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I. CHRIST AND HIS MIRACLES.

“His glory consists, not in being banished from history; we render him a truer worship by showing that all history is incomprehensible without him.”—
RENAN.

It may be said, without disparagement of the labors of able men, that our learned treatises on the person of Christ and on his miracles fail to exhibit in a satisfactory manner a certain necessary relation between them, apart from which neither can be clearly apprehended. The confusion that attends, even to the present day, the discussion of these subjects is evidence of something wrong in our conception and method of dealing with them.

There is a troublesome feeling in many minds that the best and final word respecting the divinity of Jesus and the place and value of miracles remains to be spoken, and that, when it is spoken, it will discover a new line of thought touching the relation of the two things. It would be sheer egotism for a paper like this to propose more than a suggestion, when one takes into consideration the magnitude of the two-fold subject, and of the literature already extant; but it ought to be possible to set forth in brief, yet clear and satisfactory form the main features of a doctrine which, to our thinking, promises so much to faith in its conflict with science and philosophy.

It may be assumed that the deity of Christ is one of the best established doctrines of Christianity, in so far as the consensus of faith is able to secure a dogma. While it involves the profoundest mystery of religion, and rises beyond intellectual apprehension, it is yet in its relations seen to be indispensable. The religious

V I. N O T E S.

THE PRESBYTERIES AND THE TITHE.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS TO THE ASSEMBLY'S OVERTURE.

THE problem of revenues is always a difficult one, both in church and state. The state claims the right to supplement her present resources derived from taxation by a free use of her credit, whether wisely or unwisely. The church dares not violate the injunction, "Owe no man anything." Nor has she any God-given power of taxation by which she may compel the filling of her treasury; nor does she hold the power of the keys in any such sense as to compel an otherwise unwilling people to supply her financial needs. Her only legitimate resource is an appeal to a sense of duty and to love for the Master's cause. Her only assessment law is the word of God, sustained by the conscience of the individual believer, and enforced by the same law of love, and not by pains and penalties, either civil or ecclesiastical. There is no wonder, then, that the ever-enlarging schemes of Christian enterprise should call for serious and perplexing discussions about ways and means. And when we consider that since the fourth century the church has depended mainly for her revenues upon tithes, rates, Peter's pence, etc., assessed and enforced by civil and ecclesiastical sanctions, we need not be surprised that the disenthralled church should grope slowly towards the full measure of the divine standard; and we may well expect Protestant Christianity to be keenly alert to denounce any appearance of ecclesiastical domination.

In feeling after some divine indication of duty in giving to the Lord, the tithe has been slowly entering a claim to recognition for many years; and many of the leaders in Christian giving, on both sides of the Atlantic, beginning with the tithe as the minimum, have mounted up to such measure as to show that they believe that "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;" and multitudes of others have been led by their example to a larger measure of duty, though they have never even considered whether there be such a thing as a divine indication of a minimum rule.

So prominent did the question of tithing become, that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, in 1889, sent down an overture to the Presbyteries asking them to discuss and report on the "Law of the tithe" as a "means of revenue." The whole subject of tithe and "tithe law" was discussed from many points of view, in the press and in the Presbyteries, and answers to the Assembly's overture were sent up in May from nearly all the Presbyteries, a thing in itself quite significant.

These answers were referred to a special committee, who made the following report, which was adopted unanimously enough, except that a large minority wished to have the subject lie over a year for further general discussion, so that if possible a properly guarded deliverance might be made by the next Assembly, more carefully defining the scriptural rule of duty and liberty, and defining also the limitations of ecclesiastical courts in legislating, or even in making authoritative deliverances, on the subject, or, in other words, in defining the relations of the spiritual to the secular:

"In response to the overture of the last Assembly, sixty-eight of the seventy-one Presbyteries on the roll have sent up papers on the law of the tithe as a means of raising the funds of the church. All the shades of opinion expressed could not be presented without giving the papers in full, some of which are quite voluminous. The following summary, however, is substantially correct:

"Of the sixty-eight reporting, fifty-one express the opinion that the law of the tithe is not binding under the New Testament dispensation; ten regard it as still binding, either upon the church or the individual, or both; one is not clear enough to be put on either side; six decline to express an opinion. Of the fifty-one that do not regard the law as binding under the present dispensation, sixteen refer to it as suggestive in the matter of systematic giving, or useful to guide the Christian in determining his duty. Of the ten that believe the law to be binding, three advise against formal enactment, or measures to enforce the law.

