

THE DUTY OF LIBERALLY SUPPORTING GOSPEL ORDINANCES.

SERMON, BY REV. WM. MURRAY, CAMPBELTON, N. B.

MALACHI, III. 10: "Bring ye all the tithes unto the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

THE words which we have selected as the subject of this day's discourse inculcate on us the duty of contributing liberally towards the support of religious ordinances. Though the requirement is one of the binding nature of which none of us can be ignorant, yet here, as in other matters, it is well that we should have our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance.

The text naturally divides itself into two parts: 1st, the duty; 2nd, the blessing promised. "Bring ye all the tithes unto the storehouse; and prove me if I will not pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

When the Almighty chose Israel to be to Himself a peculiar people, He was naturally led to establish His worship among them. Thus only would they be kept stedfast in His service, and instructed more perfectly in regard to Himself and Divine things generally; thus would they be marked out from their heathen neighbours, and prevented from relapsing into heathenism, which, with all their religious privileges, they shewed a continual tendency to do.

It may be thought, however, that a less costly establishment would have sufficed for this end. The temple, we know, was on a most magnificent scale, and everything connected with it was of the richest materials. The sacrifices required for the temple service were also very numerous. For the proper care of so large an edifice, and of the many sacred utensils employed about it,—for the right performance of the various services of the temple, and for the due celebration of its many sacrificial appointments,—a very large number of sacred officers were required. To the special purpose of taking charge of everything connected with the temple, the entire tribe of Levi was set apart, and of the number of this tribe, at the different periods of the Jewish history, some idea may be formed from the fact that in the days of David it amounted to 38,000, of such as were above 30 years of age. Under them were the Nethinims or porters, who did the more servile work of the temple, and who are supposed to have been the descendants of such nations as were taken captive by the Israelites. These probably amounted to several thousands more. And there were, in addition to these two inferior classes of officers, the priests, whose province it was to conduct the various religious services connected with the worship of Jehovah. As we find these divided into 24 classes who officiated in the temple in their turn—each class for a week—their number was probably considerable; and as the priesthood was hereditary in some families, their number would be a continually increasing one. Such a costly religious establishment,—such a large body of men, amounting to many thousands,—would require no small outlay to maintain them; and it may be asked, was all this necessary? Could the object which God had in view not have been attained equally well, at less expense, with fewer services, and by employing a much smaller staff of officials?

To understand the reason of this, it is necessary to bear in mind that it was of importance that the Israelites—little removed from a state of heathenism as they were—should be impressed with the greatness and majesty of the Supreme Being, and this they were, in part, by the very magnitude of His dwelling-place, by the splendour of its furniture and decorations, and by the number of attendants that waited on Him. It is easy to see how all this would elevate their conceptions of God, reminding them with what a great Being they had to