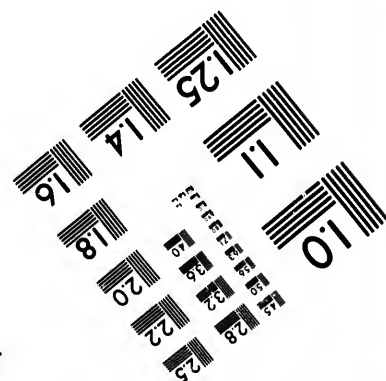
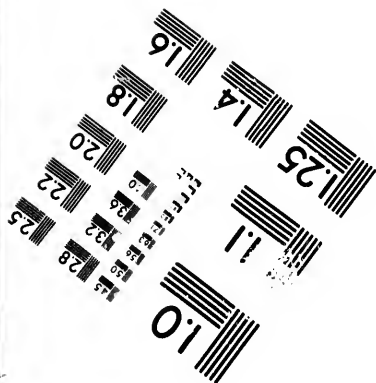
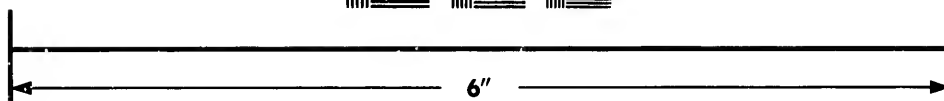
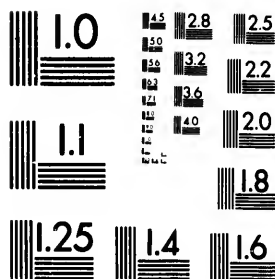


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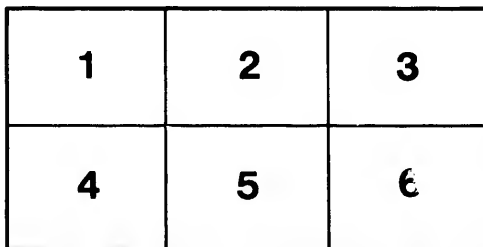
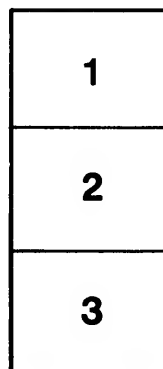
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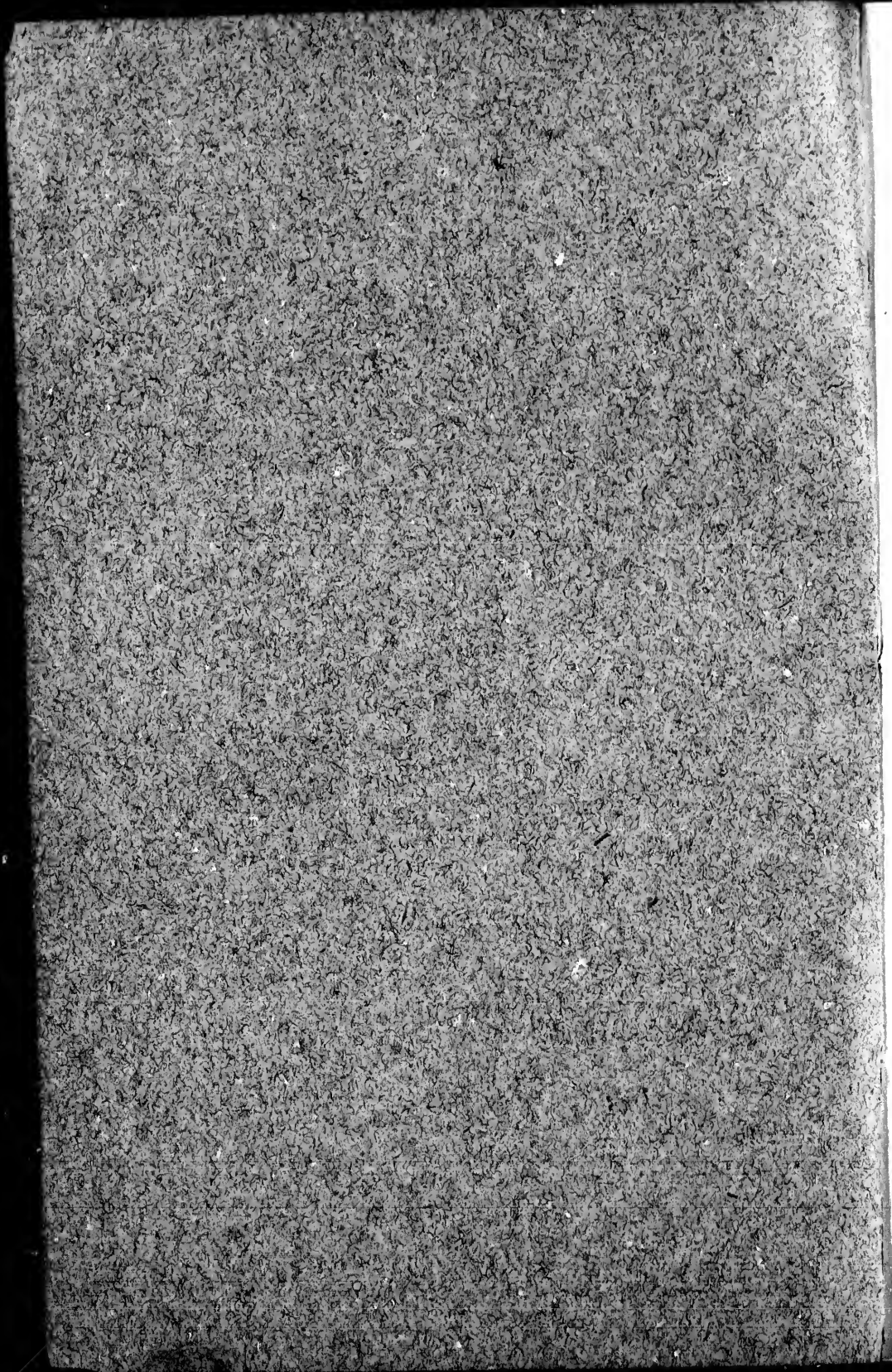
THE  
FIRST FRUITS  
OF OUR INCREASE.

