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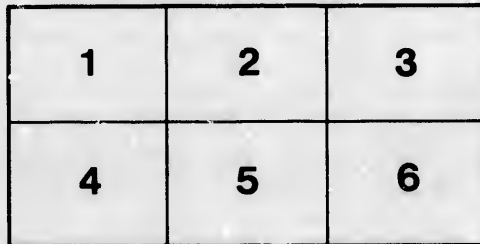
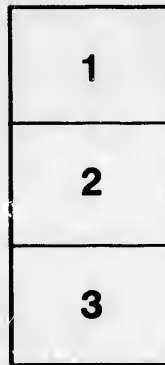
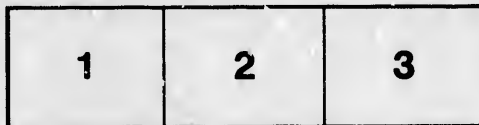
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SYSTEMATIC BENEFICENCE ;

ITS CLAIMS AND OBLIGATIONS.

AN ESSAY

DELIVERED BEFORE THE Y. M. C. A. CONVENTION,

AT

TRURO, N. S., SEPTEMBER, 1873,

BY

REV. E. A. McCURDY, NEW GLASGOW.

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.)

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*An Essay delivered before the Y. M. C. A. Convention at
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In its widest acceptation, Beneficence means the act of doing good. Systematic Beneficence is the act of doing good on system. Hence it is both the flower and the fruit in the Christian life of the principle laid down by the Apostle, "As we have therefore opportunity let us do good to all men especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

But while this is the primary and literal signification of the phrase, it has been applied more particularly, and more frequently, to doing with our substance; to the devotion of our property under the influence of right principles and on system, to purposes of religion and benevolence. I presume that it is in this mere restricted sense that your Executive Committee employed it when they requested me to open the discussion at this Convention on "Systematic Beneficence: its claims and obligations."

To lay broad and deep the foundations for God's claim upon our Beneficence, seems very obviously my first duty. And, let me say, that it appears to me that the immoveable rock upon which you can safely build the whole structure of Beneficence on system, is, that we and ours, all we are and all we have, belong to God. By creating us, and that which He has put into our possession, He vested in Himself a title to ownership, the validity of which can be rivalled by no other. His words are to be understood in their largest and most absolute sense, when He affirms: "Whatsoever is under the whole heavens is mine;" "all the earth is mine;" "every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts."

With a frequency and emphasis which must carry profoundest conviction to the heart of every one who trembles at His word, the Most High teaches that He is the Great owner, the absolute Proprietor of all things, while we are but the stewards of what belongs to Him. Let this great truth be clearly apprehended; let the precise relationship which exists between proprietor and steward be fairly and fully understood; let it be held fast, as part of the teaching of the Bible, that God alone can present an indisputable and inalienable claim to proprietorship in its truest sense—while all of us, and all our fellow-creatures, whether believers or unbelievers, stand to Him in the relationship of stewards, and you have the foundation firmly laid for God's making any claim upon us which He pleases. Now.

Beneficence, to be worth anything, must be a recognition of this truth. It must also be a recognition of the truth that we are His redeemed people, as well as the creatures of His hand, and the stewards of His substance. In its root principle, it is not something outward and formal. It is inward and spiritual. To have any value, Beneficence must be an act of worship, or rather a series of acts of worship. Our gifts must be the offspring of gratitude. They must be the out-come of love. They must be the manifestation of devotion. As the psalm of praise, as the prayer of thanksgiving, is an empty service, unless it expresses the feeling of the heart, so an offering of substance to God, which is not the expression of gratitude, is a useless thing. But if, like the offering of Mary, when she presented her alabaster box of ointment, or of the poor widow, when she brought her two mites, it is the outcome of a full, overflowing heart, it will be regarded as true beneficence, and so receive the hearty applause of the blessed Saviour Himself.

But beneficence, to possess the character required in the Bible, must be systematic, as well as conscientious. Our beneficence hitherto has been far too spasmodic and impulsive. We have overlooked the great New Testament law for its direction, and we have adopted human plans and expedients. Now, if we wish to honour God, fill His treasury and bless the world, we must fall back upon the inspired precept: "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him."