"A large number of the Presbyteries enjoin greater consecration to the Lord, and liberal and systematic giving according to one's ability, and quote, as setting forth the Scripture principles that should guide in the discharge of this duty, such passages as these: 'Let every one lay by him in store according as the Lord hath prospered him;' 'The Lord loveth a cheerful giver;' 'As a man purposeth in his heart, so let him give.'

"The committee recommend that these facts be spread upon the minutes, and that no further action be taken upon the subject by the General Assembly."

This report is entered here, not for criticism, but as a part of the history defining the present ecclesiastical status of the question. From the standpoint of an Assembly's committee, with its recognized functions, this report is perhaps adequate. From another standpoint,

however, the reports of the Presbyteries on the tithe are a curious and interesting study, when they are carefully analyzed and studied on the comparative method.

The first thing which strikes one is the many points of view from which the discussions proceed, and the varying definitions on which the reports are based. If a categorical proposition had been sent down for discussion, the range would have been much narrower. Instead of this, a subject was proposed; but there was given no such definition of terms as to secure unanimity of view in considering it. A wide range of answers was, therefore, to be expected, and opinions apparently divergent, if not contradictory, may possibly be unified by a more accurate definition and a wider generalization. The very form of the answers given in most cases reveals the supposed intent of the Assembly's overture, while it often equally reveals the various and diverse views of the nature and workings of the tithe, when it was confessedly a rule of action, and, which is more important, of the relations of that "tithe law" to the voluntary and cheerful liberality of God's people.

Many of the Presbyteries, and probably the majority, understood the overture as raising the question, whether the Assembly should enact a "tithe law" to be enforced upon God's people by ecclesiastical sanctions, in order to secure, by authority and by suitable measures, a satisfactory revenue to the church; in other words, whether the Assembly should establish a compulsory revenue system. If the Assembly of 1889 meant to raise any such question, it were easy to anticipate the cleancut and emphatic "no!" which came back from so many quarters; and some Presbyteries, which did not so understand the overture, took the pains (out of abundant caution) to negative any such suggestion. The reports are all unanimous on this point, either in what they say or in what they do not feel it necessary to say. Presbyterians in this country are too intensely imbued with the law of liberty to forge such fetters for themselves. And, what is remarkable, not a single Presbytery seems to desire the Assembly to make any deliverance on the subject which should carry with it even the moral weight of so august a body. A few Presbyteries would like the Assembly to commend the tithe as a minimum rule of duty to the consciences of God's people.

It is further evident that many of the Presbyteries, in discussing the binding force of the "tithe law" in all dispensations, start with this assumption, that the Old Testament tithe was a revenue system imposed on God's people, and enforced by civil as well as ecclesiastical

power, and so put on the mere level of taxes ; and some of the Presbyteries actually pronounce it unequal, unjust and cruel, forgetting that no God-given institution can be so characterized. The wonder is that such a suggestion did not lead to the inquiry whether any such tithe system is found in the Scriptures. At least one Presbytery does find such a tithe system to be anti-Mosaic, anti-Christian and unscriptural, and there drops the subject. It is no wonder, then, that, with such a definition of the Old Testament tithe, so many should find it not binding on the Christian church, and so declare themselves.

Some Presbyteries, again, reject the tithe because it embraced, as they suppose, the civil taxes for the support of the state.

Others again reject the tithe because we are not "under law, but under grace," as if this fact were inconsistent with law as a rule of life.

Others again reject the tithe because "all is the Lord's," as if this were any more true to the Christian than when David said, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein."

A large number of Presbyteries emphasize very properly such passages as these: "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver;" "As a man purposeth in his heart, so let him give;" "Let every one lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." Now, it would seem sufficient to say, that these principles are quoted for substance from the Old Testament Scriptures, where they have full prominence. Compare Ex. xxv. 2 ; xxxv. 21-29 ; 1 Chron. xxix. 6-9 ; Prov. xi. 25, etc. A divine rule of duty is in no wise inconsistent with a "voluntary," "cheerful" and joyous obedience.