A Ser. m.

By REV. C. H. MOCKRIDGE, D. D.

HAMILTON  
SPECTATOR PRINTING COMPANY.

1884.



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FIRST FRUITS  
OF OUR INCREASE.

*A Sermon.*

By REV. C. H. MOCKRIDGE, D. D.

HAMILTON  
SPECTATOR PRINTING COMPANY.

1884.

The following sermon was preached in Christ Church Cathedral, Hamilton, on the Sunday morning previous to Thanksgiving Day, by Rev. Dr. Mockridge, and is published at the request of many who heard it.



## THE FIRST FRUITS OF OUR INCREASE.

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PROVERBS iii, 9, 10,—“Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”

It is the peculiar province of an intelligent being to acknowledge himself under the control of a superior power. That power we call God. It is a wide, comprehensive term. With the idea of a God there is connected everything that is good. If there is a power which is yet to extricate me from evil, and set my feet on holy ground, and make me perfect so that I shall never again have even a desire to commit sin, that power is God. And why should any man attempt to limit the power of such a Being? If in Him is involved my very creation and existence; if it is through Him I am at this moment a living, rational creature, how much do I owe Him! Do you think we always realize this, my brethren, to its full and proper extent? Is it a matter of absolute thankfulness to God that we are this day living, intelligent beings,—that we are not a stock, or a stone, or a dumb brute, which knows nothing but to follow its own blind instinct? Is it a matter of thankfulness that we are in possession of all our faculties, that we are not blind or dumb, sick, dying or helpless? that we are not slaves as men and women as intelligent as ourselves have before now been, subject to the brutal treatment of heartless masters? In the face of our glorious

liberty in this Canada of ours, where the rights of all are respected, is there a feeling of gratitude that we are this day what we find ourselves to be? Is there a proper acknowledgment that we are under the guidance of Almighty God? These questions come before us naturally on this Sunday before Thanksgiving Day. Our thanksgiving day ought to be made a reality with us,—not simply a holiday, or a day for a ramble in the country or the woods, but a day of real thanksgiving and praise. Let us honor this House of God with our presence that day. In that way, whatever enjoyment and recreation we may take, let us honor God.

Yes, let us honor God, because if we recognize that God exists, and that He is over us, that He gave us life, and supports it and keeps it, then surely it is due to us to honor Him.

But in what way shall we honor God? How can we who are of unclean lips hope to render anything like suitable homage and praise to such a Being as God?

