

But we have other testimony no less ancient, in proof of the application of a tenth of their possessions by mankind to sacred and other public purposes. The practice prevailed amongst the Carthaginians, the Arabians, the Greeks, the Romans, and even earlier nations. These peoples were accustomed to bestow a tenth of spoils captured in war, on a successful general. A tenth, too, of commercial profits was sometimes dedicated to a particular Deity. At other times, a king was the chosen recipient of a tenth of the property of certain of his subjects. Abraham, therefore, in paying tithes to Melchisedec, was but following a custom which existed in the nations around him ; the result, no doubt, of some common tradition. Indeed, the offering to religion of money, of the fruits of the field, and of the increase of the flock, may be said to be instinctive in the human race ; to be, as some would prefer to express it, a principle of natural religion. There never was a time in which men did not recognize the responsibility of acknowledging by religious gifts, the Kingship and bounty of the Creator ; neither was there ever a nation or people so ignorant or debased, as not in some form or other, often rude and even savage, to surrender to the ends of what they called religion, a portion of their substance. Long before Solomon reduced it to words, the principle embodied in this requirement was recognized by the universal human mind : " Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase."

The legislation of Moses elaborated this ancient practice, impressing it not only with a Divine sanction, but also with a fixed proportionate distribution. That which had previously been somewhat elastic in its operation, became under Moses, compulsory—a *law*, to transgress which was to sin against the God of Israel. Tithes under the Levitical dispensation constituted the one source of ecclesiastical finance. From the tenths of the people, the elaborate and costly sacerdotal system of the Jews, including the whole machinery of its gorgeous temple-worship, was maintained. From a like source, the poor of the nation were provided for. One-tenth did not suffice for both these objects ; so two-tenths were devoted by the Jews, under Divine direction, to religious purposes.