This precept, studied under the light of other passages of Scripture, furnishes a most concise and comprehensive statement of the principles which underlie Systematic Beneficence; and it answers for us several questions, which seem to me completely to sweep the field before us.

In the first place, if I am asked, "What are we to understand by Systematic Beneficence?" I reply that we are here informed that it is the regular and frequent offering. It is true that the phrase, "lay by him in store," is susceptible of various renderings. Albert Barnes renders it, "Let him lay by at home, treasuring as he has been prospered. Dr. Hodge says: "The words mean to lay by himself," and thinks that the direction is nothing more definite than "let him take to himself what he means to give, and let him carry it to a common treasury." My own conviction is that both these things are implied, and that the passage enjoins upon us, in the first place, to have a purse or treasury for the Lord in our own homes, to replenish it regularly, and to draw from it, to carry our offerings to the house of God, or to bestow them in any way in which the circumstances connected with the call upon us dictate. In a word, the rule laid down by the Apostle seems to demand both frequent storing and frequent offering.

In the second place, if I am asked, Who are the *persons* upon whom this duty of frequent storing and offering is binding, I reply that the answer of the Apostle on this point, is clear, explicit and unmistakable. "Let EVERY ONE OF YOU lay by him in store." There is no mistaking the sweep and compass of these universal terms. The "every one" must mean every individual whom the Apostle's words reach. The precept comes with authority and power to all, to high and low, to rich and poor, to bond and free. It is binding alike upon husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, sovereign and subject, pastor and people. It is designed as a rule of life to the unbeliever, as well as to the believer; for if the persons and property of both, and of both alike, God is the sole and universal proprietor, while they themselves are but stewards. True, the ungodly may ignore or deny their stewardship, but they cannot possibly escape from the obligations which it imposes upon them. The precept is fully binding upon them. But, with peculiar power, this command presses upon the Christian. He knows and feels, and acknowledges, that in every sense he belongs to God. He remembers that as his creator and preserver, Jehovah is his Lord; that as his Redeemer, Jesus Christ has secured a right to him and to his by purchase; and that by a voluntary surrender of himself to the Saviour, he has given himself, all he is and all he has, to his rightful Sovereign. With an emphasis, therefore, mightily increased, addressing himself to those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, purified and appropriated by the Spirit of Christ, and led by the grace of Christ to declare that they are not their own, the apostle points out their duty in the precept: "Let every one of you lay by him in store." This duty of

every hearer of the Gospel, to consecrate a due proportion of his substance to the advancement of the cause of God, I am anxious, in the presence of this Convention, as well as elsewhere, to state with clearness, decision and energy. I am urgent in pressing it upon your attention, because I believe that its neglect entails guilt. I am very anxious that it should be attended to, because it is a duty which is sorely neglected. Facts and figures bear me out in saying so. For instance, Great Britain's national income, for the year 1873, was about £76,000,000. It is said that her national gains were £800,000,000. But Great Britain's free-will offerings, for religious and benevolent purposes, are set down at £5,000,000. In other words, the subjects of King Jesus, in Great Britain, contribute for the support and extension of His kingdom only one-fiftieth as much as the subjects of Queen Victoria contribute for the maintenance of her sway; or, to put it in another way, about one-one hundred and fiftieth of the gains of the Empire are spent upon religious and benevolent objects.

The *Princeton Review* for April, 1872, is responsible for the statement, that the Benevolent contributions of the Baptists of the United States, for a given year, amounted to but \$630,000; those of the Methodists, \$996,011; and those of the Presbyterians, \$1,444,388; or an average per member of 45 cts., 70 cts. and \$3.17, respectively. Do not these facts, and others like them, force irresistibly upon us the conclusion that the precept, "Let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him," has, by a very large number, been entirely ignored, or forgotten; and do they not vindicate any legitimate attempt to impress upon the minds of men, whether in worshipping assemblies, Association Conventions, or church courts, the universality of the duty of practising Beneficence upon system, and according to principle?

