

## COMMUNICATIONS.

For the Colonial Churchman.

## SOURCES OF CHURCH PROPERTY IN THE EARLY AGES OF CHRISTIANITY.

## Essay 4.

That the Mosaic Statute with respect to tithes, was in force among the Jews during our Saviour's sojourn on earth, we learn from various passages of the New Testament. With the Pharisee, who is represented in one of our Lord's parables as having gone up to the temple to pray, it was a matter of self gratulation that he gave tithes of all his possessions. Luke xviii. 12. And it is brought as an accusation against the hypocrites that they "paid tithes of mint and cummin, and anise, and omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." Mat. xxiii. 23.

When the Romans conquered Judea, they forthwith according to the custom of the times, proclaimed themselves its masters, and reduced it into a Province of their vast empire. They imposed taxes upon the inhabitants, and appointed a scale by which their amount might be regulated according to circumstances. Hence in addition to the burden which the Mosaic ritual lay upon them for the purpose of continuing the worship of the true God in their nation, they were compelled to submit to the dictates of a conqueror, and to pay tribute to the Roman Government. An evident distinction is made by our Saviour between the contribution thus levied and those which were designed for several purposes. When a penny "was brought unto him, he saith to them, whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."—Mat. xxii. 19-21.

The Jews therefore in the days of Messiah continued to practise in some degree the pious injunction which had been imposed upon their forefathers by the laws and ceremonial of Moses. But from the passages just referred to and partly quoted, we may easily conclude that although the letter of the statute had been in every respect complied with, yet the disposition or feeling which accompanied the performance was not at all times of the right and legitimate kind. The self complacency which is ever the result of spiritual pride or blind security, prevailed in place of that lowliness of mind and contrition of heart, which best become men clothed with infirmity and sin.—The feelings of sincere devotion which had been anciently associated with an act of religious contribution, were totally lost sight of, and their place usurped by emotions and sentiments of a more unholy character. For this degeneracy and also for the general depravity of the national morals, the Jewish people were visited with a severe retribution in the destruction of their metropolis, and the total overthrow of their kingdom.

About the year 70 of our era, Titus, the son of Vespasian, was appointed to the command of the Roman forces, then in Judea, with a view to quell some rebellion which had been for some time threatening the peace of that country. The opposition which he met with, was of such a nature as to render it necessary for him to go to the utmost extremity. At length he crushed the energy of his opponents, besieged their city, took and destroyed their temple, and left Jerusalem, the pride and the glory of Mount Zion, a heap of smoking ruins. Since that disastrous occurrence, the Hebrew nation have to this day been wanderers on the face of the earth.

Hence therefore it may be said of tithes and offerings, and oblations, as well as of every other thing connected with the Mosaic dispensation, that "old things have passed away, and that all things are become new." For not a vestige of the law, nor of the people, remained in their ancient habitations. The Roman Eagle was every where triumphant; encouraging the growth of paganism and idolatry, and extinguishing for a season the pure light which shone for the guidance of the nations, among the descendants of Abraham.

In this state of things we cannot suppose that the first Christians, who, in the opinion of their political rulers, were identified with the Jewish nation, were permitted to retain much property of any kind. But notwithstanding the limited nature of their worldly possessions, and the many inconveniences to which their peculiar circumstances exposed them, they still found means to make such provision as was necessary for the support of the ministry, and for continuing the blessing of Divine worship amongst them. The methods by which they proposed to accomplish these ends may be learned from various passages of the New Testament, where it will be found that, in this as in all other cases, they shaped their conduct according to the circumstances in which they were placed.

1. The first mention of worldly possessions, that is made after our Lord's ascension, informs us that "all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need"—Acts II. 44, 45. The Apostles, and of course the disciples, on whom the duty of

the ministry devolved, being among the family of believers, were in the first instance, supported by distributions from this common stock or fund. And if we may judge from the case of Barnabas, which is recorded in Acts IV. 36, 37, it was well understood among the primitive converts, that their admission into the number of the faithful implied an oblation of all their worldly goods for the general benefit of the brethren. "And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas,—which is being interpreted, the Son of Consolation,—a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."

No doubt the first believers were led to the adoption of the above measure by the peculiar circumstances of their situation. At all events two very important ends would be accomplished by its operation. The poor amongst them would at all times be certain of obtaining a regular supply of food, and would thus become independent of their unbelieving friends and neighbours: and those who owned landed possessions, would escape confiscation of property should Government choose to take umbrage at their conversion to the new religion. But this latter consequence cannot be admitted as a reason for diminishing the merit of the oblation. The oblation on the part of the donor appears to have resulted from a sense of duty; and therefore deserves to hold a distinguished place among the good works in which Christians are called upon to excel. Hence the first Church property, that we read of under the Gospel dispensation emanated from contributions which were either voluntary, or rendered necessary, on the part of the donor, by a sense of duty or security.

