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

**ROMANS-049**. **A CRUSHED SNAKE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."*

*Romans 16:20*

There are three other Scriptural sayings which may have been floating in the Apostle's mind when he penned this triumphant assurance. Thou shalt bruise his head; the great first Evangel--we are to be endowed with Christ's power; The lion and the adder thou shalt trample under foot--all the strength that was given to ancient saints is ours; Behold! I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy--the charter of the seventy is the perennial gift to the Church. Echoing all these great words, Paul promises the Roman Christians that the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Now, when any special characteristic is thus ascribed to God, as when He is called the God of patience or the God of hope, in the preceding chapter, the characteristic selected has some bearing on the prayer or promise following. For example, this same designation, the God of peace, united with the other, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, is laid as the foundation of the prayer for the perfecting of the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews in every good work. It is, then, because of that great name that the Apostle is sure, and would have his Roman brethren to be sure, that Satan shall shortly be bruised under their feet. No doubt there may have been some reference in Paul's mind to what he had just said about those who caused divisions in the Church; but, if there is such reference, it is of secondary importance. Paul is gazing on all the great things in God which make Him the God of peace, and in them all he sees ground for the confident hope that His power will be exerted to crush all the sin that breaks His children's peace.

Now the first thought suggested by these words is the solemn glimpse given of the struggle that goes on in every Christian soul.

Two antagonists are at hand-grips in every one of us. On the one hand, the God of peace, on the other, Satan. If you believe in the personality of the One, do not part with the belief in the personality of the other. If you believe that a divine power and Spirit is ready to help and strengthen you, do not think so lightly of the enemies that are arrayed against you as to falter in the belief that there is a great personal Power, rooted in evil, who is warring against each of us. Ah, brethren! we live far too much on the surface, and we neither go down deep enough to the dark source of the Evil, nor rise high enough to the radiant Fountain of the Good. It is a shallow life that strikes that antagonism of God and Satan out of itself. And though the belief in a personal tempter has got to be very unfashionable nowadays, I am going to venture to say that you may measure accurately the vitality and depth of a man's religion by the emphasis with which he grasps the thought of that great antagonism. There is a star of light, and there is a star of darkness; and they revolve, as it were, round one centre.

But whilst, on the one hand, our Christianity is made shallow in proportion as we ignore this solemn reality, on the other hand, it is sometimes paralysed and perverted by our misunderstanding of it. For, notice, the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet. Yes, it is God that bruises, but He uses our feet to do it. It is God from whom the power comes, but the power works through us, and we are neither merely the field, nor merely the prize, of the conflict between these two, but we ourselves have to put all our pith into the task of keeping down the flat, speckled head that has the poison gland in it. The God of peace--blessed be His Name--shall bruise Satan under your feet, but it will need the tension of your muscles, and the downward force of your heel, if the wriggling reptile is to be kept under.

Turn, now, to the other thought that is here, the promise and pledge of victory in the name, the God of peace. I have already referred to two similar designations of God in the previous chapter, and if we take them in union with this one in our text, what a wonderfully beautiful and strengthening threefold view of that divine nature do we get! The God of patience and consolation is the first of the linked three. It heads the list, and blessed is it that it does, because, after all, sorrow makes up a very large proportion of the experience of us all, and what most men seem to themselves to need most is a God that will bear their sorrows with them and help them to bear, and a God that will comfort them. But, supposing that He has been made known thus as the source of endurance and the God of all consolation, He becomes the God of hope, for a dark background flings up a light foreground, and a comforted sorrow patiently endured is mighty to produce a radiant hope. The rising of the muddy waters of the Nile makes the heavy crops of corn in Egypt. So the name the God of hope fitly follows the name the God of patience and consolation.