But another question, which this inspired precept answers for us, is, **When ought we to make our appropriations of property to the cause God?**

Is it only once in the year, at its expiration, when its work is done, its losses estimated, its profits counted—when other obligations have been met, and we are in a position to judge whether or not we can afford to give anything at all, in response to the claims of religion and benevolence? or is it merely on every occasion when a special and emphatic call is made upon us by the church, either from the pulpit, or by a collector calling upon us to seek our contributions? The Apostle, you will perceive, thrusts aside both these methods, as well as many others, by his simple, but much more effective plan: "**ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, let every one of you lay by him in store.**" As the contributions for the relief of the poor and distressed, for the support and extension of the Gospel whether by the instrumentality of the associations or of churches, is a duty to be discharged, there must be a time for its performance. As it is an important duty, it should have a fixed and specified time. As it is a duty which makes large demands upon us, the time appointed ought to recur frequently. As it is a duty spiritual in its essence, though material in its accidents, the time fixed should be that under which the mind and heart are under the most hallowed influence. For all these things the apostolic rule makes the most ample provision. A particular time is specified. It recurs frequently, once a week. It is a sacred day—the holy Sabbath. The interesting and impressive associations connected with the first day of the week, which make it preëminently suitable for the right discharge of the duty, one familiar to all who understand the design and uses of the Sabbath institution. It recalls the period of the creation, when God made the world, and placed it, with all its treasures, under the control of man, to be used for the glory of the creator, as well as for the good of the creature. It reminds us of the rest of satisfaction and delight which He enjoyed, when, ceasing from labour, He looked upon the work of His hands and saw all things very good. It is intimately associated with the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It recalls to one's mind, His glorious resurrection, by which He entered into His rest as God had entered into His. It is the day on which the Gospel is most widely preached, and the spirit of God most largely shed abroad upon the hearts of men. Moreover, it is the day sacred to rest and worship. And, oh! when the Christian thinks of all this, when he reflects upon God's kindness in creating and furnishing such a beautiful world for his dwelling place, when he recalls the fact that after by sin he had forfeited

all claim to it, and to every other blessing, Jesus by his obedient life, satisfactory death, and triumphant resurrection secured blessings for him, riches, purer and better far than those which he had lost; the pardon of sin, the gifts of the spirit, and a brighter, more beautiful, purer and happier home in heaven; when his understanding has been informed by the truth, his heart warmed by the holy spirit, and his soul ravished with the prospect of the eternal rest which remains for the people of God of which the earthly Sabbath is but the symbol, is he not in the best possible condition of mind and heart to acknowledge the loving-kindness of the Lord; and will not an offering of his substance presented then and there, if it flow from gratitude to God and love to the Saviour, be as acceptable an act of worship as the psalms of praise which he sings in the utterances of his full overflowing heart in expressions of thanksgiving to God? And is it not because this great truth, that offerings of gold and silver presented to God from right motives are true and acceptable worship, has been to such a large extent lost sight of, we find some persons objecting to the taking of collections in the house of God on the Sabbath day? And may not the same fact account also for so many persons bringing so frequently as their offerings the smallest coin in the realm, just as the Israelites sometimes brought the torn, the lame and the blind to the altar of God, and thus insulting the Almighty with a miserable exhibition of their own selfishness, when they ought to be honouring Him with generous, largehearted, and liberal contributions of that which He has graciously given them. Never till all offerings are generally regarded as the unvariable expressions of gratitude, as the natural and necessary manifestations of love, and are consequently dignified with a place among our acts of worship, will Christians obtain a correct view of their nature and design, or the Church be favored with frequent repetitions of such scenes as the disciples witnessed when a grateful, loving, devoted woman brought her alabaster box of ointment worth three hundred pence, and poured it upon her Saviour's head, thus securing for herself the blessed assurance of His acceptance. "She hath done what she could. Verily I say unto you, wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world there shall this also that this woman hath done be spoken of for a memorial of her."

