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

**ROMANS-040**. **THE SOLDIER'S MORNING CALL by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Let us put on the armour of light."*

*Romans 13:12*

It is interesting to notice that the metaphor of the Christian armour occurs in Paul's letters throughout his whole course. It first appears, in a very rudimentary form, in the earliest of the Epistles, that to the Thessalonians. It appears here in a letter which belongs to the middle of his career, and it appears finally in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in its fully developed and drawn-out shape, at almost the end of his work. So we may fairly suppose that it was one of his familiar thoughts. Here it has a very picturesque addition, for the picture that is floating before his vivid imagination is that of a company of soldiers, roused by the morning bugle, casting off their night-gear because the day is beginning to dawn, and bracing on the armour that sparkles in the light of the rising sun. That, says Paul, is what you Christian people ought to be. Can you not hear the notes of the reveille? The night is far spent; the day is at hand; therefore let us put off the works of darkness--the night-gear that was fit for those hours of slumber. Toss it away, and put on the armour that belongs to the day.

Now, I am not going to ask or try to answer the question of how far this Apostolic exhortation is based upon the Apostle's expectation that the world was drawing near its end. That does not matter at all for us at present, for the fact which he expresses as the foundation of this exhortation is true about us all, and about our position in the midst of these fleeting shadows round us. We are hastening to the dawning of the true day. And so let me try to emphasise the exhortation here, old and threadbare and commonplace as it is, because we all need it, at whatever point of life's journey we have arrived.

Now, the first thing that strikes me is that the garb for the man expectant of the day is armour.

We might have anticipated something very different in accordance with the thoughts that Paul's imagery here suggests, about the difference between the night which is so swiftly passing, and is full of enemies and dangers, and the day which is going to dawn, and is full of light and peace and joy. We might have expected that he would have said, Let us put on the festal robes. But no! The night is far spent; the day is at hand. But the dress that befits the expectant of the day is not yet the robe of the feast, but it is the armour which, put into plain words, means just this, that there is fighting, always fighting, to be done. If you are ever to belong to the day, you have to equip yourselves now with armour and weapons. I do not need to dwell upon that, but I do wish to insist upon this fact, that after all that may be truly said about growth in grace, and the peaceful approximation towards perfection in the Christian character, we cannot dispense with the other element in progress, and that is fighting. We have to struggle for every step. Growth is not enough to define completely the process by which men become conformed to the image of the Father, and are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Growth does express part of it, but only a part. Conflict is needed to come in, before you have the whole aspect of Christian progress before your minds. For there will always be antagonism without and traitors within. There will always be recalcitrant horses that need to be whipped up, and jibbing horses that need to be dragged forward, and shying ones that need to be violently coerced and kept in the traces. Conflict is the law, because of the enemies, and because of the conspiracy between the weakness within and the things without that appeal to it.

We hear a great deal to-day about being sanctified by faith. I believe that as much as any man, but the office of faith is to bring us the power that cleanses, and the application of that power requires our work, and it requires our fighting. So it is not enough to say, Trust for your sanctifying as you have trusted for your justifying and acceptance, but you have to work out what you get by your faith, and you will never work it out unless you fight against your unworthy self, and the temptations of the world. The garb of the candidate for the day is armour.

And there is another side to that same thought, and that is, the more vivid our expectations of that blessed dawn the more complete should be our bracing on of the armour. The anticipation of that future, in very many instances, in the Christian Church, has led to precisely the opposite state of mind. It has induced people to drop into mere fantastic sentiment, or to ignore this contemptible present, and think that they have nothing to do with it, and are only waiting for the coming of the Lord, and the like. Paul says, Just because, on your eastern horizon, you can see the pink flush that tells that the night is gone, and the day is coming, therefore do not be a sentimentalist, do not be idle, do not be negligent or contemptuous of the daily tasks; but because you see it, put on the armour of light, and whether the time between the rising of the whole orb of the sun on the horizon be long or short, fill the hours with triumphant conflict. Put on the whole armour of light.