Only ten Presbyteries declare the Old Testament "law of the tithe" of permanent binding authority, and it is evident they proceed from a more liberal definition of said law and a juster view of its working. According to them, the tenth of the increase is the Lord's in all ages and dispensations ; and in their view the "tithe law" is only the divine indication of a minimum rule of duty, sustained and enforced only by providential sanctions, and calling only for a voluntary and cheerful obedience from willing hearts ; a rule which neither priest nor magistrate could enforce, or did enforce in any form ; only a rule of minimum duty from which the cheerful giver might rise to such higher standard or proportion as God's providence might indicate, or the exigencies of his cause demand. Now, whatever may be thought of the strength of the scriptural argument for such a tithe, there cer-

tainly are no objections to such a tithe in itself which do not lie equally against the Sabbath or any other positive institution of holy living.

The six Presbyteries that decline to give an opinion do so either expressly or impliedly because they are "undecided" on this "vexed question," and are not able to reach a conclusion. These Presbyteries evidently present a hopeful field to the advocate of a scriptural tithe.

Twenty-two Presbyteries reject the tithe outright, as in no sense binding on the Christian as a rule of action, using in the discussion such terms as these: "Solely Jewish," "repealed," "exaction," "not equitable," "ecclesiastical tithe law," "deliverance mischievous," "violates liberty," "enforcement," "exact," "compel," etc., etc.; all of which shows the prominence of a definition of "tithe law" already noted. A few of these argue, "under grace," and "all is the Lord's," as already noted. Only two of the twenty-two say "not binding," without adding some form of argument as indicated above.

The remaining thirty Presbyteries present views which are curious, interesting and hopeful. Many of them reject the present binding authority of the "tithe law" for the same reasons substantially as the twenty-two cited above; several of them reject in negative and modest phrase: "Do not see," "Are not convinced," "Are not prepared to adopt," "Unwise at present stage," etc. But all reject for reasons, expressed or implied, largely drawn from such a view of the "tithe law" as ought to condemn it in all ages and dispensations. Still, these thirty Presbyteries all express sentiments favorable to the tithe as a starting point for Christian liberality, while the full measure of duty is much larger. This is easily shown by phrases like the following (quoted literally or for substance and in brief): "Tithe binding on all men as token of God's ownership;" "Jewish obligation enhanced to the Christian;" "Christianity calls for more;" "An expression of God's will;" "A guide;" "Valuable in practice;" "Larger consecration and larger proportion needed in Christianity;" "More liberal;" "Might be usefully recommended and adopted;" "Assembly may advise;" "Valuable indication and guide;" "The principle continues;" "Not less:" "Christianity calls for more;" "New Testament measure not below the Old;" "Proportion not diminished, but enlarged;" "A scriptural precedent;" "Good minimum starting point;" "Obligatory in spirit for enlarging;" "Superior graces and larger field of a superior dispensation do not suggest less;" "No Christian should do less;" "Urges tithing as a question of personal duty;" "One-tenth the ordinary minimum;" "Forcibly suggestive," etc., etc.

Now, it is evident that we have no right to count any of these thirty Presbyteries with the ten that formally endorsed the tithe as of permanent binding authority; still, it is evident that the two classes are not working on the same definition of the scriptural tithe, and, if they had been, it would still be hard to say how much nearer they would have come to each other in their conclusions. The first class of ten, however, would certainly endorse all that the thirty feel free to say in favor of the tithe as a voluntary minimum in ordinary cases in the Christian dispensation. So, then, by throwing these two classes together, we find that forty of the sixty-two Presbyteries who are able to express an opinion about the tithe as a means of revenue for the church are found endorsing and commending it in some form. It would perhaps be difficult to formulate this commendation into a single paper which all would accept; still the concurrent trend of opinion is marvellous. The most ardent advocate of a properly defined scriptural tithe may well be surprised at its evident good standing in our church. Some will think also that the arguments adduced for this favorable status of the tithe are not only true, as they undoubtedly are, but scriptural as well. The consequences of this proposition we will not press.

The work which the writer proposed to himself is completed by making this analysis from a little different point of view, and for a different purpose from that of the Assembly's committee. The writer has refrained in these notes from discussing his own views of the tithe, except in an incidental and parenthetical way.