But another question which is answered for us in the inspired precept which we have quoted is, "How much ought we to give?" This is a question often asked by those who are anxious to know and discharge their duty, and it is one which demands a clear, distinct, and definite answer on such an occasion as this. The reply to this query furnished by the apostle is, "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as GOD HATH PROSPERED HIM." But clear and distinct as is the rule here laid down, I believe that in order to grasp its full import we need to study it under the light of other scriptures, for luminous though the direction be, even as it stands by itself, yet when the scattered rays of scripture light bearing upon the same subject are concentrated upon it as their focus it gleams with a brilliancy which in these days of weak vision as to the claims of God is almost dazzling. The truth is that Biography, Legislation, and History; Precept, Threatening, and Promise, as these are embodied in the sacred oracles, all contribute to give a length, and a breadth, a height and a depth to this inspired measure, the magnitude of which cannot be fully grasped without a more elaborate and careful investigation than we can give it in a single paper such as this. And yet we will utterly fail to do justice to our subject unless we glance, even though it be but hastily, at those lessons contained in the sacred record which are fitted to illumine this precept. The duty of contributing of our substance to the cause of God is one which has always been binding upon the children of man. Going back to the earliest ages we find that the proportion given by the patriarchs was one-tenth. When Abraham on his return from the slaughter of kings, bearing with him a weighty spoil met Melchisedeck, recognizing the dignity of the King of Salem, and Priest of the Most High God, the Father of the Faithful "gave him tithes of all."

When Jacob felt himself constrained by the impulses of gratitude to make his solemn vow unto the Lord, his language was, "Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth to thee."

Now the question arises: Whence originated the practice which both these godly men so conscientiously observed? Had we time, I believe that I could con-

vince any intelligent and candid hearer, that its origin was Divine, and that in devoting the tenth of their substance, they were acting in accordance with an instruction of the Divine will which had been communicated to them. I know that the sacred record transmits to us no positive command requiring them to appropriate a tenth part of their substance to works of religion and benevolence. But neither have we any direct and positive command as to the observance of the Sabbath day prior to the time of Moses. Nor have we any precept enjoining the ancients to offer sacrifices. And yet I suppose that there is not one of us who does not believe that those ancient worthies were required by the Almighty to keep the Sabbath, and to offer sacrifices. Now if you study the matter carefully you will find that every argument which can be adduced to prove the Divine origin of sacrifice and almost every argument which can be adduced to prove the Divine origin of the Sabbath, might be pleaded in favour of the Divine origin of the tithe.

But without spending longer on the patriarchal measure of contributions we must inquire, What was the measure practised by the Jew? There is no difficulty in ascertaining this. We have here the plain and positive precepts of their Lawgiver. I cannot dwell upon the first claim which was made upon the Israelites in the shape of the first fruits of their fields, and the firstlings of their flock, as well as the first born of their sons. But I would direct your attention to the fact that they were instructed to separate a tenth part of their substance for sacred purposes. "All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruits of the tree, is the Lord's, it is holy unto the Lord. 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." Lev. 27 : 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 land 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.

But over and above the first fruits and the tithe destined for the use of the Levites, another tithe was levied to uphold the various appointed feasts and sacrifices. Deut. 14 : 22, 23. It has been estimated by those who are best qualified to judge, that altogether they must have spent one-fifth to one-third of their substance in obedience to positive precept in the support of the Lord's cause. But elevated as is the view with which these facts furnish us as to the Systematic Beneficence of the Jews, we have not yet reached either the summit of God's demands, or the altitude of their attainments. Positive precept defines the minimum. Less than a tenth no Israelite could offer and obey God. More than a tenth, a fifth, or even a third he might present with acceptance, when his gifts sprang from a willing mind and a grateful heart. Free will offerings were as essential an element of Israelitish worship, as the doctrine of the tithe or the offering of sacrifice. Look, for example, at the universal, large-hearted and munificent free will offerings presented by the chosen people on the occasion of their building their tabernacle and temple. We cannot go into detail, but if you will study carefully, at your leisure, the twenty-fifth and thirty-sixth chapters of Exodus, and the twenty-ninth of First Chronicles, I am sure that you will admit that under the shadow of the generous liberality of the Jews, our offerings shrink into insignificance, and I am not without the hope that you will vindicate my conduct in asking you to study with me those principles and precepts, the knowledge and practice of which trained to such marvellous liberality in the cause of God. And should any one ask me "What has all this discussion to do with us, and our duty since we live under a different and more advanced dispensation?" I answer, "Much every way." For if, as we have endeavored to shew, the law of tithe dates from the beginning, as it has never been cancelled it must still be in full force like the command which requires the seventh part of our time to be spent in the worship of God, it imposes upon us the duty of devoting at least a tenth part of our income to His glory.

