

LENT UNTO CHRIST.

"Quick, quick!" we find Mrs. Graham of New York, exclaiming, on a sudden accession of fortune, "let me appropriate the tenth before my heart grows hard." The principle on which this eminent Christian acted was that of Abraham and Jacob, of the Jewish economy, and of many great names in the Christian Church. There are some difficulties connected with its universal adoption as the rule of Christian liberality. There is neither precept nor example for it in the New Testament. The apostles never claimed a tenth; the primitive Christians never gave it. Those Scriptures that profess to treat on the subject overlook it. A rule of a far different kind is expressly laid down. Nor can we see how such a rule, however applicable to family properties like those of the Jews, which could not be alienated or augmented, can suit a community of Christians, whose fortunes range from the opulence of a Solomon to the penury of a Lazarus. The tenth of one man's income might be a robbery of his dependants, while, in another case, it would be but a grain from a harvest-field of gold, which could not possibly abridge a comfort or abate a luxury.

Liberality is erected by the Gospel into a grace of the Spirit, and it is therefore perilous to prescribe rules for its free exercise. We would as soon sit down to tell a man how much he might trust, or love, or hope, or bear, or rejoice, as how much he might give. In all these cases the Scriptural rule is the same—not to the tenth, or even the half, but to the whole of his ability. And albeit, liberality, like the lost Pleiad, has almost disappeared from that bright constellation of graces which has beamed since the morning of Christianity in the horizon of the Church—it is yet heaven-born and heaven-nourished; nor does any grace of them all more beautify and adorn the soul. It consists in giving for the Lord and to the Lord; but its parent is love, that grace in which all others are enwrapped, and which (1 Cor. xiii.) becomes by turns gentleness, courtesy, modesty, humility, lenity, simplicity, verity, fortitude, faith, confidence, patience, and perseverance. Love the greatest thing God can give to us, and the greatest thing we can give to God, prompts to the consecration of ourselves and our property in proportion as it expatiates on the Divine excellency; and as it passes from sense to spirit, from thanking to adoring, it becomes the image of Heaven—beatitude in the bud, the very infancy of glory.

Liberality, resembling fire in its busy communicative activity, never rests. Its work is to diminish misfortune and promote human happiness. It is the eye of the believer, like a sense of mercy, enkindling into pity at the sight of poverty, wretchedness, and ignorance—a pity which impels him to feed the hungry or redeem the captive. It is the Christian pouring out his hoarded gain in the charities of religion, for colleges, churches, and schools. It is the redeemed man, with his eye on the better and enduring substance, giving his goods for the sustentation of the Gospel, that the perishing poor may have it preached to them, and that the Lord may get himself glory by their conversion. It is the heir of God reckoning the rule of his liberality by the lofty prospects of glory that are before him, by the wrath of God, and the bliss of heaven. It is the pious merchant giving much money to the cause of his Saviour, and, like Petit, the friend of Bilney, sweetly saying the while, "Lent unto Christ."

Up to the commencement of the present century, the grace of liberality was little known in the Church of Christ. With the corruption of Christianity, in early times, it waned and set in darkness. Money was used by churchmen for far other purposes than the salvation of souls. Agelnoth, Archbishop of Canterbury, when at Rome in the beginning of the eleventh century, purchased from the Pope an arm of St. Augustine for 6000 lbs. weight of silver, and 60 lbs. weight of gold. Money flowed into the treasury of the Church of the middle ages, but it was to satisfy the rapacious cupidity of the priests, to sustain their licentious pleasures, or to purchase exemption from the penances and fasts which they imposed on the ignorant multitude. Even the Reformation, for centuries did not succeed in restoring liberality to its rightful place among the graces. It was reserved for the wave of religious revival which broke on the United Kingdom in the early part of this century, and which bore on its bosom the Bible and Christian missions to the Heathen and the Jew, to nourish it into life and eminence. Every year is adding to its brightness and power. On every part of the church it is beginning to rain its Hermon dew. We accept it as a sign of awakening life—an omen of the world's coming spring-time. It will soon be felt by the Church, that the brightest blaze of intelligence is of incalculably less value than the smallest spark of holy love.

The records of Christianity present no case of liberality equal to that of the Macedonian believers, mentioned by Paul in the eighth and ninth chapters of the second epistle to the Corinthians. They were very poor, yet they gave liberally—"their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality." They gave to the full extent of their ability, yea, "and beyond their power." They gave willingly, "being willing of themselves," not grudgingly or of necessity; and unlike the Christians of our day, who need all the appliances of eloquence, and urgency, and personal application, they prayed the apostle "with much entreaty that he would receive the gift." And whence this wonderful consecration of property, so worthy of all imitation by our Presbyterian Churches? It was owing to "the grace of God bestowed on them." They first gave themselves to the Lord. Oh! it is this that melts the heart and opens the hand, that makes selfish sinners give themselves to Jesus, and that transforms the love of gain into the love of giving.

