

affecting narrative touch their hearts, or an eloquent appeal fire their souls, and then they give freely, perhaps generously; but their gift is a matter of bounty constrained by present emotion, and not the result of a deep and abiding conviction of duty. But if according to our doctrine, giving is an act of worship, then it is a binding obligation. It is as much a duty to give as it is to pray; and the obligation neither of the one nor the other can be evaded, if he who never prays is a reprobate, can he be a christian who neglects or refuses to worship God by giving? Instead therefore of vague and indefinite impressions, our doctrine forces home upon the soul a conviction of imperative duty. It admits of no evasion, and answers every excuse. Does any one say, I cannot afford to give? Our doctrine answers, "You cannot afford to do without giving, it is an act of worship; it secures the blessing of God; and the poorer you are, the more you need it. The poor widow needed so much, that 'giving that maketh rich,' that she could not afford to keep her 'two mites.'" Does another say, I have a family to support, and cannot give? But is that any excuse, replies our doctrine, for not worshipping God? Is your family to separate between you and God, so as to prejudice an act of worship? In like manner, it will meet and answer every excuse that reluctance can offer, or covetousness devise.

In settling the moral obligation of beneficence, this doctrine also determines as a consequence *who* are to give. As worship is incumbent on every soul, so each one must offer it for himself. It is not sufficient for a parent to pray for his family, each child must also pray for itself. In like manner also if beneficence is worship, each one must give for himself. A parent should teach his child to worship God by giving, just as he teaches it to say, "Our Father who art in heaven." Giving can no more be done by proxy than praying.

HOW WE SHOULD GIVE.

2. This doctrine determines the *spirit with which we should give*. As it is an act of worship, we should esteem it a privilege to give. We should contribute just as we pray, cheerfully, with all the heart, importunately, taking our gifts to God and urging them upon him, and begging that he would accept them, just as we plead with him to answer our prayers. Who would ever give ostentatiously, or as a matter of bounty, or feel pride and self-complacency in his beneficence, if he realized that it was an act of worship?

SYSTEM.

3. This doctrine teaches, *that our beneficence should be systematic*. Worship without

system is transient and fruitless; a spasmodic impulse, wanting the vital element of persistence. Beneficence therefore, like all other acts of worship, must proceed upon a regular plan. Without this it is defective. An occasional paroxysm of prayer, followed by weeks and months of lethargy, is not religion; so an occasional ebullition of liberality, succeeded by a long season of covetous drought in the soul, is not beneficence. Like life in the body, the pulsations of beneficence must be regular and uniform, sending out the warm tide of charity equally and systematically through the whole sphere of our influence. In this, as in every thing else, plan is efficiency. If covetousness plans for self, beneficence must counter-plan for God. When we give with as much regularity as we pray, this is worship. When we keep the account of charity as systematically as we keep the ledger of commerce—when we invite God into the very centre of our business, and bring his omnipresent eye to inspect, and his ear to audit all our accounts, this is the worship of beneficence.

PROPORTION.

4. This doctrine determines the *proportion of our beneficence*, the most difficult of all practical questions, how much each one is under obligations to give to God. Worship is not the definite and prescribed task of a slave, but the spontaneous and generous service of a child, inspired and proportioned by love. Hence the Bible nowhere designates the exact amount of worship which we are required to undo. This we take to be one of the proofs of the divinity of our blessed religion. Every false religion numbers its prayers, and fixes and exacts its duties of devotion with a servile precision. But the Bible enjoins the general duty, prescribes the seasons and ordinances of worship, and then leaves the amount to the apportionment of christian love. Now this is the grand law of beneficence. It is worship, not servitude. It is not a tariff of duties, but a law of liberty. It does not arrange an inexorable system of taxation, but puts into our hands a divine claim upon our property, and leaves the question, "how much," to the decision of Christian love, from which we have no reason to fear a scanty apportionment. "In assisting us," says Harris, "to fill up the blank with a proper assessment, the only step which it takes is to point us to the cross of Christ, and while our eye is fixed there in admiring love, it says, 'How much owest thou thy Lord? Freely ye have received; freely give.'"

As in prayer we are to commune with God as much as we can, and besides our stated worship to maintain the habitual spirit of devotion; so in the worship of