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

**2 KINGS-015. METHODICAL LIBERALITY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"4. And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the Lord, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord, 5. Let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance; and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. 6. But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house. 7. Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? Now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. 8. And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. 9. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord. 10. And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the Lord. 11. And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the Lord: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders that wrought upon the house of the Lord, 12. And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the Lord, and for all that wast laid out for the house to repair it. 13. Howbeit there were not made for the house of the Lord bowls of silver, snuffers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the Lord: 14. But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the Lord. 15. Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully."*

*2 Kings 12:4-15*

The sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God, says Chronicles. The dilapidation had not been complete, but had been extensive, as may be gathered from the large expenditure recorded in this passage for repairs, and the enumeration of the artisans employed. No doubt Joash was guided by Jehoiada in setting about the restoration, but the fact that he gives the orders, while the high priest is not mentioned, throws light on the relative position of the two authorities, and on the king's office as guardian of the Temple and official head of the church. The story comes in refreshingly and strangely among the bloody pages in which it is embedded, and it suggests some lessons as to the virtue of plain common sense and business principles applied to religious affairs. If the outward business of the house of God were always guided with as much practical reasonableness as Joash brought to bear on it, there would be fewer failures or sarcastic critics.

We note, first, the true source of money for religious purposes. There was a fixed amount for which each man is rated, and that made the minimum, but there was also that which cometh into any man's heart to bring, and that was infinitely more precious than the exacted tax. The former was appropriate to the Old Testament, of which the animating principle was law and the voice: Thou shalt or Thou shalt not. The latter alone fits the New Testament, of which the animating principle is love and the voice: Though I have all boldness in Christ to enjoin thee ... yet for love's sake I rather beseech. What disasters and what stifling of the spirit of Christian liberality have marred the Church for many centuries, and in many lands, because the great anachronism has prevailed of binding its growing limbs in Jewish swaddling bands, and degrading Christian giving into an assessment! And how shrunken the stream that is squeezed out by such a process, compared with the abundant gush of the fountain of love opened in a grateful, trusting heart!

Next, we have the negligent, if not dishonest, officials. We do not know how long Joash tried the experiment of letting the priests receive the money and superintend the repairs; but probably the restoration project was begun early in his reign, and if so, he gave the experiment of trusting all to the officials, a fair, patient trial, till the twenty-third year of his reign. Years gone and nothing done, or at least nothing completed! We do not need to accuse them of intentional embezzlement, but certainly they were guilty of carelessly letting the money slip through their fingers, and a good deal of it stick to their hands. It is always the temptation of the clergy to think of their own support as a first charge on the church, nor is it quite unheard of that the ministry should be less enthusiastic in religious objects than the laity, and should work the enthusiasm of the latter for their own advantage. Human nature is the same in Jerusalem in Joash's time, and to-day in Manchester, or New York, or Philadelphia, and all men who live by the gifts of Christian people have need to watch themselves, lest they, like Ezekiel's false shepherds, feed themselves and not the flock, and seek the wool and the fat and not the good of the sheep.

Next we have the application of businesslike methods to religious work. It was clearly time to take the whole matter out of the priest's hands, and Joash is not afraid to assume a high tone with the culprits, and even with Jehoiada as their official head. He was in some sense responsible for his subordinates, and probably, though his own hands were clean, he may have been too lax in looking after the disposal of the funds. Note that while Joash rebuked the priests, and determined the new arrangements, it was Jehoiada who carried them out and provided the chest for receiving the contributions. The king wills, the high priest executes, the rank and file of the priests, however against the grain, consent. The arrangement for collecting the contributions saved the faces of the priests to some extent, for the gifts were handed to them, and by them put into the chest. But, of course, that was done at once, in the donor's presence. If changes involving loss of position are to work smoothly, it is wise to let the deposed officials down as easily as may be.

Similar common sense is shown in the second step, the arrangement for ascertaining the amounts given. The king's secretary and the high-priest (or a representative) jointly opened the chest, counted and bagged up the money. They checked each other, and prevented suspicion on either side. No man who regards his own reputation will consent to handle public money without some one to stand over him and see what he does with it. One would be wise always to suspect people who appeal for help for the Lord's work and are too spiritual to have such worldly things as committees or auditors of their books. Accurate accounts are as essential to Christian work as spirituality or enthusiasm. The next stage was to hand over the money to the contractors, as we should call them; and there similar precautions were taken against possible peculation on the part of the two officials who had received the money, for it was apparently weighed out into the hands of the overseers, who would thus be able to check what they received by what the secretary and the high-priest had taken from the chest, and would be responsible for the expenditure of the amount which the two officials knew that they had received.

But all this system of checks seems to break down at the very point where it should have worked most searchingly, for they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to pay the workmen, for they dealt faithfully. That last clause looks like a hit at the priests who had not dealt so, and contrasts the methods of plain business men of no pretensions, with those of men whose very calling should have guaranteed their trustworthiness. The contrast has been repeated in times and places nearer home. But another suggestion may also be made about this singular lapse into what looks like unwise confidence. These overseers had proved their faithfulness and earned the right to be trusted entirely, and the way to get the best out of a man, if he has any reliableness in him, is to trust him utterly, and to show him that you do. It is a shame to tell Arnold a lie; he always believes us, said the Rugby boys about their great head-master. There is a time for using all precautions, and a time for using none. Businesslike methods do not consist in spying at the heels of one's agents, but in picking the right men, and, having proved them, giving them a free hand. And is not that what the great Lord and Employer does with His servants, and is it not part of the reason why Jesus gets more out of us than any one else can do, that He trusts us more?

One more point may be noticed; namely, the order of precedence in which the necessary works were done. Not a coin went to provide the utensils for sacrifice till the Temple was completely repaired. After they had set up the house of God in its state, as Chronicles tells us, they took the balance of the funds to the king and Jehoiada, and spent that on vessels for the house. A clear insight to discern what most needs to be done, and a firm resolve to do the duty that lies nearest thee, and to let everything else, however necessary, wait till it is done, is a great part of Christian prudence, and goes far to make works or lives truly prosperous. First things first!--it is a maxim that carries us far and as right as far.