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

**JUDGES-007. GIDEON'S FLEECE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said."*

*Judges 6:37*

The decisive moment had come when Gideon, with his hastily gathered raw levies, was about to plunge down to the plain to face immensely superior forces trained to warfare. No wonder that the equally untrained leader's heart heat faster. Many a soldier, who will be steadfastly brave in the actual shock of battle, has tremors and throbbings on its eve. Gideon's hand shook a little as he drew his sword.

**I. Gideon's request.**

His petition for a sign was not the voice of unbelief or of doubt or of presumption, but in it spoke real, though struggling faith, seeking to be confirmed. Therefore it was not regarded by God as a sin. When a wicked and adulterous generation asked for a sign, no sign was given it, but when faith asks for one to help it to grasp God's hand, and to go on His warfare in His strength and as His instrument, it does not ask in vain.

Gideon's prayer was wrapped, as it were, in an enfolding promise, for it is preceded and followed by the quotation of words of the Angel of the Lord who had looked on him, and said, Go in this thy might and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee? Prayers that begin and end with as Thou hast spoken are not likely to be repulsed.

**II. God's answer.**

God wonderfully allows Gideon to dictate the nature of the sign. He stoops to work it both ways, backwards and forwards, as it were. First the fleece is to be wet and the ground to be dry, then the fleece is to be dry and the ground wet. Miracle was a necessary accompaniment of revelation in those early days, as picture-books are of childhood. But, though we are far enough from being men in Christ, yet we have not the same need for childish things as Gideon and his contemporaries had. We have Christ and the Spirit, and so have a word made more sure than to require signs. But still it is true that the same gracious willingness to help a tremulous faith, which carries its tremulousness to God in prayer, moves the Father's heart to-day, and that to such petitions the answer is given even before they are offered: Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. No sign that eyes can see is given, but inward whispers speak assurance and communicate the assurance which they speak.

**III. The meaning of the sign.**

Many explanations have been offered. The main point is that the fleece is to be made different from the soil around it. It is to be a proof of God's power to endow with characteristics not derived from, and resulting in qualities unlike, the surroundings.

Gideon had no thought of any significance beyond that. But we may allowably let the Scripture usage of the symbol of dew influence our reading into the symbol a deeper meaning than it bore to him.

God makes the fleece wet with dew, while all the threshing-floor is dry. Dew is the symbol of divine grace, of the silently formed moisture which, coming from no apparent source, freshens by night the wilted plants, and hangs in myriad drops, that twinkle into green and gold as the early sunshine strikes them, on the humblest twig. That grace is plainly not a natural product nor to be accounted for by environment. The dew of the Spirit, which God and God only, can give, can freshen our worn and drooping souls, can give joy in sorrow, can keep us from being touched by surrounding evils, and from being parched by surrounding drought, can silently distil its supplies of strength according to our need into our else dry hearts.

The wet fleece on the dry ground was not only a revelation of God's power, but may be taken as a pattern of what God's soldiers must ever be. A prophet long after Gideon said: The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord, bringing to others the grace which they have received that they may diffuse it, and turning the dry and thirsty land where no water is into fertility, and the parched ground into a pool.

We have said that the main point of Gideon's petition was that the fleece should be made unlike the threshing-floor, and that that unlikeness, which could obviously not be naturally brought about, was to be to him the sure token that God was at work to produce it. The strongest demonstration that the Church can give the world of its really being God's Church is its unlikeness to the world. If it is wet with divine dew when all the threshing-floor is dry, and if, when all the floor is drenched with poisonous miasma, it is dry from the diffused and clinging malaria, the world will take knowledge of it, and some souls be set to ask how this unlikeness comes. When Haman has to say: There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples ... and their laws are diverse from those of every people, he may meditate murder, but many from among the people of the land will join their ranks. Gideon may or may not have thought of the fleece as a symbol of his little host, but we may learn from it the old lesson, Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.