce description of the slaughter of Sisera--So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord! but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he shineth in his strength. She contrasts the transiency of the lives that pit themselves against God with the perpetuity that belongs to those which are in harmony with Him. The truth goes further than she probably knew; certainly further than she was thinking when she chanted these words. Let us widen them by other words which use the same metaphor, and say, they that be wise--that is a shallower word than them that love Thee--they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Let us widen and deepen them by sacreder words still; for Jesus Christ laid hold of this old metaphor, and said, describing the time when all the enemies shall have perished, and the weeds have been flung out of the vineyard, Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father, with a brilliancy that will fill heaven with new splendours, bright beyond all that we see here amidst the thick atmosphere and mists and clouds of the present life!

Nor need we stop even there, for Jesus Christ not only laid hold of this metaphor in order to describe the eternal glory of the children of the Kingdom, but at the last time that human eyes on earth saw Him, the glorified Man Christ Jesus is thus described: His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. Love always tends to likeness; and love to Christ will bring conformity with Him. The perfect love of heaven will issue in perfect and perpetual assimilation to Him. Science tells us that the light of the sun probably comes from its contraction; and that that process of contraction will go on until, at some point within the bounds of time, though far beyond the measure of our calculations, the sun himself shall die, the ineffectual beams will be paled, and there will be a black orb, with neither life nor light nor power. And then, then, and after that for ever, they that love Him shall continue to be as that dead sun once was, when he went forth in his hot might.