

# THE ROYAL BOUNTY

by Alexander Mckenzie

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*McKenzie's devotional work exploring the theme of God's generous provision and royal bounty toward His people, reflecting on divine grace and the abundance of spiritual blessings available to believers.*

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1. The Royal Bounty

## The Royal Bounty

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The Royal Bounty [Note:Reprinted by permission of Dr. Alexander McKenzie and the publishers, Houghton, Mifflin Co.] And King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own land, she and her servants.—1 Kings 10:13. The Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. She was amazed at all that she had heard, and delighted with all that she saw, and confest that after the generous rumors that had reached her in her distant home the half had not been told her. She brought her present to him, as was the custom of the times; and when she went away she asked a gift of him, and history says that the king gave her all that she desired; and that, having given her everything of which she had thought, he added something more of his own thought. He gave her this, not because she had desired it, but because he had desired it; not for her heart's seeking, but out of his heart's wishing to bestow. This is the simple record: "And King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." These last words describe the added gift, and this was doubtless the best of all; that upon which she would think with the greatest pleasure, and of which she would speak with the greatest pride. The word "royal" is well chosen, for we think of something which is great when we apply this term to it, as we speak of a royal deed, royal magnificence, royal benevolence, royal bounty. We readily approve the action of the king, for it is this excess of giving, beyond that which is demanded of us, which makes the real generosity. We are in the habit ourselves, so far as we are generous at all, of reaching beyond the real necessities and requests of our friends, and giving out of the largeness of our hearts. It is this excess which commands the high price. It is the added, extraordinary beauty of a painting which enhances its worth. Some pictures are sold by the square yard, and some by the inch. It is that which genius adds which is the royal bounty. It marks the difference between genius and talent. To be what we must, and to do what we must, is narrow and uninteresting. The man who is just, and no more, wins our praise for his integrity, but not our regard for his liberality. There are some men who would on no account have their measures in the slightest degree too small, but would be quite as careful not to have them too large. There is no reason why justice should not be combined with charity, and a strict regard for the legal demands which are made upon us with the excess out of a free heart which will make our justice beautiful. I saw in a fine country town a tall, graceful tree which cast its pleasant shade upon the path, and I marked that men had fastened upon it an iron frame which held a lamp that gave out its light upon the path. The tree was not the less a tree that it added the light, and the lamp was not less a lamp because it belonged to the tree. I came afterward and found that the bark of the tree had grown up around the iron where it was fastened to it, till the frame and lamp were fairly incorporated in the tree itself. It is easy thus to enlarge our life, adding beauty to strength, giving what our heart desires to give to that which Sheba asks at our hands. This thought is strongly expressed by St. Paul, "Scarcely for a righteous man," the man who does exactly what he ought to do, and nothing more, "will one die." Yet peradventure, for a good man, who does all he ought to do, and adds something because he wants to do it, some would even give their life. This man appeals to our

heart which is ready to respond. The best things are indeed only to be given in this way. They can not be bought. They can not be had for the asking; such things as confidence, and friendship, and courtesy, which no statute can demand, but which the royal heart delights to give; and there is a like royalty which is able to receive and prize the gift. This is God's way, to whom all life is but the expression of his heart. We rejoice continually in his bountiful goodness. What is the need of flowers? He could have made a strong and honest earth which would take in the seed and give it out in harvest, and thus we could live; but when He had made the earth substantial, useful as it is, He added flowers, because He wished to give them, was delighted to look upon them, and knew how happy we should be who saw them blossom by the roadside. There is no need of birds. The world would go its way, the seasons would follow one another, the sun would rise and set, the forest trees would reach up toward the clouds, without them. God made all this, and then filled the quiet woods with forms of beauty, and changed silence into songs. Even heaven itself has more than we should have looked for or asked for. We might have had a good delightful heaven, without pain or sorrow or sighing, without death, and such a heaven we have. But in the vision of the Apocalypse, which only dimly sees the heavenly reality, its streets are covered with gold, as it were transparent glass; its gates are pearl, and the strong walls, which can not be moved, glisten with jewels. So it might have been with the arrangement of this world. We might have had men to care for us, women to nurture us, fathers to work for us, a society whose process might move on with industry and safety from year to year. But God has added the richer delights of love and sympathy, of all that we name friend and friendship. It is in the same way that He frames His ordinances for us. We could have had all days alike, but when He had made six good days He added a seventh which should be wearied by no work, wherein the soul should be at leisure to live with itself in quietness, and worship God. He might have supplied all our wants in the course of nature, bringing His gifts to our door with regularity, and we should have lived our appointed time; but He does more than this. He lets us thank Him when we take our daily bread, and blesses the bread with the love which gives it. He even lets us tell Him what we wish, and to our wishes He gives patient heed. He might have left us to conscience and experience, in the light of nature to frame our character and our hope, but to these He has added the thought of other men, the revelation of His wisdom by His saints, the gift of His spirit to our spirit, to be in us a continual light.