It may not be amiss, however, to construct a brief and coherent paper on the tithe out of materials the most of which is gleaned from the reports of the Presbyteries, which shall at the same time express the writer's views: such a paper as any church court might adopt without usurpation of authority or infringement of Christian liberty; such a paper as a large minority in the last Assembly hoped to see passed, in whole or in part, by the Assembly of 1891, in case the subject had been postponed till that time, to-wit :

1. The scriptural tithe was one-tenth of the proper product of capital, labor, spoil, or any other form of increase, estimated in gross, and was consecrated to the support of the institutions of religion, and was the divine indication of a minimum to be given for this purpose. Circumstances and the exigencies of the case often called for a much larger proportion in the form of free-will offerings.

2. This tithe is seen in practice before the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant, is recognized by Jacob as the law of his life consecra-

tion, and was formally engrafted on the Mosaic system at Mount Sinai. It must not be confounded with the sanctuary tithe and the poor tithe, which presumably originated with that system and passed away with it. Having none of the features of a type or mere ceremonial, it would seem to be of divine authority as long as there are institutions of religion to support.

3. This tithe was purely a voluntary offering, self-assessed, and collected by no civil or ecclesiastical authority, and enforced only by providential rewards and punishments. The enacted and enforced tithes of so many other religious systems have been a usurpation of a divine prerogative and a galling despotism.

4. Nor was this tithe an inexorable law, to be self-enforced in the face of all conditions. All positive institutions which indicate a certain measure of service would sometimes become irksome and cruel if there were no principle limiting their application in actual practice. Phariseism says, "Enforce at all hazards." Christ says, "Go ye and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice," thus quoting and setting up the Old Testament and universal principle of "necessity and mercy," as limiting such positive measures of service. Such plea of "necessity and mercy" in the tither's case is between him and his God, and he must needs be careful that he is not moved by covetousness on the one hand, or by weakness of faith on the other.

5. It is left to "prophet" and "teacher" to expound and enforce this duty of tithing as far as he may see his way clear to do so from God's word, and only so far; and it is also left to the conscience of the individual Christian to determine how far he shall accept and act upon this minimum rule of honoring God with the substance; but both the teacher and the taught must give account to the same Judge, and to him only. All other question or inquisition about it would be an impertinence and a usurpation.

6. It follows, therefore, clearly that the church courts can pronounce nothing on this subject which shall bind the conscience or the conduct of God's people, even by its moral weight. Besides, such deliverance would be of the nature of promulgating a new article of faith not now embraced in the standards of the church. Such a new article of faith might perhaps be added to the *Confession of Faith* in a constitutional way, but in that case the constitutional duty of enforcement would rest upon the church, and then liberty perishes under ecclesiastical domination.

7. The obligation to support the institutions of religion seems to

have been unquestioned in New Testament times by the heresies of the day; we, therefore, find but two references to it, one by Christ—"The laborer is worthy of his hire"—and one by Paul, Heb. ix. 13, 14; and both references are drawn from Old Testament usage and authority. Numerous and urgent arguments and exhortations are, however, given to secure generous gifts to the poor, and they were no doubt timely. These exhortations contain principles of wider application to Old Testament tithes, and free-will offerings as well.

8. Many who may not concede the permanent binding authority of the tithe as a minimum for all ages and dispensations will perhaps concede the following proposition: If the tithe was the minimum proportion in a confessedly inferior dispensation, the larger graces, wider field and abounding prosperity of a better dispensation do not suggest a smaller proportion when we essay to "honor the Lord with our substance."

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THE DODS-BRUCE DECISIONS.

THE General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, which met last spring in Edinburgh, was the largest that has been held in twenty years, the number of commissioners in attendance being seven hundred and sixty. On the 27th of May the great Assembly Hall on High street, which holds about two thousand people, was packed as never before perhaps in its history. As early as eight o'clock in the morning people began to gather, and by ten, when the Assembly was called to order, not a vacant seat could be seen, though only holders of tickets were admitted. Even after benches had been placed in the aisles a great block of people was left standing at each door. This extraordinary manifestation of interest on the part of both ministers and people was due to the expectation of a debate and a decision concerning the alleged heresies of Prof. Marcus Dods, of Edinburgh, and Prof. Alexander Balmain Bruce, of Glasgow. The former had exposed several joints in his harness by certain expressions he had used in regard to the divinity of Christ, the atonement and the resurrection, as well as by sundry unguarded statements concerning the "errors" and "immoralities" in the Old Testament. The latter had rendered himself obnoxious to the heresy hunters by loose statements also on the subject of inspiration, particularly in regard to the free reports of the words of our Lord in the synoptical Gospels.