

THE  
**COLONIAL CHURCHMAN.**

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. . . . . Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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*For the Colonial Churchman.*

**CHURCH PROPERTY.**

Essay I.

The dedication of some part of our worldly goods to the service of God appears to have been, from the earliest period, an essential concomitant of true religion. Whether the oblation might be considered as a free-will offering or the effect of statutable enactments, on the part of the sinners, the end, or the object in view, seems to have been invariably the same; namely, the glory of God and the preservation of his worship in the world.

As long as the ministry of the world is committed to the care of mortal men,—or as the Apostle calls them in this capacity—'earthen vessels,' themselves compassed with many infirmities, and subject to the various wants and necessities, which have ever been inseparable from human nature since the fall,—as long as this is the case, so long must the promotion of the Gospel, and the exercise of the Gospel ministry be commensurate with the degree of worldly support, which the devotion of believers may prompt them to contribute to such worthy objects. Were those to whose hands 'the heavenly treasure' has been entrusted, endued with superior qualifications and enabled, like angels, to subsist without bodily sustenance, and to administer to the spiritual rites and necessities of men, there might be less need for the observance of such customs and ordinances as have for their object the support and preservation of religion. There might be fewer offerings, fewer oblations, and fewer donations made at the altar of God: the spiritual interests of humanity would, on this hypothesis, be still subserved in every essential particular. But experience teaches us that there has not been, and cannot be, under the present constitution of things, such a pure and perfect administration of the word of life, exhibited in this lower state of existence. The worship of God therefore, committed to the agency of mortals, must always depend in a great degree, for its continuance, among the sons of men, on the temporal support of the faithful.

This appears to be a universal proposition: there is no exception to it. Accordingly we find that, under every dispensation of God to man, a principal part of Divine worship consisted in an offering or oblation of worldly goods. In the first account, which the Bible records, of a religious ceremony, we read 'that Cain brought of the first of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof.' There is not the least doubt that the circumstance here recorded had been the effect of a divine command: although the sacred historian does not mention it. For we cannot conceive a more rational method of accounting for the existence of 'skins' of which coats had been made for Adam and Eve, before their expulsion from the Garden, than to state that the animals to which they belonged had been slain for the purpose of sacrifice. Consequently we argue that the institution of sacrifice, and the command which rendered necessary an oblation from Cain and Abel, were alike of divine origin.

The practice, which was thus instituted, and based upon the authority of God, appears to have been observed among his true servants during the period which elapsed between the creation and the flood. Immediately after that catastrophe, the first care of Noah was to 'build an Altar unto the Lord,' and to make thereon such offerings and oblations as were conformable to the practice of his

ancestors, and the divine command. This sacrifice was so acceptable to God that it drew down a blessing upon the whole earth, and a promise that it should never be destroyed again by water.

The same custom, we have reason to believe distinguished the worshippers of the true God, in the subsequent periods of history; and very probably served as a mark by which they might be known from the corrupt and wicked generations by whom they were surrounded, however scattered and distant from each other their habitations might have been, still worship by sacrifice, pointed them out as servants and followers of the true Father of heaven and earth, and was a sign of recognition and a bond of affection amongst themselves. Hence we perceive that Melchizedec, although apparently unconnected in any way with the family of Abraham, was yet recognized by that illustrious patriarch, as 'a priest of the most high God,' and received 'tithes of all' the spoil which had been taken from the fugitive kings. Gen. xiv. 18.

From this circumstance may be evidently deduced the following conclusion: namely that the custom of dedicating tithes to the service of God, must have been instituted previously to the days of Abraham. We here read that he gave to Melchizedec tithes of the tenth part of all that he had, or most likely of all the spoil he had. And we cannot conceive why they should pay tithes of the spoils, if they had not previously been in the habit of paying tithes of other things.

