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

**ROMANS-020**. **THE REVELATION OF THE SONS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."*

*Romans 8:19*

The Apostle has been describing believers as sons and heirs. He drops from these transcendent heights to contrast their present apparent condition with their true character and their future glory. The sad realities of suffering darken his lofty hopes, even although these sad realities are to his faith tokens of joint-heirship with Jesus, and pledges that if our inheritance is here manifested by suffering with him, that very fact is a prophecy of common glory hereafter. He describes that future as the revealing of a glory, to which the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared; and then, in our text he varies the application of that thought of revealing and thinks of the subjects of it as being the sons of God. They will be revealed when the glory which they have as joint-heirs with Christ is revealed in them. They walk, as it were, compassed with mist and cloud, but the splendour which will fall on them will scatter the envious darkness, and when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall His co-heirs also appear with Him in glory.

We may consider--

**I. The present veil over the sons of God.**

There is always a difference between appearance and reality, between the ideal and its embodiments. For all men it is true that the full expression of oneself is impossible. Each man's deeds fall short of disclosing the essential self in the man. Every will is hampered by the fleshly screen of the body. I would that my tongue could utter the thoughts that arise in me, is the yearning of every heart that is deeply moved. Contending principles successively sway every personality and thwart each other's expression. For these, and many other reasons, the sum-total of every life is but a shrouded representation of the man who lives it; and we, all of us, after all efforts at self-revelation, remain mysteries to our fellows and to ourselves. All this is eminently true of the sons of God. They have a life-germ hidden in their souls, which in its very nature is destined to fill and expand their whole being, and to permeate with its triumphant energy every corner of their nature. But it is weak and often overborne by its opposite. The seed sown is to grow in spite of bad weather and a poor soil and many weeds, and though it is destined to overcome all these, it may to-day only be able to show on the surface a little patch of pale and struggling growth. When we think of the cost at which the life of Christ was imparted to men, and of the divine source from which it comes, and of the sedulous and protracted discipline through which it is being trained, we cannot but conclude that nothing short of its universal dominion over all the faculties of its imperfect possessors can be the goal of its working. Hercules in his cradle is still Hercules, and strangles snakes. Frost and sun may struggle in midwinter, and the cold may seem to predominate, but the sun is steadily enlarging its course in the sky, and increasing the fervour of its beams, and midsummer day is as sure to dawn as the shortest day was.

The sons of God, even more truly than other men, have contending principles fighting within them. It was the same Apostle who with oaths denied that he knew the man, and in a passion of clinging love and penitence fell at His feet; but for the mere onlooker it would be hard to say which was the true man and which would conquer. The sons of God, like other men, have to express themselves in words which are never closely enough fitted to their thoughts and feelings. David's penitence has to be contented with groans which are not deep enough; and John's calm raptures on his Saviour's breast can only be spoken by shut eyes and silence. The sons of God never fully correspond to their character, but always fall somewhat beneath their desire, and must always be somewhat less than their intention. The artist never wholly embodies his conception. It is only God who rests from His works because the works fully embody His creative design and fully receive the benediction of His own satisfaction with them.

From all such thoughts there arises a piece of plain practical wisdom, which warns Christian men not to despond or despair if they do not find themselves living up to their ideal. The sons of God are veiled because the world's estimate of them is untrue. The old commonplace that the world knows nothing of its greatest men is verified in the opinions which it holds about the sons of God. It is not for their Christianity that they get any of the world's honours and encomiums, if such fall to their share. They are unknown and yet well-known. They live for the most part veiled in obscurity. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. They are God's hidden ones. If they are wise, they will look for no recognition nor eulogy from the world, and will be content to live, as unknown by the princes of this world as was the Lord of glory, whom they slew because their dim eyes could not see the flashing of the glory through the veil, that is to say, His flesh. But no consciousness of imperfection in our revelation of an indwelling Christ must ever be allowed to diminish our efforts to live out the life that is in us, and to shine as lights in the world; nor must the consciousness that we walk as veiled, lead us to add to the thick folds the criminal one of voluntary silence and cowardly hiding in dumb hearts the secret of our lives.

**II. The unveiling of the sons of God.**

That unveiling is in the text represented as coming along with the glory which shall be revealed to usward, and as being contemporaneous with the deliverance of the creation itself from the bondage of corruption, and its passing into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. It coincides with the vanishing of the pain in which the whole creation now groans and travails, and with the adoption--that is, the redemption of our body. Then hope will be seen and will pass into still fruition. All this points to the time when Jesus Christ is revealed, and His servants are revealed with Him in glory. That revelation brings with it of necessity the manifestation of the sons of God for what they are--the making visible in the life of what God sees them to be.

That revelation of the sons of God is the result of the entire dominion and transforming supremacy of the Spirit of God in them. In the whole sweep of their consciousness there will in that day be nothing done from other motives; there will be no sidelights flashing in and disturbing the perfect illumination from the candle of the Lord set on high in their being; there will be no contradictions in the life. It will be one and simple, and therefore perfectly intelligible. Such is the destined issue of the most imperfect Christian life. The Christian man who has in his experience to-day the faintest and most interrupted operation of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has therein a pledge of immortality, because nothing short of an endless life of progressive and growing purity will be adequate to receive and exemplify the power which can never terminate until it is made like Him and perfectly seeing Him as He is.

But that unveiling further guarantees the possession of fully adequate means of expression. The limitations and imperfections of our present bodily life will all drop away in putting on the body of glory which shall be ours. The new tongue will perfectly utter the new knowledge and rapture of the new life; new hands will perfectly realise our ideals; and on every forehead will be stamped Christ's new name.

That unveiling will be further realised by a divine act indicating the characters of the sons of God by their position. Earth's judgments will be reversed by that divine voice, and the great promise, which through weary ages has shone as a far-off star,--I will set him on high because he hath known my name--will then be known for the sun near at hand. Many names loudly blown through the world's trumpet will fall silent then. Many stars will be quenched, but they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.

That revelation will be more surprising to no one than to those who are its subjects, when they see themselves mirrored in that glass, and so unlike what they are here. Their first impulse will be to wonder at the form they see, and to ask, almost with incredulity, Lord, is it I? Nor will the wonder be less when they recognise many whom they knew not. The surprises when the family of God is gathered together at last will be great. The Israel of Captivity lifts up her wondering eyes as she sees the multitudes flocking to her side as the doves to their windows, and, half-ashamed of her own narrow vision, exclaims, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Let us rejoice that in the day when the sons of God are revealed, many hidden ones from many dark corners will sit at the Father's table. That revelation will be made to the whole universe; we know not how, but we know that it shall be; and, as the text tells us, that revelation of the sons of God is the hope for which the earnest expectation of the creature waits through the weary ages.