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

**2 CHRONICLES-022. JOSAIH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. 3. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. 4. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. 5. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. 6. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. 7. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem. 8. Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. 9. And when they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned to Jerusalem. 10. And they put it in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the Lord, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the Lord, to repair and amend the house: 11. Even to the artificers and builders gave they it, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed. 12. And the men did the work faithfully: and the overseers of them were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; and other of the Levites, all that could skill of instruments of musick. 13. Also they were over the bearers of burdens, and were overseers of all that wrought the work in any manner of service: and of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters."*

*2 Chronicles 34:1-13*

Another boy king, even younger than his grandfather Manasseh had been at his accession, and another reversal of the father's religion! These vibrations from idolatry to Jehovah-worship, at the pleasure of the king, sadly tell how little the people cared whom they worshipped, and how purely a matter of ceremonies and names both their idolatry and their Jehovah-worship were. The religion of the court was the religion of the nation, only idolatry was more congenial than the service of God. How far the child monarch Josiah had a deeper sense of what that service meant we cannot decide, but the little outline sketch of him in verses 2 and 3 is at least suggestive of his having it, and may well stand as a fair portrait of early godliness.

A child eight years old, who had been lifted on to the throne of a murdered father, must have had a strong will and a love of goodness to have resisted the corrupting influences of royalty in a land full of idols. Here again we see that, great as may be the power of circumstances, they do not determine character; for it is always open to us either to determine whether we yield to them or resist them. The prevailing idolatry influenced the boy, but it influenced him to hate it with all his heart. So out of the nettle danger we may pluck the flower safety. The men who have smitten down some evil institution have generally been brought up so as to feel its full force.

He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah--that may mean simply that he worshipped Jehovah by outward ceremonies, but it probably means more; namely, that his life was pure and God-pleasing, or, as we should say, clean and moral, free from the foul vices which solicit a young prince. He walked in the ways of David his father--not being one of the emancipated youths who think it manly to throw off the restraints of their fathers faith and morals. He turned not aside to the right hand or to the left--but marched right onwards on the road that conscience traced out for him, though tempting voices called to him from many a side-alley that seemed to lead to pleasant places. While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father--at the critical age of sixteen, when Easterns are older than we, in the flush of early manhood, he awoke to deeper experiences and felt the need for a closer touch of God. A career thus begun will generally prelude a life pure, strenuous, and blessed with a clearer and clearer vision of the God who is always found of them that seek Him. Such a childhood, blossoming into such a boyhood, and flowering in such a manhood, is possible to every child among us. It will still bring forth fruit in old age.

The two incidents which the passage narrates, the purging of the land and the repair of the Temple, are told in inverted order in 2 Kings, but the order here is probably the more accurate, as dates are given, whereas in 2 Kings, though the purging is related after the Temple restoration, it is not said to have occurred after. But the order is of small consequence. What is important is the fiery energy of Josiah in the work of destruction of the idols. Here, there, everywhere, he flames and consumes. He darts a flash even into the desolate ruins of the Israelitish kingdom, where the idols had survived their devotees and still bewitched the scanty fragments of Israel that remained. The altars of stone were thrown down, the wooden sun-pillars were cut to pieces, the metal images were broken and ground to powder. A clean sweep was made.

A dash of ferocity mingled with contempt appears in Josiah's scattering the dust of the images on the graves of their worshippers, as if he said: There you lie together, pounded idols and dead worshippers, neither able to help the other! The same feelings prompted digging up the skeletons of priests and burning the bones on the very altars that they had served, thus defiling the altars and executing judgment on the priests. No doubt there were much violence and a strong strain of the wrath of man in all this. Iconoclasts are wont to be violent; and men without convictions, or who are partisans of what the iconoclasts are rooting out, are horrified at their want of moderation. But though violence is always unchristian, indifference to rampant evils is not conspicuously more Christian, and, on the whole, you cannot throttle snakes in a graceful attitude or without using some force to compress the sinuous neck.

The restoration of the Temple comes after the cleansing of the land, in Chronicles, and naturally in the order of events, for the casting out of idols must always precede the building or repairing of the Temple of God. Destructive work is very poor unless it is for the purpose of clearing a space to build the Temple on. Happy the man or the age which is able to do both! Josiah and Joash worked at restoring the Temple in much the same fashion, but Josiah had a priesthood more interested than Joash had.

But we may note one or two points in his restoration. He had put his personal effort into the preparatory extirpation of idols, but he did not need to do so now. He could work this time by deputy. And it is noteworthy that he chose laymen to carry out the restoration. Perhaps he knew how Joash had been balked by the knavery of the priests who were diligent in collecting money, but slow in spending it on the Temple. At all events, he delegated the work to three highly-placed officials, the secretary of state, the governor of Jerusalem, and the official historian.

It appears that for some time a collection had been going on for Temple repairs; probably it had been begun six years before, when the purging of the land began. It had been carried on by the Levites, and had been contributed to even by the remnant of Israel in the northern kingdom, who, in their forlorn weakness, had begun to feel the drawings of ancient brotherhood and the tie of a common worship. This fund was in the keeping of the high priest, and the three commissioners were instructed to require it from him. Here 2 Kings is clearer than our passage, and shows that what the three officials had mainly to do was to get the money from Hilkiah, and to hand it over to the superintendents of the works.

There are two remarkable points in the narrative; one is the observation that the men did the work faithfully, which comes in rather enigmatically here, but in 2 Kings is given as the reason why no accounts were kept. Not an example to be imitated, and the sure way to lead subordinates sooner or later to deal unfaithfully; but a pleasant indication of the spirit animating all concerned.

Surely these men worked as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye. That is what makes us work faithfully, whether we have any earthly overseer or audit or no. Another noteworthy matter is that not only were the superintendents of the work--the contractors, as we might say--Levites, but so were also the inferior superintendents, or, as we might say, foremen.

And not only so, but they were those that were skilful with instruments of music. What were musicians doing there? Did the building rise with the sound

Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet?

May we not gather from this singular notice the great thought that for all rearing of the true Temple, harps of praise are no less necessary than swords or trowels, and that we shall do no right work for God or man unless we do it as with melody in our hearts? Our lives must be full of music if we are to lay even one stone in the Temple.