

to me, most obviously, my first duty. To some, this may appear too elementary to be necessary. But in a matter where God's glory and man's duty are so vitally concerned, in reference to a subject on which covetousness is so apt to blind the mind and harden the heart, it seems absolutely imperative to start from first principles. Let it be observed then that the immovable rock on which Jehovah's claim rests is that we and ours, all we are and all we have, belong to Him. This fact cannot be ignored without denying that we are God's creatures. No christian, indeed very few who live in a christian land, will take that position. Now it is obvious that no claim to ownership can at all approach much less rival in validity that which is based upon creation. Yet men recognize a far less stable basis in all their own possessions, and in all their business transactions with each other. The man who builds a house, with his own hands, upon his own soil, by that act vests the title in himself. The right of property of the artist who paints a life-like picture, or of the sculptor who moulds a beautiful statue from the shapeless marble is never questioned. But these men only fashion the materials which are placed in their hands, while God's right of property rests upon creation in its most absolute sense. Hence his oft-repeated claim:—"Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine." "All souls are mine." "All the earth is mine." "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." "The silver is mine and the gold is mine saith the Lord of Hosts." With a frequency, and emphasis which must carry profoundest conviction to the heart of every one who trembles at His word, the Most High teaches us that He is the great owner the sole proprietor of all things; while His intelligent and responsible creatures whatever their possessions, rank, or station are merely the stewards of what belongs to him. Let this great truth then be clearly apprehended, let the precise relationship which exists between proprietor and steward be fully understood, let it be held fast as part of the teaching of the Bible that there is only one being who can

present an inalienable and indisputable claim to proprietorship in its most absolute sense, while all others stand to Him as stewards, and the foundation is fairly and firmly laid for God's making upon us any demands that He pleases, for His regulating in any way that He sees fit the disposal of that property, which, though for a time intrusted to us, yet really in the strictest sense of the words, belongs to Him. No one for a moment questions the right of an owner of an estate, when he engages a manager or steward, to lay down the rules according to which he would have his business transacted, and to insist upon his acting in strict conformity with instructions. Surely then it will not be denied that the Great Proprietor of the universe has a better right to do the same. Our Creator might indeed have put us into possession of His goods, and given us absolute control of their management and disposal. But in His infinite wisdom and goodness he has not done so. Revelation clearly indicates that he has imposed limitations, and providence frequently reiterates the truth, sometimes in tones of thunder. Every storm which sweeps the sea and strews the ocean's bed or shores with the fragments of its thousand wrecks, every earth-quake which lays in ruins the stately piles that wealth and toil have reared, every flood which bursts upon the fruitful fields, and bears down and bears away with its resistless torrents the brightest prospects of the husbandman,—as well as well as the volume of inspiration itself proclaim with a voice which men must hear, Jehovah's rightful prepotent:—"Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own."—And yet beyond question God has given to man a large amount of liberty in the use of His goods. As He has made him a rational being, He has left much of what He has given him to be used at his discretion. Food, raiment, the necessities and comforts of life make heavy demands upon that portion of God's good things which he has given us richly to enjoy. Even here, however, our conduct must be regulated by the inspired precept, "use the world as not abusing it." Nevertheless we are strictly