There is a very good expression of God's way of dealing with us in a line of the twenty-third Psalm, "My cup runneth over." This seems unnecessary. To have the cup full, or a little less than full, is enough for us, and more convenient. For us, but not for God, who delights in filling it; and when we bid Him stay His hand, He keeps on pouring, and the water flows, till, presently, the cup is overflowing, but not because we thought to have it so, but because of His great delight in giving; until it would seem as if He could not stop, or content Himself with that which He has already bestowed upon us. Let this stand as a simple expression of His way with us. When we come upon anything that all good men approve, we may be very certain that we have found something which God Himself approves, and which is the method of His life. We like, among ourselves, this principle of the cup that runneth over. Our liking for it we have inherited from God. We might expect, therefore, that when the Son of God has His life in the world He will live by this rule, which is of heaven and of earth; and it is even so. His first miracle would seem unnecessary. There have been people who blindly but honestly wished that He had never wrought it. Why did He do it if there was no need of it, if it were even possible that it should be wrested from its meaning? He had gone as a guest to a wedding, perhaps because the bride was his friend, and there came that

grave calamity which would mar the feast; for presently it was whispered to Him, "They have no wine." Surely they could have a wedding without wine. Not that wedding. Not in the custom of that time. He knew that the bride, if she lived to be old, would never recover from the shame of her wedding-day, whose beauty was lost. Here was a necessity, in love, in kindness; and that the cheeks of this girl might not redden with shame, He reddened the water into wine.

He was at Capernaum. They brought to Him a sick man with the palsy. They broke up the roof, and lowered him to the feet of Jesus, who knew well what they wanted. He passed over the little thing which they sought, and, governed by His own feeling, not by theirs, he said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are sent away from thee." That was enough. In a few days, the man would be able to walk without His help. Death comes to the succor of cripples. The man gave no sign of discontent, but Jesus found that the friends were unsatisfied, and He thought within Himself, "You brought him here that he might be raised up, and be made able to carry his bed home. I have done a greater thing for him, but I will add this which you want." "Arise," He said, "take up your bed and go your way." He did the greater work which made the soul strong, and for the lesser work,—well, He threw that in. It was the royal bounty. There was a time later than that, after His resurrection, when some of His disciples had toiled all the night upon the sea, and had taken nothing. He could not have it a fruitless night for them. In the morning He was their risen Savior, who might well bestow some spiritual gift becoming to the resurrection. This He did, but He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the ship, and you will find what you have been seeking." They cast it, therefore, and drew it in, full of fishes, a hundred and fifty and three. This is the record of a fisherman, who wrote that the fish were large; and of an old man, who remembered the number of them. They drew their net to shore, and there was a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, another fish. When they had enough, one that was better than all was added. Have you not sometimes wished that you could have had that hundred and fifty-fourth fish? This was Christ's way all the while, and is His way still. He fills the net as full as it will hold, that our life may be sustained, and then He adds more, that His love may be gratified, and that which He adds is the "royal bounty." The work of our Lord was not merely in meeting the wants of men, but in creating the wants; not in gratifying their great desires, but in making their desires great. His own work in the world was twofold: to teach men how much more there was which they could enjoy, and how much more there was which He was eager to impart. The greater the desire, the surer it was that it would be met by His desire. Indeed, a large desire is necessary to wealth. We must look out toward that wherein our riches lie. "He who would bring home the wealth of the Indies must send out the wealth of the Indies." To him whose desires are allowed liberty there comes the answer of fulfillment from "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In all His life and in all His teachings we see vastly more than men ever asked, much more than they are willing to take even to-day. It has often been, as it was at the first, that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not"; but to those who received Him He gave all they wished, and more than they had thought; He gave the right to become the sons of God. They would have been content with a greater prophet, a bolder leader, a stronger king, a Messiah who should enthrone Israel and bring the nations in homage to its feet. He came bringing God to the world, giving an eternal liberty, erecting an everlasting kingdom. They wanted manna; He gave the bread of life. They wanted wells of water; He gave the well that should be within them, springing up for evermore. They wanted a leader; He gave a Savior. They wanted man; and He was God. This has continued even to our time. Many admire Christ because He was a teacher, neglecting that wherein He was infinitely more than teacher. They are glad of an example; He was that, but,

