

T H E

C O L O N I A L C H U R C H M A N .

" BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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For the Colonial Churchman.

CHURCH PROPERTY UNDER THE MOSAIC ECONOMY.

Essay 2.

During the bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt it is but consonant with reason to suppose that the religious usages and observances of their ancestors had been at first neglected through necessity, and subsequently forgotten through long desuetude. The era of their deliverance, from the tyranny of their task-masters, formed not only the beginning of their political freedom as a nation, but the commencement also of a new order of things relative to their practices and observances as a religious community. Their Leader and Lawgiver reduced, under the divine sanction, their devotional feelings, and the veneration which they were taught to entertain for the God of heaven, into a practical shape, and made religion an important branch of the polity of which he was the founder.

Until the time of Moses it is believed with much reason that the priestly office formed no distinct profession, but was discharged for the time being by the head of the family on whom it seems to have conferred a certain degree of dignity and honour. In the course however of the administration of the Jewish Lawgiver, a particular tribe was selected, who, by virtue of their descent from a common progenitor, were consecrated to the service of God. 'Thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and encamp round about the tabernacle.' Num. i. 50. The regulation too, which related to the giving of tithes under the patriarchal economy was confirmed by divine authority. 'Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed that the field bringeth forth year by year,' Deuter. xiv. 22. The Jewish law likewise ordained that freewill offerings should be made for particular purposes; such as are specified in Exod. xxv. 1—9. to be necessary for the construction of the tabernacle, the ark, the mercy-seat, the table, the candlestick and the furniture, together with every other instrument that was deemed requisite for the due celebration of Divine worship.

Hence it may be perceived that Church Property under the Mosaic Economy assumed a more tangible shape than it had in the time of the Patriarchs. It consisted of certain articles which were solemnly set apart for the purpose of enabling the priests and the people to worship Jehovah with honour and proper reverence; and of certain rates, which had been ordered by the Divine command to be dedicated to the service of God. The former may be described as property in possession; the latter, property by right. The former moreover was of a permanent character, there being a law afterwards enacted to render it inalienable, in reference to which Malachi says, 'Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.' iii. 8. And the second kind of property may likewise be said, in reference to quantity and quality, to be mutable or changeable, although equally inalienable with the former. Let us briefly consider these two sorts of ecclesiastical property, according to the station which each is represented to have occupied in the constitution of the Jewish Polity.

1. The first, permanent Church property that we read of is the Tabernacle and its various accompaniments. These were constructed of materials which the people contributed, and which were demanded of them as a free-will offering unto the Lord. They served as a visible symbol to denote the presence of Jehovah, and to excite the adora-

tion of the Hebrew hosts, until they entered into the promised land. Here further donations were made; and the ceremonial of the Jewish worship increased in splendor in the same proportion that the property of the nation increased in quantity.

The Levites received as a permanent possession forty-eight cities. 'Command the Children of Israel that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in.'—All the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities.' Num. xxxv. 2. 7. This with their property in right was all the inheritance the tribe of Levi possessed. For Moses gave them not any inheritance: the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance as he said unto them.' Joshua xiii. 33.

During the sovereignty of the Judges the Ark of the Lord and the Tabernacle were at Shiloh. But shortly after the election of the first Jewish King both seem to have been removed to Shechem, and from thence to Jerusalem. Here Church Property received an immense addition in the superb Temple which David had prepared, and Solomon built. This was a distinction worthy of the riches and prosperity which distinguished the reign of the latter monarch above every previous and subsequent period of the Hebrew annals. It was a means, under Divine providence for keeping alive the spark of true piety in Israel, and for directing the people towards the worship of the true God; and continued to answer these important ends until its overthrow and spoliation by the victorious armies of Assyria. After that event it was desecrated, and the vessels that belonged to it sacrilegiously profaned.

But on the return of the Israelites from the Babylonish Captivity, the Temple not only was restored, but its property appears to have been increased. The most splendid donations were appropriated for the building and the decoration of it: 'The Tinsathah gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty besoms, five hundred and thirty priests' garments.' Nehem. vii. 70. Also—'the Priests and the Levites, and the porters and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities.' ver. 73.

Further donations were made to this kind of Church Property during the period which elapsed between the return from the captivity and the advent of Messiah.—Synagogues appear to have been built in many cities of Judea, as we read in various passages of the New Testament; a fact which implies an increase in those ornaments and furniture that the Mosaic law had assigned as proper adjuncts to every place of public worship. Thus notwithstanding the degeneracy of the great bulk of the Jewish people at the time of our Saviour's appearance on earth, the amount of permanent ecclesiastical property within the limits of their territories is a direct proof of the beneficial results of the Mosaic regulations with regard to this particular, and of the support it was calculated to afford to religion and the worship of the true God.

2. The property in right, or that which is in a certain degree subject to change, was derived from various sources. It was obtained chiefly from tithes and oblations, both of which were of divine institution. The contribution of them was thus rendered obligatory upon all the children of Israel, and those of the heathen nations, who lived within the limits of their Political Jurisdiction.—'And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereunto the fifth part thereof.

And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord.' Levit. xxvii. 30—32. The rod mentioned in the latter part of this passage, was the tithing rod used in numbering the tenth out of the herd; or it may mean the shepherd's crook, under which the flock passed as he numbered them daily.

Besides the first tithes thus paid, there was also a second tithe, paid from the nine remaining parts, which the owner was obliged either to pay in kind, and carry to Jerusalem, or to the place where the sanctuary was, there to feast before the Lord with the Levites and the poor, or if the place was too remote, he might turn it into money. 'And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it: then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose.' Deuter. xiv. 24. 25.

Every man likewise in the commonwealth of Israel was enjoined to make oblations and offerings of various kinds unto the Lord. 'Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass.' Exod. xxv. 2. 3. Then there were the Burnt-offerings, the Drink-offerings, the Free-will-offerings, the Heave-offerings, the Peace-offerings, the Sin-offerings, the Trespass-offerings, the Thank-offerings, the Wave-offerings, the Wine-offerings, and the Wood-offerings—All these offerings were commanded to be brought unto the Lord,—in other words to be dedicated to his service, for the twofold purpose of testing the piety and obedience of the donors and of preserving the worship and name of the true God in Israel.

They consisted chiefly of the productions of the soil; such as flour, bread, corn, and oil; or of animals,—such as bullocks, goats, lambs, and turtle-doves. These latter were offered as a sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of the people, and typified the great Sacrifice which was afterwards to be offered on the Cross. Certain seasons were set apart, when the sacrifices were ordered to be made; and the necessary supply of animals and materials was for the most part obtained from the contributions and voluntary oblations of the worshippers.

After the settlement of the Hebrews in the land of Canaan, the laws and ordinances, which Moses had enacted by divine command for the future government of their kingdom, began to take more extensive effect than formerly, and to produce by their celerity of operation the most beneficial results. The share of their property that had been set apart for divine uses had gradually accumulated, and was not only sufficient to answer the main object in view, but served as a lasting monument of their munificent piety. Witness the magnitude of the sacrifice which Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple. 'And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace-offerings which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep.' The feast lasted for seven days, and clearly proves the extent and magnificence, to which Church Property had attained in the days of Solomon. I. Kings viii. 63.

Thus the temple at Jerusalem, the cities appropriated to the Levites, together with the tithes and offerings of the people, constituted the visible means, by which, under the providence of God, the worship and name of Jehovah was preserved from generation to generation in the kingdom of Israel. Among those who were appointed to wait at his altar in the sanctuary were men, who were gifted