

THE WESLEYAN,

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF A COMMITTEE OF WESLEYAN MINISTERS AND FRIENDS IN LOWER CANADA
IN CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH CONFERENCE.

"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

Vol. I.

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1840.

No. 3.

DIVINITY.

CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY.

CHRISTIAN liberality consists in freely bestowing the property which we may possess, for the sake of promoting the temporal welfare, or the eternal happiness of others.

To render liberality truly Christian, it must—

1. Spring from right motives.
2. Be exercised in a right spirit, and
3. Bear a due proportion to the ability of the giver.

In fact, to the eye of reason, as well as religion, this is requisite to render charitable actions liberality. There is very little charity in an individual giving what he wants not, and is never likely to need; that when possessed is not enjoyed, and when parted with is not missed. Yet what but this are the gifts of many professing Christians to the cause of God! Could what they contribute be taken from them, in an unperceived manner, they would not, to their dying day, be sensible of the slight alteration their property had experienced. The sum parted with is so small, that they would not feel it, if they were not aware that they had given the trifling contribution. Liberality depends, in a great degree, on the circumstances and ability of the giver. A sum may be a perfectly contemptible donation from one individual, that would be generosity itself from another. What would form a large and liberal gift from one with a few shillings weekly; or from one with a straitened income, barely sufficient to defray indispensable expenses; would be a poor, pitiful trifle, if bestowed by another living in superfluity and wealth. Perhaps there is nothing connected with Christian benevolence that seems to have been less regarded than the rule, that liberality should bear a due proportion to the ability of the giver. Survey the subscription lists of religious societies, and how frequently will you observe the man that comparatively is poor, and the rich, standing on a level. The man with his superfluous hundreds, or even thousands yearly, gives his annual guinea; and by his name stands, with the same sum annexed, that of some individual struggling through life with a straitened income, yet loving the cause of God, and willing to deny himself and family to advance that cause. In cases of this description, it is evident that there is no proportion between the ability of the donor and his gifts.

Take a few cases, illustrative of the principle now maintained. See a person in the middle rank of life; he has an income of two hundred pounds a year; but he has a large family wholly dependent upon him for their support and for their future settlement in life. They need every farthing he acquires; but he loves the cause of God, contributes to it in various ways, and from him a Missionary and a Bible society each receives an annual pound. Near him resides a Christian friend with a similar income, but no family whatever, and no one dependant upon him; he lives in comfort, and contributes a similar sum to the same societies. Is there any reasonable proportion between the liberality of these two persons. One with difficulty parts with what his family needs, the other gives what he scarcely feels. The former denies himself to impart his aid; the latter exercises no self-denial whatever, nor lessens any of his comforts. Near him dwells a third individual; he too is professedly a Christian. He has five hundred pounds a year. He lives in the same style as his friends; and, when he has defrayed his yearly expenditure, he has three hundred remaining to lay by. Out of this he gives

a similar subscription to the same societies. Now, is there any comparison between the generosity of the first individual and this latter? The first squeezes his subscription out of a sum that will barely defray his expenditure; the last presents his from what forms, as far as the present time is concerned, an unneeded surplus. The first cannot lay up a single pound; the last lays up his hundreds, and by them is continually accumulating more. The first deducts his two pounds from an income that will barely supply his wants, but he denies himself, that he may contribute that sum. The last gives but the hundred and fiftieth part of a surplus above his wants. Would he vie with his less wealthy neighbour in liberality, it is evident he must contribute not his two pounds, but his surplus three hundred pounds, to the cause of God. Worldly-minded professors of religion may laugh at and scorn this remark, but its correctness is evidently founded on principles which they may deride, but cannot overthrow.

