

SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT OF THE LORD'S CAUSE.

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What proportion of his substance should a Christian consecrate to God, is the question which still further demands our attention. Already we have endeavoured to turn the brilliant light of patriarchal practice, regulated as we think by Divine prescription, upon the apostolic rule, "As God hath prospered him." Proceeding historically, it is my purpose in this month's *Record* to direct attention to the Jewish measure of contribution to the Lord's cause. Here our way is easy. We are not shut up to ascertain it solely from their conduct, for we have the plain and positive precepts of their great Lawgiver.

The first claim made upon the Israelites was the first-fruits of their fields, and the firstlings of their flocks, as well as the first-born of their sons. "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits and of thy liquors; the first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise also shalt thou do with thine oxen and thy sheep."—Ex. xxii. 29, 30. By direct and positive precept they were prohibited from eating either bread, or parched corn, or green ears, until they had brought their offering of the first-fruits unto God; and because God had spared their first-born, both of man and beast, when he unsheathed his sword and slew the first-born of their haughty oppressors, therefore must they dedicate them all to him. We have no means of ascertaining (from the Bible) the amount of this offering, but the writers in the Talmud "inform us, that liberal persons were accustomed to give the fortieth, and even the thirtieth, while such as were covetous or penurious, gave only a sixtieth part."

But beyond their appropriation of the earliest produce of their seeds and fruits, and of the firstlings of their flocks and herds, they must separate a tenth part of their substance for sacred purposes. Here, for the first time, the law which seems to have been enacted in the very earliest ages, and to have regulated the conduct of their pious ancestors in their offerings to the true

God, as well as of many and widely scattered nations of idolaters in the proportion of their substance presented to false gods, finds a place in the sacred canon. "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 to the Lord." "Concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy to the Lord."—Lev. xxvii. 30, 32. This passage is clear and explicit. The fields and gardens of the Israelites, their olive yards and vineyards, their flocks and their herds, were all laid under tribute to Jehovah. Because the lands which they cultivated, the fruits and increase of the fields which they tilled, and their cattle upon their thousand hills, were God's good gifts to them, they were required to acknowledge His sovereignty and goodness by the grateful, joyful devotion of the tithe of all to Him. And just as the Sabbath law which was obligatory from the beginning, was incorporated among the ten commandments given on Sinai; just as the offering of sacrifices, which can be traced up to the very dawn of the history of our race, and claims to be divinely authorized, is prescribed as part of the Mosaic ritual; so the law of tithe, recognized as binding by most ancient nations, conscientiously observed by the godly patriarchs, and, thus almost demonstrated to be of heavenly origin, is made part and parcel of the rule by which the peculiar people were required to regulate their conduct, all through that dispensation under which they were placed.

The destination and use of this tithe are distinctly specified. Of the tribes of Israel one had no inheritance in the land of promise. All the children of Levi were consecrated to sacred service in connection with the worship of God. But they must be provided for even though they are forbidden to own land, to sow fields, to plant vineyards, and to gather in their increase.—"Behold I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service, which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation"—Num. xviii. 21.