But let it be conceded that we cannot trace this law beyond the Mosaic dispensation, even upon this supposition a similar conclusion seems to force itself upon

us; for if the Church, under the past and present dispensations, is essentially one, if her faith in these different stages of her development is identical, if her moral duties are the same as we all maintain, then it necessarily follows that the precepts of the Old Testament are still binding upon Christians, except in so far as connected with types and shadows, or designed to regulate Jewish civil affairs they were fulfilled in Christ and abrogated by his authority. Let it be observed from the Bible itself gleams a true and steady light, which enables us to discover the statutes which have been abolished and those which still retain their binding force. From its pages we learn that the civil and ceremonial law has been abolished, but nowhere can we find that any, even the least, of its moral precepts have been swept away. Now the law of tithe is not ceremonial. It is not a civil statute. Its nature is moral rather than typical. All the reasons which called for its enactment at first still obtain. Now, as ever in the past, God is the great Sovereign of the Universe, its sole proprietor and Lord. Now, as always hitherto, men are intrusted as stewards with *His* goods. In these last days, as well as in former times, the covetousness of the human heart needs to be checked, crucified by the constant outflow of a generous liberality. The cry of the poor and needy still ceaselessly falls upon our ears. The claims of religion are increasing rather than diminishing. True the priest-hood, as a separate order, has been abolished, but we have it on apostolic authority that as they who under a former dispensation waited at the altar were made partakers with the altar, even so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel. The Jews had to maintain merely a national religion. The Christian Church had to preach the gospel to every creature. The obligations under which we are laid are vastly greater than were those of the Jews. Our religious privileges are mightily enhanced. The Jews had the type; Christians have the anti-type. He had the shadow; we have the substance. Those truths which were for him but the prediction of prophecy, are for us the facts of history. He entertained the pleasures of hope; we exult in the joys of fruition. He felt the bondage of the law; we breathe the free spirit of the gospel.

Now if all this is true; if the law of tithe is in its very nature moral and neither ceremonial nor civil; if there is not a shadow of proof that it has ever been repeated by the Great Lawgiver; nay, it has attained the sanction of our Lord and Master by His memorable utterance, "These ought ye to have done and not to leave the others undone." If all the reasons which led to its enactment at first still exist, and others more potent have been added; if the claims upon our beneficence are far more numerous than those which pressed upon the Jewish people, if the blessings which we enjoy at the hand of our Gracious Benefactor are richer, fuller and freer than theirs; if, too, the results achieved by our beneficence are higher, nobler, and more lasting; who that is influenced by reason, scripture, justice, gratitude, or yields, indeed, to any of those considerations which are fitted to inform the understanding, sway the heart and shape the life, will at all dispute that Christians are under the most impressive obligations to practice a bounty more large-hearted and open-handed than that which characterized believers under a former dispensation, even during the seasons of their deepest, truest devotion to the cause of their God and Redeemer.

The truth is that a survey of Christian teaching on this subject seems to shunt us up to the conclusion that God requires of all at least a tithe, while from those whom He has blessed with abundance, He looks for freewill offerings besides, smaller or larger as circumstances may demand and love and gratitude dictate.

I know that this interpretation of the phrase "as God hath prospered him" may perhaps startle some of my hearers, but I hope they will not reject it till they have examined the subject fully, and satisfied themselves that the view is incorrect. Few persons, I think, could hold stronger views against the propriety of making the law of tithe binding upon Christians than myself at a former period, and it was only what seemed to me the overwhelming force of evidence weighed in the course of a careful study of the subject that wrought a change in my opinions on the subject.

