

CHRISTIAN GIVING.

Under the Jewish economy offerings formed an essential element of worship, and minute directions were given to the people regarding the various offerings which they were to bring with them when engaged in the service of God. The proportion of their givings was two tithes, which, with other items, amounted to about one-third of their realized annual income. God being the political King of Israel, this sum included all taxation for civil and criminal purposes. These givings to the Lord were in accordance with the law, while the first tabernacle, which was erected according to divine directions, was made by the voluntary offerings of the people, in answer to the request by God, through Moses; and so liberal was the response, that Moses had to stay the people from giving. And we are informed, that when the sanctuary was completed it was filled with the glory of God, an evidence of His acceptance of their offering, and of His making it His dwelling-place.

It is reasonable to suppose that, as giving formed an essential part of worship under the old economy, it would also occupy an important place in the worship of God under the new economy.

The question might be asked, Why should giving form as important a part of Christian worship as prayer or praise? That throws us back on the purpose of Christian worship—on the institution of the Church of God. We all admit that the Church is a divine institution, that it was founded by God for wise and beneficent purposes—to be a memorial of His name to all generations—the conservator of true religion—the palladium of civil and religious liberty; but above all, the place where the Gospel is proclaimed, and where Christians are built up in the faith. As the Church of the living God is the place where He meets with His people, and where they receive fresh strength not only for the activities of life, but for its discipline and trial, and where their spiritual being is nurtured by divine grace and truth it is evident that the giving of money for the support of its ordinances, as well as for the poor, must form an essential part of Christian worship. If praise is offered to God, if prayer is presented to Him in the name of our Intercessor, if the Word is expounded as a means of conversion as well as a means of grace, the voluntary offering of His people for the support of the Gospel and the extension of His kingdom is, in like manner, acceptable to Him, as it is an evidence of the measure of our appreciation of His blessing. God thus confers the honour and the privilege on every Christian of contributing to the maintenance of His Church, and the extension of His kingdom. . . .

If prayer presupposes meditation, giving to God would demand our most thoughtful attention. We would be bound to consider our ways and means and the objects of our giving, and fix the amount to be set apart for the Lord's offering. Happily, a divine principle has been given us for our guidance in this matter—a principle as simple as it is beautiful—"Let every one give as God hath prospered him." The old system of tithes is abolished with the Jewish economy; the new principle of giving is inaugurated with the Christian dispensation. "Ye are not under the law, but under grace."

The more this principle is considered, the more will its wisdom be discerned, its adaptation to the infinitely diversified conditions of men, and its universality. "As God hath prospered you." A fixed amount was no doubt necessary for a nation under discipline, but it would be entirely foreign to the spirit of the New Testament, and would destroy the spiritual value. By such a principle God leaves it to ourselves to fix the amount in the light of His gracious providence towards us, and thus gives us the opportunity of recognizing Him as the source of our prosperity. . . .

We venture to say that if Christian giving were regarded in this aspect, it would tell on the amount given to God. You are, as it were, putting your givings into His hand. If Jesus Christ was present in person to receive your offering, would you give to Him personally what you are now contributing for the support and advancement of His kingdom? Although

unseen to human eye He still sits over the treasury of His house, and sees the rich casting in much, and the widow her all. "And He beheld *how*, not *what* they cast in." But there is also the treasure house of heaven, with its record of the givings of earth. Intimately connected with the principle of Christian giving, as an element of Christian worship, is the weekly offering: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." Dr. McKnight renders this passage: "Let each of you lay somewhat by itself, putting it into the treasury." And, according to this view, the disciples are commanded to place a weekly sum into the public treasury on the Lord's day, to be kept by *itself* against the apostle's arrival. This would prevent the necessity of any further contributions. A sum would thus be in readiness, which could at once be transmitted to Judea, and would be much greater than if contributed at *one time*. . . .

Having thus adverted to the principle and period of giving, I notice its universality. Let every one. The obligation to give is correlative with the membership of the church. The honour and privilege is conferred on all. There is neither favouritism nor partiality, so that the poor have the privilege as well as the rich of coming into the courts of God's house with their offerings. And when every one discharges this duty week by week, giving assumes its true place in the Christian Church, and the support of God's house is not left to impulsive spurts of generosity, but to the methodical liberality of obedient and grateful hearts.

A sum having thus been set apart and deducted from the weekly or annual income, the remainder is free for use. If this introduces the element of economy into your personal and domestic arrangements, you have so much less to live on, and, in numerous instances, self-denial is practised, rather than incur debt or intrench on the Lord's portion.

