

place were often relieved by the alms of a wealthier neighbour. Out of this same fund the expenses of the messengers travelling from one Christian community to another had no doubt to be defrayed, besides many other things. Possibly with a view to relieve the pressure upon the fund, a spirit of hospitality is much encouraged in Scripture. A bishop was to be "given to hospitality," and the widow to whom preference was shown was to be the one who had "lodged strangers."

It is not, therefore, surprising that the first Christians were in the habit of devoting a very large proportion of their private property to the wants of the Society; that a landowner in Cyprus should be found to sell his land and give the proceeds to the Apostles, and that even an Ananias and a Sapphira should desire the credit of a like sacrifice to the great cause.

2. But if the system of "voluntary offerings" is an unquestionable duty laid upon all Christians, as we see it is, we are met by the further question, "On what principle shall we give?" And the answer we have ready to hand, "*As God hath prospered us.*" The system of tithes, *i.e.* of giving back to God a tenth part of what He gives to us, is as old as the Jewish religion. It became a regular recognised system in the Christian Church in the fourth century. Whether we thus give a tenth of our property to the special service of God, or whether, with the early Christians, we are not content without we give a great deal more, yet one thing we learn clearly from the words of our text—that our almsgiving, no less than our lives,

will be subject to a searching examination. Alas! how few, who in other respects live conscientiously, have ever learned "to lay by in store *as God hath prospered them.*"

But the offerings of the Christian are to be guided by another principle. He is to give "not grudgingly or of necessity." Nay, the condition of his alms going up before God is that it be a spontaneous and willing offering; otherwise, like Cain's sacrifice, God will not "have respect unto it."

There is still one further point to secure the acceptance of our alms—a point of such moment that our Lord gives it a prominent place in His sermon on the mount—the need of "secrecy." The Christian's alms to be worth anything before the throne of God are not to be done "before men to be seen of them" (S. Matt. vi., 1-3). They are to present a marked contrast to those of the worldling, who in effect sends a trumpeter down the streets to proclaim what he is going to do. They are even to be secret, that the left hand is not to know what the right hand has given.

3. Lastly, *when shall we give?* The Apostle answers, "*On the first day of the week.*" The time, at the week's end, when you settle up with your brother-man is the time to settle up with God also. If this is done regularly and conscientiously there will be little trouble in arriving at God's portion. There will be a growing disinclination to allow ourselves to run into debt, arising from an increasing sense of responsibility to God in these matters, and there will be an awakened sense of the peace of Sunday coming from the