

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP.

An address delivered at the Elgin Association by Mrs. Laidlaw.

The message of this paper has an interest for you, Christian hearer, whether you are, or are not rich in this world's goods. To you there come the gracious words, "Come out from among them and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be *my sons and daughters* saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18). Upon you rests a Father's claim. His message to you by His Son is, "Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, *hoping for nothing again*: and your reward shall be great and ye shall be called the *children of the highest*." (Luke vi. 35). The claim is upon you and it is upon your property. You recognize His right; you recognize your obligation: for God's claim on His children children's property needs only to be affirmed to be believed. He has created us, as well as this beautiful world, and he has not given up His sovereign right to all that his hand has made. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof: the world and they that dwell therein" (Ps. xxiv. 1). "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. i. 10). "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts" (Hag. ii. 8).

Not only is *His ownership* thus asserted but likewise *our stewardship*. Property and riches are from the Lord and are ours only to use. "Every man, also, to whom God has given riches, and wealth, and hath given power to eat thereof, and to take his portion and rejoice in his labor, *this is the gift of God*" (Eccl. v. 19). We are but stewards and are entrusted with our Lord's money. "Occupy till I come" (Luke xix. 13), are words of temporary committal. We hold possession as they that give account. We are not trading with our own, for the business of life is carried on with borrowed capital and success in that business is owing to Heaven's blessings. "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich" (1 Sam. ii. 7). A truth so often repeated in the revealed Word is surely significant. "Children" should be as much concerned for the use of, as for the attainment of a Father's gifts.

Consecration is an essential truth in the Divine economy. Favor confers responsibility. Consecration is not only of what we are, but of what we have. A setting apart of persons and possessions; not a partial transference, but entire and perfect renunciation. Consecration has largely lost its old significance: it was not so much a making over sacred, as a devotement, a making over to sacred use; and this, based not so much on law as on a recognized relationship. The idea of consecration is as old and widespread as the race. Earliest Scripture history records examples. Cain brought of "the first fruits of the ground" an offering unto the Lord, and Abel of

the "firstlings of his flock" (Gen. iv). The first impulse of Noah after his deliverance was to make offerings unto the Lord (Gen. viii. 20). The first mention of devoting to God a certain proportion of one's property was Abram's offering. "A tenth of the spoils" to Melchizedek, by virtue of his office as the Priest of the Most High God (Heb. vii. 4; Gen. xiv. 20). In like manner Jacob pledged himself to devote to God a tenth of all his income (Gen. xii. 12). The origin of these religious rites which were prior to the Law is unknown, but it is evident they were accepted as they were afterward required by express precept.

Again, consecration was the prominent feature in the Jewish life; with the growth of the nation, principles were formulated into laws. Precepts engraven on the heart were to be written on the statute book. The thing to be emphasized was Israel's relation to God. "I have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." A passive recognition was not enough, but consecration was demanded, and the command "to sanctify" extended to almost everything. The Israelites gave "the tithe" of the whole produce of the soil, for the maintenance of the Levites was but a small part of his contribution to religion (Deut. xiv. 28).

A ransom was paid for the first born male of every family and of the flock. The first fruits of the year was offered to God (Ex. 34). When the fields were reaped the corners were left untouched, that a remnant might be left for the poor; and whatever dropped from the hand was not gathered (Lev. xix. 9, 10). Every seventh year all that the land produced was common property (Ex. xxiii. 10, 11), and in this year all debts were remitted (Deut. xv. 1, 2). The half shekel for the sanctuary was a regular requirement (Ex. xxx. 31). The numerous offerings were an additional expense, and at the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem no one was to appear before the Lord empty (Ex. xxiii. 15). It has been estimated that the devout Jew gave to the support of religion and the relief of the poor, not less than one-third of his income.

When the tabernacle was to be reared an appeal was made for "willing" offerings, and the response was so liberal that "the people were restrained from bringing" (Ex. xxxv. 5; xxxvi. 6). When preparation for the building of the temple was being made a like liberality was shown and "the people rejoiced for that they offered willingly" (1 Chron. xxix. 9). The prayer of David makes manifest the deep spirit of consecration impelling the people. "For all things come of Thee and of thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chron. xxix. 14). We notice again that the gospel of Christ breathes the same spirit of individual consecration. Christ taught, that men must give up all to follow Him. Fatherly care in the smallest details of life is taught and the precept