Again, note here what the armour is. Of course that phrase, the armour of light, may be nothing more than a little bit of colour put in by a picturesque imagination, and may suggest simply how the burnished steel would shine and glitter when the sunbeams smote it, and the glistening armour, like that of Spenser's Red Cross Knight, would make a kind of light in the dark cave, into which he went. Or it may mean the armour that befits the light; as is perhaps suggested by the antithesis the works of darkness, which are to be put off. These are works that match the darkness, and similarly the armour is to be the armour that befits the light, and that can flash back its beams. But I think there is more than that in the expression. I would rather take the phrase to be parallel to another of this Apostle's, who speaks in 2nd Corinthians of the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. Light makes the armour, righteousness makes the armour. The two phrases say the same thing, the one in plain English, the other in figure, which being brought down to daily life is just this, that the true armour and weapon of a Christian man is Christian character. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, these are the pieces of armour, and these are the weapons which we are to wield. A Christian man fights against evil in himself by putting on good. The true way to empty the heart of sin is to fill the heart with righteousness. The lances of the light, according to the significant old Greek myth, slew pythons. The armour is righteousness on the right hand and on the left. Stick to plain, simple, homely duties, and you will find that they will defend your heart against many a temptation. A flask that is full of rich wine may be plunged into the saltest ocean, and not a drop will find its way in. Fill your heart with righteousness; your lives--let them glisten in the light, and the light will be your armour. God is light, wherefore God cannot be tempted with evil. Walk in the light, as He is in the light ... and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.

But there is another side to that thought, for if you will look, at your leisure, to the closing words of the chapter, you will find the Apostle's own exposition of what putting on the armour of light means. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ--that is his explanation of putting on the armour of light. For once ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, and it is in the measure in which we are united to Him, by the faith which binds us to Him, and by the love which works obedience and conformity, that we wear the invulnerable armour of light. Christ Himself is, and He supplies to all, the separate graces which Christian men can wear. We may say that He is the panoply of God, as Paul calls it in Ephesians, and when we wear Him, and only in the measure in which we do wear Him, in that measure are we clothed with it. And so the last thing that I would point out here is that the obedience to these commands requires continual effort.

The Christians in Rome, to whom Paul was writing, were no novices in the Christian life. Long ago many of them had been brought to Him. But the oldest Christian amongst them needed the exhortation as much as the rawest recruit in the ranks. Continual renewal day by day is what we need, and it will not be secured without a great deal of work. Seeing that there is a putting off to go along with the putting on, the process is a very long one. Tis a lifelong task till the lump be leavened. It is a lifelong task till we strip off all the rags of this old self; and being clothed, are not found naked. It takes a lifetime to fathom Jesus; it takes a lifetime to appropriate Jesus, it takes a lifetime to be clothed with Jesus. And the question comes to each of us, have we put off the old man with his deeds? Are we daily, as sure as we put on our clothes in the morning, putting on Christ the Lord?

For notice with what solemnity the Apostle gives the master His full, official, formal title here, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we put Him on as Lord; bowing our whole wills to Him, and accepting Him, His commandments, promises, providences, with glad submission? Do we put on Jesus, recognising in His manhood as our Brother not only the pattern of our lives, but the pledge that the pattern, by His help and love, is capable of reproduction in ourselves? Do we put Him on as the Lord Jesus Christ, who was anointed with the Divine Spirit, that from the head it might flow, even to the skirts of the garments, and every one of us might partake of that unction and be made pure and clean thereby? Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do it day by day, and then you have put on the whole armour of God.

And when the day that is dawning has risen to its full, then, not till then, may we put off the armour and put on the white robe, lay aside the helmet, and have our brows wreathed with the laurel, sheathe the sword, and grasp the palm, being more than conquerors through Him who loved us, and fights in us, as well as for us.