Mr. Gladstone, writing to the Secretary of the Systematic Beneficent Society, under date January 9th, 1865, says: "I think the object of the society (which I understand to be inducing men to give at least *some fixed proportion of their incomes*, such as their several cases may permit, to purposes of charity and religion) is one that may be legitimately adopted by all, especially by all Christians, with the greatest and most beneficial consequences. And although it is the religious character and effect of such a proceeding that has the first claim upon attention, I, for one, believe its results would be no less advantageous in a *social*, and likewise in an economical, point of view." . . .

If this principle of Christian giving were recognized, it would tell on the funds of the church, the schemes of the denomination, as well as on the spiritual life of the giver, and there would be less likelihood of our hearing the melancholy confession—"I never considered the principle of systematic and proportionate giving, I never regarded it as a Christian grace, nor recognized it as an essential part of Christian worship."

One of the advantages of placing Christian giving on a scriptural basis would be, that it could not by any possibility give offence to any one, because it is left to each one to determine the amount which he would give to God. The arrangement is made in the presence of God, and determined by the principle as "God hath prospered you." Your giving is not, therefore, regulated by what others give, but solely and entirely by the blessing of God. You will, I think, admit, that if this principle was universally adopted and acted on by every minister and member of Christ's churches, it would sweep away all questionable modes of raising money, which appear to be justified on the slender plea that the results justify the means. Money is obtained, therefore the means are allowable, but they may not be honouring to God, and if so, they will certainly not receive His blessing. I would notice, finally, that there is an inseparable connection between Christian giving and spiritual blessing, as there is between every petition of the Lord's Prayer and Christian duty.

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye

all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out (empty out) a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: and ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. iii. 8-12).—*D. M. W., in the Scottish Congregational Magazine.*

POOR PREACHING.

It would be hazardous to deny that there is some such preaching. And we will not hold a shield over the head of that man whose feeble faith, sloth or worldliness makes his preaching poor. But there are some causes of poor preaching not found in the preacher.

1. *A poor place of worship* is apt to make poor preaching. You cannot look round in some of the churches without suffering a chill morally, and a chill physically, if you enter them between November and April. Broken panes of glass or bad ventilation admit the wind, and the conflict that ensues between that and the generators of caloric, if there are any, is like that of him that cometh against ten thousand with an army of twenty thousand. Some of these places of worship are enormously large in proportion to the congregation. The preacher must encounter a frightful number of empty pews in search of a hearer. Then there are large tracts of uninhabited territory in the galleries. Cheerless wastes they are to a preacher. The exterior of the house never had an acquaintance with the paint brush, and looks dark and gloomy, as if frowning at such neglect. What wonder if you have poor preaching in such a sanctuary? This is but putting like and like together. The unhappy preacher studies his sermon with all the undesirableness of his forlorn place of worship stalking like gloomy ghosts before him. What wonder if their footprints are seen all over the sermon?

2. *Poor hearers* make poor preaching. Some come lingering and late, as if it were a drudgery to come at all. Numbers stop about the church door to chat about everything in the creation but religion, till the preacher's voice, commencing service, wakes them up to the fact that they are at the house of prayer. Some seek the most comfortable place in pews studiously accommodated for repose, and in the very face and eyes of the preacher take their leave of him in the total unconsciousness of deep sleep. Some not disposed of as the last named, examine with curious eyes every visible object but the speaker, and shew vast interest in every passing wheel, and the costume of every new comer. Now is there not some tendency in such things to make poor preaching; and would not a prompt and thorough-going reform, that should reach every one in the congregation, have some influence in giving a new inspiration to the preacher?

3. *Poorly paid* preaching is likely to be poor preaching. It shrivels a man up terribly to be straitened about his temporal support. If he must move in the hampered of all sorts of shifts and expedients to make the ends of the year meet he cannot sail free and joyously on the great sea of truth. He can only play the puny part of creeping along shore. With this kind of care upon his shoulders he cannot rise up to the stature and vigour of a giant. He is crippled and becomes a dwarf. His poor pay makes him feel poor. And it is in poverty of spirit that he undertakes a sermon. His thoughts will have a hue of poverty about them, and then he feels poorly prepared for the pulpit, and what can the result be but poor preaching? Take the lead from his wings, the care from his heart, by promptly paying and meeting all his wants. Give him the chance thus to spread his pinions, and see if his joyful and animated enterprise in his work does not stop the cry about poor preaching.

4. *The spiritual poverty* of the church is a fruitful source of poor preaching. Mind acts on mind. The glowing and animated minds of the saints are so many agents of powerful excitement to the preacher. Their