far beyond it, He was the life whereby righteousness became possible. There are those who would be content with His beautiful spirit, His blameless life, His deeds of charity, His patience, His submission, His consent to a death which He could not avoid. He offers to the world the spirit of the Eternal, the life of God to be lived upon the earth; He lays down the life which no man could take from Him; and, with all the roads leading from Jerusalem open before Him, walks with determined step to Calvary and the cross. Beyond that which has contented many in the world, He gave Himself, the world's Redeemer, the Lamb of God, the Good Shepherd giving His life for the sheep.

It is very, very sad to mark how ready we are to measure Christ's gifts to us by our narrow wants and limited desires; not by the greatness of His love, not by His exhaustless riches, not by the fulness of the grace of the Eternal, who is the Father and friend of all men. If ever we shall pass beyond the gratifying of ourselves, and allow Christ to gratify Himself in blessing us, we shall find in a glad experience what the simple words mean, "I am come that they might have life"—oh, friends, do not stop there, finish the sentence,—"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." We ask life of Him, and He gives us life, and offers length of days forever and forever. We pray that we may live; and we set up a goal at seventy or ninety years, when He draws no line across our path. "I give eternal life," He says. We pray for help that we may live; He offers more than that in the unrivaled sentence, "Because I live, ye shall live also." We think of life as being, and are content. We use existence as a synonym of living, but He said, "This is eternal life, to know God, and me." So for ourselves; we are to live as His disciples. We wish to be true, useful, and generous. We wish to do in small measure such things as He did,—in His name to give the cup of water, and the healing of the sick. He grants all that we desire, then speaks out of His own heart, and His desire, "The works that I do shall ye do, and greater works than these"; for the miracles which attract us or baffle us, which draw us to His love, or possibly turn us from His word, which are only miracles because they are strange to us, are to be exceeded in the things which we do, when by our teaching we open the eyes of men that they may see God, and lift them up to the ways of holy living, and raise them from being into life. Our visions of heaven in our reverent imagination, even in the exultant words of the Revelation, are not equal to the simple truths which He taught, and men learned to repeat after Him. For what are golden streets and jeweled walls beside that which He meant, "In my Father's house are many mansions." "I go to prepare a place for you." "Ye shall behold my glory." "Ye shall be loved as I am loved." The thought of Christ far outruns the aspiration of the world, as it comes to us from the lips of that disciple whom Jesus loved, "We shall be like him, for we shall see him even as he is."

What do we need, then? To enlarge our desires! Yes, but to consent to God's desires. To wish for more, but to consent to be blest as Christ longs to bless us. We must know the methods of God, whose will to give is greater and more constant than our will to receive. We must adjust our life to God's desire. Faith is the compact of the soul with God, rather than with itself. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," is a promise ever old and ever new. We must be firm enough and aspiring enough to hold the cup after it has begun to overflow, and to let God's hand pour the water of life as long as He will, for this world and all the worlds that are to be. If we could desire more, if we could ascend to God's desire for us, life would be transfigured.

