

once that it thus improves the exchequer, it impoverishes it a hundred times. It is difficult to see on what principle this relative graduation of our benevolence can be defended. We are forbidden to measure our morality by that of our friend and neighbour. Before we determine the degree of sobriety we mean to observe, we do not first ascertain how much wine he drinks each day; nor do we think it right to regulate our honesty or truthfulness by his, modestly resolving to be a little more under the mark than he, lest we should be supposed guilty of presumption. And if benevolence be, in a world like this, as binding an obligation as justice—so binding indeed that he that shutteth up his bowels of compassion against his brother hath not the love of God—whence have we received the authority to restrict its outflow by considerations of a purely relative and conventional character? There is a weak and ensnaring fear on the part of too many, to confront fairly their individual obligation in the presence of a conscience that derives its illumination from heaven. And yet in giving, as in every other thing, to our Master we stand or fall; and the only conduct which becomes us as men of intelligence and piety is that which in the sight of our God and Saviour honestly and courageously takes full account of our means, and then, examining the claims of each appeal as it comes, allots to it its due share. If the light of that judgment which we are so soon to face were only seen to rest, as it does indeed rest, on all the paths and purposes of our life, upon our givings and receivings, a wonderful impulse would be given to our beneficence. The liberality of many would be increased a hundredfold. The plea, “I cannot afford,” which, by its flippant and audacious trifling with the truth, has astonished both heaven and earth, would not be heard once where now it is heard but too often. We have no faith of ever seeing the finances of our various institutions rising into a position of unfluctuating prosperity, until an enlightened conscience is made the chancellor of a man’s exchequer. He will see to it that nothing enters there, any more than into heaven, that defileth; and he will see to it that nothing remains there which has a mission elsewhere. He will often dole out with a firm hand large sums, which will make a heinous selfishness whisper that he is too lavish; and to all timid counsels, come they from what quarter soever, he will have but one answer—“I must give as God has prospered me; not more, lest I should be dishonest to man; not less, lest I should be dishonest to God.” When this becomes the case, we shall have seen the last of that curious and obstructive class of men who, with a vexatious eye for faults, have never yet seen the society or project which has been deemed worthy of their liberality. Whatever plan of usefulness is framed is wrong in its principle, or in its details, or in its originators, or in its supporters, or in its mode of working, or in the time of its formation. And as such persons will not devise any scheme of their own which is likely to secure the approval of any second man of ordinary sagacity, their generosity is doomed to incessant disappointment. My brethren, truth demands that we tear the mask from the face of this evil spirit. It is not generosity, but covetousness, which is idolatry, and which can have no part in the kingdom of heaven.

May the Lord pour out upon this assembly, and on all the churches here represented, the spirit of consecration, which is the spirit of Christ. Without this, in vain will be our polity, and in vain will be our creed. With this, we are ready, God keeping us, for all that the age demands at our hands. May the Holy Spirit bless us with the true anointing, the anointing which gives light to the eye and love to the heart. May we feel and speak as if we saw ourselves encompassed with a great cloud of witnesses, among whom are the spirits of the just made perfect, an innumerable company of angels, Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and God the judge of all. May we abide together for a season, in peace and joy, and with hearts strengthened by communion with each other and with our Saviour. And when we part from each other, may we go to our various scenes of labour, impelled by this one purpose, at once a necessity and a privilege, “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; for the night cometh, when no man can work.”