Many ways of honoring God will at once occur to us. Prayer and praise and a holy life,—in such ways may we honor God, and in many more. I wish now, however, to speak of one prominent means by which we may honor him. It is the means mentioned in the passage of Scripture I have chosen as my text. "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase." Such a means as this is all the more readily mentioned because we are on the eve of our national thanksgiving day. This year that day ought indeed to be to all a day of actual thanksgiving, for in the language of our text our barns are truly filled with plenty, and our presses burst out with new wine,—an expression which we may take to signify great abundance. We have had this year what our ven-

erable Bishop, himself for many years a close observer of all such things, and now in the evening of his life, declares in his Thanksgiving Pastoral to be "the most abundant harvest that the oldest among us have ever seen." Our barns are truly filled with plenty. All necessaries of life, all materials even for good cheer will be within the reach of those whose means are but small. All this should fill our hearts with gladness; all this should make us rejoice to render thanksgiving to our God.

But without having anything special to advocate to-day, I am glad to embrace this opportunity of the approaching thanksgiving to urge upon you all the privilege God gives you of being allowed to honor Him with your substance. It has fallen upon me to make from this place many an appeal for money. That is not exactly my object this morning. It is rather to lay before you the broad principle of honoring God with your substance. Yes, with your substance, with your wealth, whether that wealth be much or little. All comfort is wealth, the poor have little or none of it; but many that are, as the phrase goes, "well to do," have much. They can lay by in store as God has prospered them.

And it is not with a view to begging for money that I speak of this to-day. It is a pity people think that we ever beg for money; it is a pity they ever use the phrase. To state the needs of God's church, or of God's poor, is not to beg for money. It is giving people the opportunity of doing just so much work for God. But in any case I have not a matter of that kind in view this morning; I simply wish to speak in the light of our approaching thanksgiving on the general subject of honoring God with our substance, and my meaning will be arrived at perhaps a little more readily when I say that I desire

to throw out prominently the words "Honor the Lord with the *first fruits of thine increase.*"

The greatest enemy that giving for religious purposes has is irregularity, want of system. It is not so in other things of a kindred nature. A man truly religious is regular in his prayers. He has set times for prayer. It may be morning and evening ; it may be, and indeed should be with greater frequency ; but in any case it is regular. Sometimes he finds occasion for extra prayers. When death hovers near his loved ones ; when danger threatens ; when depression attacks him, he offers special prayers, but these are over and above his regular system of devotions. He honors God with his prayers, but he does it systematically. It has at any rate a foundation in system ; if the system is broken in upon it is usually for the purpose of extension. He wishes to give sometimes an occasional addition to his systematic rule.

In the same way should a rule be layed down for the guidance of a man's giving for religious purposes. It should be systematic. "Honor the Lord with the *first fruits of thine increase.*" What is a man's increase ? Surely it is his income. Whatever comes in to him in return for his labor is his increase. In the case of him who has a fixed salary the increase is readily known. At the end of every month or quarter he gets it, and the golden rule of systematic giving is to honor the Lord with the first fruits of every cheque received, of every month's pay or quarter's salary that comes into his hands. He should never take the whole of anything that he gets. He should consider that part of it belongs to God. However small he may choose to make that part, still he should make it. He should honor the Lord with the first fruits of his increase. He should put away a little for God's cause of everything that

comes into his hands. By this means he would not only be always receiving but he would be always giving. He would at least always be collecting material for giving. I can speak from experience when I say that a man is never really happy in his giving till he realizes that so long as he acknowledges that there is a God over him, and that the work of that God on earth depends to a great extent upon his exertions and those of his fellow creatures, he has no right to take *anything* without reserving some portion of it (however small) for Him. Sanctify your means by honoring God with them.

There are some it is true, whose income is not fixed; they hardly know, from the fluctuating nature of their business, what to consider their income. Let them then approximate to it as closely as they can, but let it be an honest approximation; let them make it as those more anxious to defraud themselves than God.

I use that word "defraud" advisedly, brethren, though I don't mean it offensively. Read the 3rd chapter of Malachi and my meaning will be understood. A certain portion of your income *belongs to God*. If you use it all you take what does not belong to you along with what does. Never forget the cause of God in everything that comes in to you. If you are paid every day, then every day reserve something for God; if it is ever so small, reserve it. Don't keep everything. You will be surprised what it will mount up to in a month, or a quarter, or a year. Have your box or your purse specially marked as God's box or God's purse; yes, mark it so; you are doing it for God. Let it be marked then as His. Or open a bank account specially for that purpose; whenever you get money which is a clear profit to you, take a portion of it and put it away in "God's box," or place it to the

credit side in your bank account. Soon some one will ask you to help a poor person, or to help the church or to give to missions ; you don't put your hand into your own pocket, you go to God's box and you take what you think a fair share for that object, and generally you will be surprised at the good sum you will thus have at your disposal. This is some attempt surely at honoring God with the first fruits of one's increase.