"The balsam, the wine, of predestinate wills is a jubilant longing and pining for God."

“God loves to be longed for, He loves to be sought, For He sought us Himself, with such longing and love.”

We wish now to take this method for our own in all our dealing with God. Our sense of what is right, the voice of conscience, the commands of Scripture, call us to our duty. Let us do what they require till conscience is satisfied; but let us add to this more than a rigid obedience asks for, all that a loving heart, grateful and generous, wishes to bestow. The little questions of life, small matters of casuistry, minute affairs of conduct, would be quite readily determined if we would live by this rule, wherewith God blesses us. That question which with unusual urgency now presses upon us, how we shall regard the Sabbath day, would not be difficult if it were our delight to remember it, and to keep it holy because it is our delight to please Him who has given to us its sacredness and blessedness. It is pitiful when we find ourselves questioning how much of the day should be holy; how much of it should be given to the thought of God and the divine life; how much of it we should yield to the holy spirit of truth; how many of the hours we should keep in the remembrance of Him whose resurrection gives to the Sabbath its greater meaning. We should keep the Sabbath holy as if we desired to keep it holy. All its hours should be sacred. They need not be less joyous, less friendly, for being holy; and we can not be gratified with the spirit in which we find ourselves trying to divide the time. Keep twenty-four hours for God, and if by any means you can make the time overflow add a twenty-fifth hour.

We question again about money. What proportion of our property should we devote to God? The Jews said one-tenth. Can we do no better, after so long a time? Let us give the whole, and if by any means we can compass it, let us add another tenth, simply to show what a delight it is to give all things to Him, and to let Him make the allotment in His care for us, and for our household, and for the Church, and for the wide world that we are living in. There are many who do this, and they learn how true is that word of Christ that is called to mind among the Acts of the Apostles, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Thus, in all things let us make the way of God our own, become His children entirely, receive the love of Christ in its fulness, make up our own life in His name, according to the largeness of His thought. If we will consent to it, we can be great and rich and strong. It seems strange to say that we are not ready to be blest, but of many it is true. They are not willing to be greatly blest, to have the cup run over. They are willing to be useful, but not very useful. They ask to be set in His service, but when He takes their word and breathes His own desire into it, they shrink back. It is a very serious thing, if we are able to perceive it, to consent that God should bless us as He pleases, should have His own estimate of our character, His own measure of our powers, His own vision of our accomplishment, and should call us to greater service, to diviner employment, than we have ever dreamed of. It was a wise woman who said, “I have had to face my own prayers.” We face our prayers when God gives His own wish to our words, and makes them large enough to hold His thoughts. It is one of the hardest things to believe, but one to which, in humbleness of mind and in a faith which will not falter, we should consent,—that high word of calling and consecration which Christ gave more than once,—“As the Father hath sent me into the world, even so send I you.” Not our thought but His thought makes our calling, and the thought of God is the summons and the guidance of our life. Even so, even according to Thy greatness, and Thy gentleness which makes men great; Thine infinite purposes, and Thine eternal grace; even so, O Lord of mercy and of truth, send us into the world! As we close these thoughts, let us remember that promise which comes at

the close of the Old Testament, which almost seems to reverse the promise at the beginning of the Old Testament, "I will never open the windows of heaven and pour out a flood again"; for the last of the prophets brings to us the word of God, that He will open the windows of heaven, and pour out a flood again. It shall not come to destroy, but to preserve; it shall create life; it shall enlarge life, but it shall be after the measure of His will, not ours. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Not drops here and there, but showers of blessing. Not running brooks, but broad rivers. Not pools of water, but a shoreless sea; deep, deep waters, when, looking up into the infinite Love, and consenting to be blest of God as God would bless us, we bring all the tithes into the storehouse and the remainder of the tithes, if any have been left. "I will pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Not room enough to receive it; that is the royal bounty.

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