Take another view. In the same church with the Christian who lives at ease on his two hundred a year, and with him who possesses five hundred and lays by three hundred, is another, whose annual income is a thousand pounds. He is not esteemed a miser, nor is he peculiarly deficient in acts of kindness to the poor around him; but when he has given something to them, and abundantly supplied his own wants, he still adds to his property five hundred pounds. He contributes to the Bible and Missionary cause the same sum as his friends. In the same church is a poor girl who supports herself, and in a great degree her mother, and whose weekly earnings are seven shillings, yet she gives to the same societies two-pence a week. How little proportion exists between the liberality of these individuals! How contemptible are the annual subscriptions of those deemed respectable, when compared with the poor girl's weekly donation! She gives the forty-second part of her income; the most liberal of them gives but the hundredth part of his. The next contributes but the two hundred and fiftieth part of his income, and the hundred and fiftieth part of his accumulating surplus. The richest imparts but the five hundredth part of his income, and only the two hundred and fiftieth part of a spare sum that he hoards up, he knows not for what or for whom. Let him with two hundred a year be as liberal as his poor neighbour, and he would change his two pounds annually to five. Let him with five hundred give the forty-second part of his income, and instead of two pounds, his subscriptions would swell to nearly twelve; and let him with an annual thousand contribute in the same proportion as his poor neighbour, and we should no longer see two pounds the amount of his two subscriptions, but they would rise to nearly twenty-four. At the sight of such subscriptions, some would exclaim, "What liberality!" Not the poor girl would still far outdo them all. She gives the weekly two-pence from her necessity; their splendid subscriptions would be but a small part of their superfluity; in neither case the twentieth part of a sum not required for present wants, but heaped up as treasure upon earth. Would he with a property yielding annually five hundred pounds, vie with the poor girl's humble donation, he must give to the cause of God and humanity, at least his superfluous three hundred pounds; and would he with the thousand approach her in generosity, he must at least contribute his treasured five hundred. Even then their liberality would not equal hers: for they would bestow what they do not now want, and never may, while she gives what is required to meet her daily necessities; and every farthing she contributes, subtracts some comfort from the few she

enjoys. It is true, there are cases in which the accumulation of property to a moderate extent is not inconsistent with the spirit and precepts of Christianity; but it is equally true, that the principles here maintained will apply with greater force to the case of many professing Christians than in any case here supposed, because they possess larger property than any sum here mentioned, and are accumulating still more at a speedier rate. If these principles are correct, how contemptible and pitiful is what is deemed the liberality of the generality of wealthy Christians! But that they are correct, we have the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ. He represented the poor widow who gave two mites, which was all her living, to the treasury of the Lord, as far more liberal than the rich, who had been frequently contributing their silver and gold, (Mark xii. 41-44.)

It is allowed, that no human regulations can enforce liberality on the principle now advanced. The circumstances and situations of mankind are so various, that, in this respect, every Christian should be a law unto himself. On such principles, however, God will judge whether we have been bountiful and liberal. This is evident from the fact, that He, who will appear as the eternal Judge, has already shown that he will estimate the liberality of the professed friends of religion, by bringing it to such a test, and by taking into account, in connexion with a gift, the ability of the giver. Conscience hereafter will judge upon this principle. And as God does now, and conscience will hereafter, the Christian that would not be fatally deluded, should now try his liberality by this standard. Is it proportioned to his ability? Is it adequate to the means of charity with which God has entrusted him? or does it rather comport with the defective, narrow, covetous standard which seems generally to have regulated the charity of professing Christians?

Christian reader, permit not the Saviour's poor disciples who are of a generous disposition, to exceed in liberality you who possess so many more comforts than they, and who, being more favoured, ought to love God more. Forget not that God looks at your ability, in connexion with your offerings to his service. Consider that the truly pious and generous poor usually contribute a much larger proportion of their scanty earnings to the cause of God, than most wealthy professors of the gospel impart out of their abundance. And view it as a shame and a flagrant sin, that they who enjoy so much more from the bounty of God, should express towards him so much less gratitude, and towards man so much less compassion.—Pike.

SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATIONS.

Jonah i. 17. Matt. xii. 40.

Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly.

Our Lord seems here plainly to refer to the history concerning Jonah, as to a *real fact*; nevertheless, this part of Scripture has by some been supposed to contain an account merely of a prophetic vision. Nothing, however, can be more certain than, that if we will calmly bestow a little due and candid attention, the whole account may be shown to contain nothing but what was very possible, even consistently with the soundest philosophy and experience: for, in the first place—

Although it be true, that a *whale* (properly so called, and accurately and generically described) has so small a gullet, that it could not possibly swallow a man; yet we ought to consider that the word *keetos* does not necessarily mean a *whale*.