

"SOME RULES OF CHRISTIAN GIVING."

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DRIVE along some country roadside in a month's time from the present will reveal to us a very great difference between fields that are now being sown, some with wheat, some with other grain; and the difference will illustrate the characters of the men that sowed these fields. You will see, perhaps, on one side of you, fields where the man going over the surface of the ground cast with a generous and liberal hand the seed that he had in his bag at his side. Then, perhaps, you can look at the other side of the road, exactly opposite this very field, and you will infer that the man who went over this surface scattered his seed with a sparing, ungenerous hand, and, as you glance on this side and on that, the man on this side and the man on that will illustrate the words of the wise man who said, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." Prov. xi. 24. On some such fact as this, St. Paul based these telling words, "This I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully," II. Cor. ix. 6; and upon the truth of this he constructs what follows: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." Thus it comes to pass that our great apostle gives us the two main laws which govern the matter of Christian giving which we have before us this evening: (1) The law of quantity and degree, as in the words I have just quoted. (2) The law of quality and of kind, as in the words in the Epistle to the Galatians, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," Gal. vi. 7. Passing from the agricultural into the spiritual realm, he leaves us to find out for ourselves, 'mid a thousand illustrations by which we are surrounded, the working of these two great laws. Now, forasmuch as Christianity is the complement of Judaism, its extension, consummation, and development, it may not be out of place for us for a moment, before passing on to the question of Christian giving, to say a word or two concerning the earlier dispensation. As is well known, the practice amongst the Jews was to give a tenth. Before any legislation on the subject, we have early reference to tithe-giving in the story of Abraham, who was returning from the slaughter of the kings, and who gave a tenth of the spoils that he had to Melchisedec, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. (See Gen. xiv. 18-20, and Heb. vii. 2.) We have also the case of Jacob vowing his vow, viz.,

"That of all God should give him, he would surely give a tenth back to God," Gen. xxviii. 22. This early practice, which must have rested upon a preceding revelation as to God's will in this connection, as one that later became crystallized in the legislation of Jehovah, and thus we find it written in Lev. xxvii. 30, "All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord." And again, Lev. xxvii. 32, "Concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." Here, then, are the duties of this practice; and when it fell off at the time when the national life was declining, we find a scathing rebuke of Jehovah uttered through His prophet to His people (in the last of the minor prophets, the prophecy of Malachi iii. 8, 9). It begins by a solemn question that the Lord God asked, "Will a man rob God?" and if the people answer, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" Jehovah's answer is ready, "In tithes and offerings," and the next verse speaks of the awful curse that rests upon them for robbing God, "Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation"; and so when the Pharisee stood by himself in the temple, and lifted up his eyes unto heaven and said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." Amongst those good deeds that he boasted of was this: "I give tithes of all I possess, I give tithes of all my increase" (Alford, cf. Dent. xiv. 22, 23), or as the Revised Version gives it, "Tithes of all I get," St. Luke xviii. 12. But the Christian offering—for this, after all, is what we are most concerned in, in this year of grace 1895—the Christian's offering rests not upon hard and fast and iron law. Alas, that so many people take advantage of this fact that it does not rest upon a law as it did with the Jews. But what does it rest upon? It rests upon that which is higher than law, even as Christianity transcends Judaism. It rests upon principle. It rests upon love. It is meant to reflect the noblest example of giving that all history has ever seen or known. Let us understand that this plane is higher than the plane of the Jewish law. Let us understand that it is higher because Christianity is the greater, more splendid revelation of the greater life; that Christianity is the greater revelation of the greater gift; that Christianity is the greatest revelation of all, that of the life of God, the life of Christ. God does not say to us, You must give a certain proportion; you must give so much, or you are cursed, as He said to the Jew; but He says to us, "Give freely, since freely ye have received"—a fuller, a larger utterance. Now, let us take one or two passages out of the New Testament, and see the working of the principle upon which all Christian giving must proceed.

(To be continued.)