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### Obligation and Measure of Christian Liberality.

For the Presbyterian Review.

THE duty of giving is something which in these days would seem to require no proof. It is a duty which is admitted by almost every one, giving to God of our substance seems to be a duty wrought into the very constitution of man. The people of heathen lands have from earliest times, been accustomed to offer to their Gods their best and costliest gifts, and in the heathen temples to-day gifts of the rarest value are brought and offered to these "unknown gods whom they ignorantly worship."

Indeed there seems to be only one class who fail to recognise their duty in this regard—a class around our own doors,—who for reasons, which it is not within my present province to discuss, have cut themselves off from the truest and holiest inspiration and live in utter disregard of the presence and power of the God of Israel.

The duty of giving does however rest especially upon us who claim to be among Gods redeemed children, and the word of God has given us sufficient instruction not only as to the *obligation* resting upon us, but also as to the *measure* of our liberality.

Let us learn then from Scriptures what our obligation is; and the first ground upon which we base our proof is, that God is the *Author and Possessor of all things*. It is rather difficult to remember this fact; as we are fond of thinking of things as if they belonged absolutely to ourselves. We like to say "our own property," "our own gold and silver," and while between man and man, there is ownership, and property may be held, yet the Holy Scripture makes the relation between God and man very clear. "All the earth is mine," is the Creator's claim, and He asserts His rights one by one to each and every, of those things which man prizes most, "Sanctify unto me all the first born among the Children of Israel both of man and beast it is mine."

Of the Land of Canaan, the land of so many promises—the land hardly obtained after travel and toil and warfare, he said, "and the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine."

"Every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, Saith the Lord of Hosts." In the New Testament we find the same Universal claim made and acted upon, John tells us "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that

hath been made." In many ways did Christ endeavor to show His absolute right to the things of this world. By the parable of the talents, He sought to impress the truth on mankind, that to Him belonged all and we only held them as His stewards. Even upon man He holds a claim. "Come and follow me," did He say, asking them to leave everything in which they were engaged and devote all their time and their energies to Him, their rightful master. This was not asked as a favor but as a right, for "ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price."

The second ground that we would suggest is that *God is the disposer of all things*. This follows directly from what we have just said. If God owns all things, surely no one would dispute his right to dispose "according to the counsel of His own will." As an earthly owner has a right, in placing a steward over his property, to restrict him and to place him within certain limitations, so it is reasonable to expect that God has the same power; and not only so, but to withdraw His gifts and privileges in whatever way He pleases.

Has not this been the lesson He has impressed upon the world from the very beginning?

He created, so was He able to destroy. The world and the inhabitants thereof did He destroy, by a flood, saving only eight souls.

With fire from Heaven did He blot out the wicked inhabitants of Sodom.

To Abraham did He give the command to leave his country and his home, and go to a country of which he knew not, was not all the wealth of Lot left behind in Sodom?

Job in one day lost servants and substances, sons and daughters, yet he only said "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Again Scripture teaches us that we are merely *stewards towards God*.

Man has ever been reminded of this: When God placed our first parents in the Garden of Eden, it was not given over to them to use as they wished; they were "to keep it and dress it." The fruit of the fairest tree and the seventh part of the trees were hallowed.

To every one does God give talents of gold and silver, genius, ability for different things, and He says "occupy till I come," "that at my coming I may receive mine own with usury." The tendency of the human heart is to forget God and say "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth," and we see God's wise check put upon mankind by demanding that for His own special glory and service a portion of that which in His bounty He has bestowed on man be reserved. These are some of the indirect grounds upon which the obligation rests. Besides these we have the *plain command of God from the beginning*.

Among all nations, the universal custom has been to give unto God a certain part of their substance. This custom has been observed not only among enlightened people, but even among those in the darkness of superstition and ignorance. This in itself may not indicate very much in the line of that which we are endeavoring to show, as the very ignorance and superstition of some might lead them to offer gifts to appease the wrath of some power which they felt to be higher than themselves. But the fact of the universal custom