Would you know the Divine rule of liberality? It is, "upon the first

day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." On the day on which the Saviour rose, and the Church was founded and the spirit was first poured out, "every one of you" who believes in Jesus, and has been bought with His blood, is commanded to lay by you in store contributions for the Lord—to give in proportion to the Divine goodness to you, as the Lord hath prospered you. This, and this only, is the great law of Christian liberality, binding on every child of God, which never can be repealed, which is applicable to every country and to every disciple through all time, which will yet collect and consecrate the resources of the world into the treasury of the Lord, and which, by reclaiming humanity from covetousness, shall compel men to cease from "doing sacrifice to his net and burning incense to its drag." It is not a fixed tribute, but a free gift, which the Lord demands of us—a gift prompted by a love and impelled by a gratitude which expands and is enabled just as we are able to feel and appreciate the blood of Jesus, and the worth of the soul, and the joy of the saved, and the misery of the damned, and the free love of God. When God says, "labour not to be rich," "the love of money is the root of all evil," and calls riches "the Mammon of unrighteousness." He indicates one of the most frightful perils impending over the moral world. And just as the grace of love delivers us from the enmity of the heart, the grace of liberality delivers us from trusting in uncertain riches. We have heard men praying for love, but we have never heard any man pray for the grace of liberality. They want deliverance from the world, but they do not want that grace by which alone that deliverance can be effected. They wish to eat the fruit without ever having planted the tree on which it is to grow.

The grace of liberality is as much a matter of individual obligation as the faith that nourishes it, or the love that is its root or marrow. Money is a trust, a talent, a loan. The real owner is God. Our right is but the right of stewardship. And, therefore, for its own sake, the grace in question should be cultivated. Its hallowing influence will be felt in joy of heart, in elevation and purity of aim, in deeper insight into the mind of Christ, and in a juster estimate of the kingdom and glory of Immanuel. On the external aspects of the Church of Christ, its bearing would be immediate and great. It would afford abundant supply for all Church purpose at home, for all mission works abroad. The parting of the widow and the estate of Barnabas, the ointment of Mary and the half of the goods of Zaccheus, who was very rich, the penny of the poor and the tenth of the rich, all uniting in the treasury of the Lord, would enable the Church to meet the wants of the age, and would furnish such evidence of earnestness and self-denial as would command the confidence of even worldly men.

Do not say, we are poor, and have no money to give. Yes, you are poor and destitute, but it is of love, of faith, of spiritual life. "Ab, massa!" we would say to you, as a slave once said to a minister, "never mind being poor, so long as you have got such a rich Father." It is certain that the beneficent Christian is like the spring, which instead of failing through being drawn from, sends forth its waters with yet greater force—a spring which winter's frost cannot freeze, which summer's sun cannot dry up. He who taught the sublime maxim, "it is more blessed to give than to receive," is Himself the most illustrious example of it. The grace of liberality shone in Him with a sun-like brightness, which shall be the model to the most exalted creatures of everlasting greatness and glory; and to the humble imitation of which we should lend our best powers, that we may be formed on Him who went about doing good. To cultivate this grace is to sow what will in due time ripen up into treasure in heaven, as making friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, as offering the sacrifice of a sweet smell, and as the practice of those six charities which our Lord declares to be the test by which every man will be tried at the great day of assize. The property of the liberal Christian is like the oil of the woman of Sidon, which, as long as she poured into empty vessels, never ceased running—like the widow's barrel of meal, which wasted not as long as she fed the prophet. We admire the saying of Chrysostom—"to know the art of alms is greater than to be crowned with the diadem of kings; and yet to convert one soul is greater than to pour ten thousand talents into the baskets of the poor."

JOHN KNOX.

Of all great men in history there is not one whose character is more simple and intelligible than that of John Knox. A plain but massive understanding, a courage which nothing could shake, a warm, honest heart, and an intense hatred and scorn of sin; these are the qualities which appear in him; these, and only these. There may have been others, but the occasion did not require them, they were not called into play. The evil which was to be overcome had no strong intellectual defences; it was a tyrannical falsehood, upheld by force; and force of character rather than breadth or subtlety of thought, was needed to cope with it.

He was born at Haddington, in the year 1505. His family, though not noble, were solid, substantial landowners, who for several generations, had held estates in Renfrewshire, perhaps under the Earls of Bothwell, whose banner they followed in the field. Their history, like that of other families of the time, is obscure and not important; and of the father of John, nothing is known, except that he fought under the predecessor of the famous Lord Bothwell, probably of Flodden, and other of those confused battles, which answered one high purpose in hardening and steeling the Scotch character, but in all other senses were useless indeed. But it is only by accident that we know as much as this; and even the first eight and thirty years of the life of his son, which he spent as a quiet,