Nehemiah - Commentaries by William John Hocking, Editor

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TEKOAH was a town some twelve miles south of Jerusalem. Here resided the “wise woman” who pleaded for Absalom (2 Sam. 14), and here lived the prophet Amos who herded cattle (Amos 1:1).

When the wall of Jerusalem was being restored in the days of Nehemiah, the inhabitants of Tekoah seem to have been especially zealous in co-operation. Their names are mentioned twice in the list of those engaged in this work (Neh. 3:5, 27).

But the nobles of Tekoah were dishonorable exceptions, conspicuous by their idleness. It is recorded of them that they “put not their necks to the work of their Lord.” The expression used is a significant one, and implies the idea of bowing the neck to receive the yoke of servitude. Its contrast is in the stiff neck and the hardened heart which are figures of that haughty, independent spirit which resents every call of authority outside itself. How often we see it displayed in the history of the nation of Israel! How often also it rises in our own hearts!

This proud spirit wrought in the hearts of these nobles of Tekoah. Their Exalted Mightiness’s looked down with no little scorn upon the band of stonemasons and laborers that were working so earnestly among the ruins of their beloved Zion.

Had they been bidden to do some great thing they would have done it. But really, they would be quite ashamed for their very “respectable” neighbors, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, to have found them carrying hods of mortar and chiselling stones to patch up broken-down walls. No, they could not let themselves down to such work as that.

Ah, well; He who had His eye upon the diligence of the son of the apothecary and the daughters of Shallum (verses 8,12) did not overlook the proud disdain of these grandees. We must leave them to Him.

As to ourselves, my beloved brethren, let us not be ashamed to be seen patching up the old walls that the enemy has broken down. See what breaches he has made! But even as Jerusalem, though desolate and ruined, was still the city of the Great King, so although the church of God is laid waste, it is still His house. Give a hand in repairing the walls, my brother. “Strengthen the things that remain.”

It is instructive to note what a number of these helpers did the piece of the wall over against their own houses. So now let us be jealous for the saints among whom we are found, that they are walking in the “old paths.” Remember the words of the apostle Jude when giving us counsel for apostate days, “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” Now, if ever, is the “time to build up,” the “time to gather stones together,” the “time to embrace,” the “time to keep” (Eccl. 3). And in order to do this we must keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 20, 21), for it is love that builds up (1 Cor. 8:1).

And let us not miss the lesson of putting not only our hands, but our necks to the work. Humility is the great requisite of the Christian servant. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” (See 2 Tim. 2:24, 25).

We are too often ashamed of the work the Lord gives us to do. We are afraid lest Tobiah should see us with the trowel and the plaster, building up tumble-down walls. But if the Lord set us the task, what then?