Brethren of this Convention, let me express to you the conviction that if Christians now-a-days would only read the injunction of the apostle, "On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered

him" under the light of Divine prescription, Patriarchal practice and Jewish example; if they would think of it under the conviction that they and their property are not their own, but in the strictest, truest sense belong to God, if they would ponder it with the loud cry of perishing millions ringing in their ears; if they would meditate upon it under the dazzling beams shed around it by the life, the passion, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of their Lord; if they would study it under the blissful illumination of the spirit of all grace, then might we expect to witness in these last days a repetition of those scenes which, proved, illustrated, and adorned the piety of the early Christians when "as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles feet, and distribution was made to every man according as he had need"; or when during a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty so abounded unto the riches of their liberality that spontaneously they came to the apostle "praying him with much entreaty, that he would receive their gifts and take upon him the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

One more question is answered for us in the passage to which we have been referring as our New Testament rule, viz: "In what way are our offerings to reach the Treasury of the Lord?" The answer is the offerers themselves must bring them. As we have already seen the passage teaches that we should lay by us in store at home. But it is surely fairly implied in the language that we are to bring the offerings to the house of God else where is the force of the clause "that there be no gatherings when I come." At all events this is indisputably the scripture method. The Israelites were commanded to bring the first of their ripe fruits to the house of God. In prospect of the erection of the tabernacle in the wilderness the proclamation was issued, "Take you from among you an offering to the Lord, whosoever is of a willing heart let him bring it." The Jewish sacrifices were invariably brought by the offerers to the temple. It would seem that no legal machinery was provided for the collection of tithes, but when the Jews withheld them they were startled by the charge of robbery and instructed to "bring all the tithes into the store-house." The same method held under the new dispensation, for in the glorious morning of Primitive Christianity as many as were possessors of lands and houses sold them and brought the price and laid it down at the apostle's feet."

Brethren this is God's plan. I reiterate the rule He has given that it may stand out before your minds in all its native simplicity, comprehensiveness, and efficiency:—"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him that there may be no gatherings when I come. Do not tell me that the rule was intended for the Church of Corinth only for such a position is utterly untenable. There is not a shadow of proof that it is not as universal in its application as any other precept contained in the epistle. Indeed you will find that the context itself guards it against so limited an application. Notice how the precept is prelaced, "As I have given order to the churches in Galatia so do ye." Nor is this all. The epistle, as you will observe by a reference to the first verse, is addressed not only "to the Church of God which is at Corinth" but also "to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord both theirs and ours."

Oh that this rule so heavenly in its origin, so beautiful in its simplicity, and so effective in its operations were universally adopted. Our pew rents which shut out the poor from the house of God would be abolished; our collectors for religious and benevolent purposes would be spared their thankless toil; our congregations freed from many painful heart-burnings and bickerings; our Young Men's Christian Associations supplied with the necessary funds for carrying on their operations, and Bible and Missionary Societies would be delivered from their distressing embarrassments. The Treasury of the Lord would be full to overflowing, waste places would be cultivated and missionaries of the cross sent to every land. God would be glorified, Christ honoured, and the Holy Spirit magnified. Towards the adoption of this rule the Church in her different branches and almost everywhere is rapidly tending. The Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces has about one-third of her congregations dependent upon the weekly offering for supplies. The Wesleyan Church of British America is striving to secure the adoption of

the same plan. Quite a number of the Baptist congregations have adopted it. It is meeting with extensive favor among the Episcopalians. The different churches in the United States are aiming at the same thing. A similar remark might be made in reference to the churches in Great Britain. The fact that our young men in the associations and conventions are directing their attention to it is a hopeful symptom. It shows that they have grasped the fundamental truth that giving from right motives is worship. It is prophetic of their success in securing the funds necessary to erect their buildings, to furnish their libraries and to carry on their benevolent work in every department. Let them master the principles of Scriptural Systematic Benevolence, let them reduce them to practice, let them labour with their wonted fervour and success to disseminate them among all the members of their associations, and throughout the several congregations with which they are connected and they will add another wreath to their laurels, and another triumph to the victories which they have won on the honourable field of Christian work and Christian achievement.



