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

**2 CHRONICLES-004. ASA'S REFORMATION, AND CONSEQUENT PEACE AND VICTORY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"2. And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God; 3. For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: 4. And commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. 5. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. 6. And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the Lord had given him rest. 7. Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought Him, and He hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered. 8. And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valour."*

*2 Chronicles 14:2-8*

Asa was Rehoboam's grandson, and came to the throne when a young man. The two preceding reigns had favoured idolatry, but the young king had a will of his own, and inaugurated a religious revolution, with which and its happy results this passage deals.

**I.** It first recounts the thorough clearance of idolatrous emblems and images which Asa made. Strange altars,--that is, those dedicated to other gods; high places,--that is, where illegal sacrifice to Jehovah was offered; pillars,--that is, stone columns; and Asherim,--that is, trees or wooden poles, survivals of ancient stone- or tree-worship; sun-images,--that is, probably, pillars consecrated to Baal as sun-god, were all swept away. The enumeration vividly suggests the incongruous rabble of gods which had taken the place of the one Lord. How vainly we try to make up for His absence from our hearts by a multitude of finite delights and helpers! Their multiplicity proves the insufficiency of each and of all.

1 Kings 15:13 adds a detail which brings out still more clearly Asa's reforming zeal; for it tells us that he had to fight against the influence of his mother, who had been prominent in supporting disgusting and immoral forms of worship, and who retained some authority, of which her son was strong enough to take the extreme step of depriving her. Remembering the Eastern reverence for a mother, we can estimate the effort which that required, and the resolution which it implied. But 1 Kings differs from our narrative in stating that the high places were not taken away--the explanation of the variation probably being that the one account tells what Asa attempted and commanded, and the other records the imperfect way in which his orders were carried out. They would be obeyed in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, but in many a secluded corner the old rites would be observed.

It is vain to force religious revolutions. Laws which are not supported by the national conscience will only be obeyed where disobedience will involve penalties. If men's hearts cleave to Baal, they will not be turned into Jehovah-worshippers by a king's commands. Asa could command Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law, but he could not make them do it.

**II.** The chronicler brings out strongly the truth which runs through his whole book,--namely, the connection between honouring Jehovah and national prosperity. He did not import that thought into his narrative, but he insisted on it as moulding the history of Judah. Modern critics charge him with writing with a bias, but he learned the bias from God's own declarations, and had it confirmed by observation, reflection, and experience. The whole history of Israel and Judah was one long illustration of the truth which he is constantly repeating. No doubt, the divine dealings with Israel brought obedience and well-being into closer connection than exists now; but in deepest truth the sure defence of our national prosperity is the same as theirs, and it is still the case that righteousness exalteth a nation. The kingdom was quiet, says the chronicler, and he had no war in those years; because the Lord had given him rest. 1 Kings makes more of the standing enmity with the northern kingdom, and records scarcely anything of Asa's reign except the war which, as it says, was between him and Baasha of Israel all their days. But, according to 2 Chronicles 16:1, Baasha did not proceed to war till Asa's thirty-sixth year, and the halcyon time of peace evidently followed immediately on the religious reformation at its very beginning.

Asa's experience embodies a truth which is substantially fulfilled in nations and in individuals; for obedience brings rest, often outward tranquillity, always inward calm. Note the heightened earnestness expressed in the repetition of the expression We have sought the Lord in verse 7, and the grand assurance of His favour as the source of well-being in the clause which follows, and He hath given us rest on every side. That is always so, and will be so with us. If we seek Him with our whole hearts, keeping Him ever before us amid the distractions of life, taking Him as our aim and desire, and ever stretching out the tendrils of our hearts to feel after Him and clasp Him, all around and within will be tranquil, and even in warfare we shall preserve unbroken peace.

Asa teaches us, too, the right use of tranquillity. He clearly and gratefully recognised God's hand in it, and traced it not to his own warlike skill or his people's prowess, but to Him. And he used the time of repose to strengthen his defences, and exercise his soldiers against possible assaults. We do not yet dwell in the land of peace, where it is safe to be without bolts and bars, but have ever to be on the watch for sudden attacks. Rest from war should give leisure for building not only fortresses, but temples, as was the case with Solomon. The time comes when, as in many an ancient fortified city of Europe, the ramparts may be levelled, and flowers bloom where sentries walked; but to-day we have to be on perpetual guard, and look to our fortifications, if we would not be overcome.