And what shall that proportion be ? This is a question that is settled for us in my opinion in the Bible. The *smallest proportion* is one-tenth. It was this that Abraham gave to Melchizedek, Priest of the Most High God. And it is from him that Jesus Christ derives his priesthood. He is a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek. We don't know who that mysterious person was, but he was some one for whom Abraham evidently had a very high regard. We do know, however, who Jesus Christ is. He is our Great High Priest, who to-day is making intercession for us in Heaven. And he is a great deal to us. All our spiritual strength has come from him. To him we owe everything. Never till the end of time shall we know how much we owe to him. What shall we render back to him ? In the light of his undying love for us, how little, how insignificant does even a tenth of all our increase seem ! To help missions, to build churches, to give children religious instruction, to aid Sunday schools, to relieve the distressed and suffering poor, surely demands at least a tenth of all our increase.

My friends, I need not enlarge upon this. No one would dispute the moral obligation that all Christians are under to give *at least* a tenth of their increase, were it not that there are enemies which raise their hard heads against it. Three of these I will now mention.

The first is Habit. Men who are wealthy today give no more than when they were poor. God's law says, "If riches increase set not your heart on them." Habit says, "If riches increase use them all for selfish ends." Brethren, such is not the law of God. It is by the first fruits of all our increase that we are to honor Him, and nothing regulates this better than a systematic plan of always giving a certain set proportion of what comes in to us, because we give then in proportion to what we get. As we prosper, God's cause prospers through us. God gets the benefit of our increase.

The second enemy is Extravagance. This robs God; it is a deadly enemy. If Christians would live in true Christian simplicity they would have much more for God's treasury than they have; but pride makes them want great things and grand things, and they waste on their own perishing bodies what would accomplish untold good. To be penurious is mean; to be economical is right and fair, and if we are economical because we wish to have something to give to God, it is Christ-like and noble.

Another enemy which lifts its sledge-hammer arm against systematic giving is Covetousness. If there is a man who might be exempt from giving a tenth of all his increase it is the poor day laborer who gets a small income and works hard for it. To take from a laborer ten cents for every dollar that he gets in return for a hard day's work seems to leave him but little to live upon. His chance of earning anything depends upon the weather and his own strength. On a wet day or when he is sick he gets nothing. But for those with large incomes how much they can give, and how much will still be left behind! You get \$300 a month; you reserve \$30 to give away, and you have \$270 for your wants; you

get \$500; you put away \$50 as your tenth, and you have \$450 left; and yet you will not even do this; you must use it all to make your income bigger still. This is covetousness; and the Master's words on that should not miss their aim upon us. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

But I need not continue this. Systematic giving has these enemies and many more. Let us kill them. A man does not know the true pleasure of giving till he gives a set portion of every thing he gets. I thank God men are beginning to realize this as their privilege. It is a privilege which, for my part, I would on no account resign.

There are many in this congregation whom I should like to get into the way of giving regularly one-tenth of all that comes into them. Were such a rule at all universally adopted, such a mighty revolution would take place in the Christian world as would astonish all. God's treasury would be full. And I am not this morning addressing people who do not give; many of you give, and give liberally; it is the systematic giving that I plead for to-day; it is the honoring the Lord with the first fruits of our increase.

And I have a right to urge this upon you; I do it in the interests of the church that we love and her divine work on earth; but above all I do it in the interests of Christ Jesus our Lord, and I do it in the face of our thanksgiving for a most abundant harvest. "Our barns are indeed filled with plenty."

Money, it is true, is not every thing,—our life, our hearts, our soul, are absolute gifts which we can make to God; but money is a great deal. It is a ready means of giving relief; it is a ready means of doing work for God. "Charge them that are rich



in this world \* \* \* that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." So said St. Paul to Timothy; so says the Word of God to us to-day. It is an undying principle: if God is always giving we should be always giving too. How continually we are asking God,—“Pray give me this.” “Be pleased to grant me that.” How little do we give back to him even of that which really would cost us nothing! Is this, my friends, honest Christian fairness?

The text promises a blessing; “Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase, *so shall* thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst forth with new wine.”

And God always fulfils his promises. We may not see how he fulfils them, but fulfil them he does. His promises never fail; they will come to us to our advantage in some way, for God’s word is true.

Let us think deeply of the golden words of our text to-day. Let us go away thinking of them, and with them let us connect those words so well known to all of us,—“To do good and to distribute forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