The second mention of tithes or tenths and the first specific dedication of them to God are to be found in Gen. xxviii. 22. Jacob vowed a vow, a part of which is this declaration. And this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.' Josephus's words in relating this vow imply that Jacob vowed to give the tenth of all his income to God for the maintenance of burnt sacrifices, and perhaps for the relief of the poor: there being as yet no regular order of priesthood, who were dependent on that source for their support. Mr. Selden indeed is of opinion that the vow must have had reference to Isaac, who, according to the Patriarchal economy, was then priest of the family. It may have had such a reference; and Isaac may have received the tithes; but there is no proof beyond a rational conjecture, and after all the matter is of but little consequence.

It seems then to have been a practice among religious people, in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to set apart a tithe or tenth portion of their increase for the service of God. By what course of reasoning, or by whose authority, they were led to limit the moiety to be devoted to sacred purposes, at the tenth part, and not at the fifth or the sixth, we cannot very easily or very satisfactorily determine. Some imagine that the custom may have arisen from the Hebrew mode of enumeration. For they, like ourselves, had adopted the number ten as the radix of their arithmetical scale: or as an eminent commentator phrases it—'this is the end of lesser numbers and the beginning of greater.' But notwithstanding this it is, after all, extremely probable that the patriarchs in this, as well as in every thing else that related to religious worship, were guided by some divine ordinance, though it be unnoticed by the sacred penman. At all events it is very certain that Gentiles paid, even in those early days, tithes or tenths to their kings. For it appears from I. Sam. viii. 15. 'And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vine-

yards, and give to his officers and to his servants'—it appears from this that tithing formed a part of the *Jus Regium* among the Eastern nations. Aristotle tells us that it was an ancient custom—*polites nomos*—or rather an ancient law under the Babylonish Monarchy. And Dr. Spencer, in his learned work on the Hebrew ritual and legislation iii. cap. x. satisfactorily shows that it formed a fundamental article in the constitution of the ancient Athenian Commonwealth. Others too have proved that the same law prevailed among the ancient Romans.

From collecting these particulars under the general head of Church Property, it will be perceived that I use these words in their most extensive signification; applying the term 'property,' to whatsoever has been dedicated to God for purposes of worship, or as an expression of grateful devotion; and using the vocable 'Church,' to point out under one general term the different dispensations, under which the divine will has from time to time been made known unto men. I will continue to attach this extensive signification to the terms in question throughout my next Essay.

CRITO.

*For the Colonial Churchman.*

**FAMILY DEVOTION.**

No. 2

MESSRS. EDITORS,

The Holy Scriptures describe the nature, success, and design of Prayer, in very few words—but those full of comfort and encouragement—*Ask and receive that your joy may be full*—In your last number the duty of family prayer was considered and it appeared, that thus to assemble in the name and presence of God for the purpose of imploring His grace and Providential care, was an indispensable duty. It is also one of the many solemn privileges we enjoy as rational and dependant creatures, as will be seen now that I continue the extract from the Periodical before alluded to.—Family prayer is a privilege as well as a duty. It has been truly remarked, that 'the aged and the young, the parent and the child, the master and the servant, on their knees before the God of heavens, and in the presence of each other, forgetting, for a while, the one his inferiority, the other his preeminence, and only remembering so much of their mutual relation to each other as may unite them more closely in supplication to their common Father; such a group, and such an occasion, must kindle zeal in the most languid bosom, and communicates warmth and spirits to the coldest heart.' Like the chamber of the dying Christian, this scene is 'privileged beyond the common walks of life.' The Most High will not disdain to visit such a habitation. 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.' 'Them that honour me, I will honour.' And surely the children of such a family will not lose their portion of the hereditary blessing. 'Their sons shall grow up, as the young plants, and their daughters be as the polished corners of the temple.'

But the advantages of this venerable custom deserve to be more fully stated. Most of them may be comprised under religious instruction—domestic government—family union—and public peace. That it is the duty of the Christian to convey religious instruction to the several members of his household, cannot admit of a doubt. And surely no general medium of communication for this pur-