2. From this common stock all believers appear to have been supplied without discrimination. This at all events is true of those who lived at Jerusalem. But when the Apostles went about preaching the word, and had penetrated into parts that were not so highly favoured, they found it necessary to adopt other measures to suit their peculiar position. They resorted among other measures to the plan of making daily contributions for the maintenance of such as were poor. This is distinctly stated in Acts vi. 1-3, and appears to be the reason why deacons were at first appointed. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." Now in order to make the supply of such daily distributions regular, and as little dependant as possible on passing contingencies, it was requisite that almsgiving should be observed as a high and important duty in the code of the Christian morality. Accordingly we find the Apostles, more especially St. Paul, impressing, with much earnestness, upon the minds of their converts the propriety of 'communicating,' with their poorer brethren, because 'with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Heb. xiii. 16. The practical result of the principle thus intimated, is exhibited in the readiness with which the Converts of Antioch sent relief to their distressed brethren at Jerusalem. "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." Acts xi. 29, 30.

It is unnecessary that I should here enlarge upon the duty, which led the first converts of the Gospel to contribute a share of their worldly goods for the support of the church. The principle which it involves is fully explained by the Apostle in II Cor. ix. 1-15. I. Tim. vi. 17-19. I. John iii. 17, and tends to shew that our chief business in this life should be, to 'lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.'

From the funds collected through the contributions of the believers a share seems to have been appropriated to the support of the ministry and the propagation of the Gospel. St. Paul writing to the Corinthians says:—"who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? I Cor. ix. 7. And as a further reason why they should make contributions for religious purposes, he refers in his second Epistle to them, to the support which enabled him first to come amongst them. "I robbed other Churches taking wages of them to serve you. And when I was present with you and wanted I was chargeable to no man, for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied." II. Cor. xi. 8, 9.

3. Hence therefore it may clearly be inferred that the ministry were supported by the contributions of the churches which had already been formed, whilst they were labouring in the formation of others. This is the general principle; although there may be some exceptions to it. Such is St. Paul's 'working with his own hands.' Necessity compelled him to adopt this alternative; and his example in this particular cannot therefore be considered as a general precedent. It is not the rule, but the exception to it. The general principle is that they, which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple; and that they which wait at the Altar, are partakers with the altar. I. Cor. ix. 13.

2. A further inference from the foregoing observations

is, that the contributions of first Christians cannot be said to have been altogether voluntary. If Pagans and heathens contributed to the support of the Christian church, then I should say, that they did so from their own good will and pleasure. But when one became a convert to Christianity, that very circumstance laid him under a positive obligation to render a share of his worldly goods for the cause of the Gospel: because simply this act, or the performance of it rather, is a positive duty enforced by the Christian morality. Hence therefore the term *voluntary* as applied to the contributions of Christians, is misapplied. For nothing can be voluntary that is inculcated as a duty; especially where the performance of that duty is considered as a proof not only of consistence of conduct but also of sincerity of profession. It would be well if those who talk and write about the *voluntary principle* of supporting religion at the present day, gave a little more of their attention to this view of the subject.

CRITO.

To the Editors of the Colonial Churchman.

Gentlemen,

The following remarks were addressed to those who mourned over the grave of a beloved child; and as this world ever presents a mingled scene of joy and sorrow, and as we are bid to weep with those that weep, they may afford at least a momentary consolation to others whose hearts are wrung with a like affliction.

New-Brunswick.

33 Psalm 6th Verse.—"Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long."

The Almighty does not afflict his children merely to make them miserable. He deals more kindly with us than the most affectionate of earthly parents. And though his ways are sometimes dark and mysterious, yet let us ever be persuaded that infinite wisdom cannot err.

Last we should be tempted to consider this world our home, our heavenly Father kindly admonishes us by various methods that we are but strangers and pilgrims here below. Are we beginning to reckon upon earthly happiness, are our hearts entwining themselves too closely around any earthly object? At a moment when we think not, that object is torn from our embrace. But is this any argument that our heavenly Father deals severely with us? No! his correction is the strongest proof of his love. In the case before us, the words of the Psalmist are literally verified, "Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long." A few short weeks and months, made up the sum of her brief existence. Of this little one it may be truly said, 'that she came up and is cut down like a flower.' The frost has nipt the tender blossom, and its leaves fall to the ground! But she falls not unwept! The tears of affection will flow. And God has not forbidden us to weep.

But let your grief be moderated by reason and religion. In this case you have not to mourn even as others without hope. You have every reason to rest satisfied, that the God who gave this little one into your arms, has taken it to himself, to make it eternally happy.

Do you weep because one of the dearest earthly ties is severed? Reflect that God knows best, at what time to separate the nearest connexions. Do you weep because her days have been so few upon earth? Alas! who can tell what might have been her portion, if her days had been prolonged? Though few were her days on earth, she will enjoy an eternity of happiness in heaven. And if we can be eternally happy, why lament that our own days, or the days of those who were near and dear to us, are cut short? She is taken before her soul was stained by any actual sin: and we believe that all original impurity was washed away in the laver of regeneration, when you dedicated her in baptism unto God.

Weep not then, for she has gone pure and clean. Weep not, for our blessed Saviour has said, that "of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

Let us remember that to ourselves our Saviour says, "except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

Except we turn from our evil ways, forsake our sins, and come unto him with the simplicity, the teachableness and innocence of children, we cannot be partakers of those joys, which are reserved in heaven for the righteous. Here is a lesson for us to give up all hypocrisy, fraud and deception. Here we are enjoined to put away from us all malice, contention and evil speaking; all pride, covetousness