Then we come to the name in my text, built perhaps on the other two, or at least reminiscent of them, and recalling them, the God of peace, who, through patience and consolation, through hope, and through many another gift, breathes the benediction of His own great tranquillity and unruffled calm over our agitated, distracted, sinful hearts. In connection with one of those previous designations to which I have referred, the Apostle has a prayer very different in form from this, but identical in substance, when he says the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. Is not that closely allied to the promise of my text, The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly? Is there any surer way of bruising Satan under a man's feet than filling him with joy and peace in believing? What can the Devil do to that man? If his soul is saturated, and his capacities filled, with that pure honey of divine joy, will he have any taste for the coarse dainties, the leeks and the garlic, that the Devil offers him? Is there any surer way of delivering a man from the temptations of his own baser nature, and the solicitations of this busy intrusive world round about him, than to make him satisfied with the goodness of the Lord, and conscious in his daily experience of all joy and peace? Fill the vessel with wine, and there is no room for baser liquors or for poison. I suppose that the way by which you and I, dear friends, will most effectually conquer any temptations, is by falling back on the superior sweetness of divine joys. When we live upon manna we do not crave onions. So He will bruise Satan under your feet by giving that which will arm your hearts against all his temptations and all his weapons. Blessed be God for the way of conquest, which is the possession of a supremer good!

But then, notice how beautifully too this name, the God of peace, comes in to suggest that even in the strife there may be tranquillity. I remember in an old church in Italy a painting of an Archangel with his foot on the dragon's neck, and his sword thrust through its scaly armour. It is perhaps the feebleness of the artist's hand, but I think rather it is the clearness of his insight, which has led him to represent the victorious angel, in the moment in which he is slaying the dragon, as with a smile on his face, and not the least trace of effort in the arm, which is so easily smiting the fatal blow. Perhaps if the painter could have used his brush better he would have put more expression into the attitude and the face, but I think it is better as it is. We, too, may achieve a conquest over the dragon which, although it requires effort, does not disturb peace. There is a possibility of bruising that slippery head under my foot, and yet not having to strain myself in the process. We may have peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation. Do you remember how the Apostle, in another place, gives us the same beautiful--though at first sight contradictory--combination when he says, The peace of God shall garrison your heart?

My soul! there is a country

Far, far beyond the stars,

Where stands an armed sentry,

All skilful in the wars.

And her name is Peace, as the poet goes on to tell us. Ah, brethren! if we lived nearer the Lord, we should find it more possible to fight the good fight of faith, and yet to have our feet shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.

The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet; and in bruising He will give you His peace to do it, and His peace in doing it, and in still greater measure after doing it. For every struggle of the Christian soul adds something to the subsequent depth of its tranquillity. And so the name of the God of peace is our pledge of victory in, and of deepened peace after, our warfare with sin and temptation.

Lastly, note the swiftness with which Paul expects that this process shall he accomplished.

I dare say that he was thinking about the coming of the Lord, when all the fighting and struggle would be over, and that when he said God shall bruise him under your feet shortly, there lay in the back of his mind the thought, the Lord is at hand. But be that as it may, there is another way of looking at the words. They are not in the least like our experience, are they? Shortly!--and here am I, a Christian man for the last half century perhaps; and have I got much further on in my course? Have I brought the sin that used to trouble me much down, and is my character much more noble, Christ-like, than it was long years ago? Would other people say that it is? Instead of shortly we ought to put slowly for the most of us. But, dear friend, the ideal is swift conquest, and it is our fault and our loss, if the reality is sadly different.

There are a great many evils that, unless they are conquered suddenly, have very small chance of ever being conquered at all. You never heard of a man being cured of his love of intoxicating drink, for instance, by a gradual process. The serpent's life is not crushed out of it by gradual pressure, but by one vigorous stamp of a nervous heel.

But if my experience as a Christian man does not enable me to set to my seal that this text is true, the text itself will tell me why. It is the God of peace that is going to bruise Satan. Do you keep yourself in touch with Him, dear friend? And do you let His powers come uninterruptedly and continuously into your spirit and life? It is sheer folly and self-delusion to wonder that the medicine does not work as quickly as was promised, if you do not take the medicine. The slow process by which, at the best, many Christian people bruise Satan under their feet, during which he hurts their heels more than they hurt his head, is mainly due to their breaking the closeness and the continuity of their communion with God in Jesus Christ.

But, after all, it is Heaven's chronology that we have to do with here. Shortly, and it will be shortly, if we reckon by heavenly scales of duration. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. The Lord will help her, and that right early. The Lord is at hand. When we get yonder, ah! how all the long years of fighting will have dwindled down, and we shall say the Lord did help me, and that right early, and though there may have been more than threescore years and ten of fighting, that, while we were in the thick of it, did not seem to come to much, we shall then look back and say: Yes, Lord, it was but for a moment, and it has brought me to the undying day of Eternal Peace.