

EADE

BV

8

py 1

THE RULE AND MEASURE

OF

CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

BY THE

REV. THOMAS SMYTH, D. D.

CHARLESTON, S. C.:

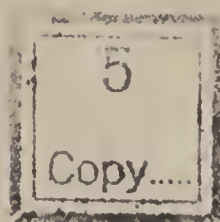
PRINTED BY B. JENKINS, 100 HAYNE-STREET.

1847.

4BV
738

SOURCE UNKNOWN

JUN 28 1956



THE RULE AND MEASURE OF CHARITY.

I would once more address you, my brethern, the ministers, officers, and members of the churches, in this public way, in the name and on behalf of the great cause of christian philanthropy in all its forms, but especially in that of missionary enterprise, which it is made my special duty to promote.

I will, therefore, endeavour to expound to you the rule and measure of christian charity, as it is laid down by the Apostle in 1 Cor., viii. 12. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." Such an exposition will, I am aware, seem unseasonable and unnecessary. What, you will say, "are we to be continually lectured upon the duty of giving money to the endless objects for which our charity is demanded?" In reply I would say, that it is the duty of every minister of the gospel not only to preach that gospel to those who are still impenitent, but just as certainly to "TEACH" those who have received the gospel, "ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER CHRIST HAS COMMANDED." But the great duty enjoined upon us by Christ, is to employ every means within our power, to extend the knowledge and the means of salvation to every creature at home and abroad; in our own neighbourhood; in every part of our country; and in every part of the world. And as this work at once puts into requisition all the available resources of *every* individual believer, it follows, that no duty is more imperative, none more important, and none more necessary to be enforced, than the duty of con-

secrating our resources, as well as our bodies, souls, and spirits, to the cause of Christ. Without such consecration the work of the Lord cannot be carried on in any one department of christian effort, and must therefore be abandoned. And while a cold and partial discharge of this duty characterizes christians, it is as evident that but *little* good can be accomplished; and that no millennial reign can ever arrive untill ALL who love the Lord Jesus Christ are found labouring for Him, and not for themselves, and freely distributing to His cause, ALL their possible means.

In my former articles I proved, to the satisfaction, I believe, of all who read them, that charitable collections are an instituted means of grace, and a part of the public worship of God, and therefore an essential part of christian faith and practice. No one, therefore, can possibly “fulfil the work of the ministry,” who does not endeavour to train up his people in the habit of christian liberality, so that they shall be found *as* “ready to distribute, and *as* willing to communicate,” as to pray, to read the Scriptures, to be humble, to be holy, and to add to their faith every other grace. And as these various graces are to be preserved and increased by “line upon line, and precept upon precept,” so is it also with this grace and duty of christian charity.

Further, the christian minister is to be guided in the selection of his topics of brotherly admonition by “the analogy,” or proportion “of faith,” and the *relative* importance and practical *necessity* of the various duties enjoined by Christ, and implied in Christianity. Now, the fulness and variety of Scripture on the subject of christian charity, is very remarkable. No other duty is more clearly, more frequently, or more solemnly commanded. Such precepts as these—“honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of all thine increase,” “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’”—are found every where throughout the sacred volume. “As they therefore who must give account unto God” for the manner in which they have taught in his name, ministers must take heed that they give *due* prominence to this matter, “whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.”

But still further, is there any danger to which more than others, his people are exposed, and in consequence of which they are in danger of “making shipwreck” of their everlasting hopes?—is it not, I ask, the duty of every christian teacher, the more carefully, earnestly, and constantly to bring THAT danger to the view of his people, to forewarn them of it, and to endeavour to save them from its dreadful overthrow. But THERE IS SUCH AN EVIL, AND THAT EVIL IS COVETOUSNESS,—the love of money and of property, and the consequent unwillingness to part with it in the exercise of charity, or to give it in that measure of liberality which the word of God enjoins. There is no other crime *so often* referred to and denounced both in the old and new Testament as this is, nor one that is so frequently adverted to, and so terribly condemned, by our blessed Saviour during his personal ministration on earth. Neither does Christ exempt *any* churches from this duty, or from these charges because of their *poverty*. We suppose that we shall be allowed to be perfectly safe in asserting that the churches over which the apostle Paul exercised a superintendence possessed, among their members, far less wealth than most churches in the present day. Opulent men, it is clear there were,—but when we remember that the Christian faith was a discreditable one,—the “sect every where spoken against,”—a fellowship into which “not many mighty, not many noble,” were called, we can have no doubt that, as compared with our own time and country, when every man who would be considered “respectable,” must have his pew in his church or chapel,—the Christians of the apostle’s day must have been truly “an afflicted and poor people,” whose simple maxim was “Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.”

Yet it was to these poor and despised societies that the apostle NEVER wrote without using the most emphatic warnings against covetousness. And it deserves our particular attention, to observe the rank and order in which he places this “respectable” vice. It is always classed with the most enormous offences.

1 Cor. v. 11.—“I have written unto to you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, *or covetous*,—with such an one no not to eat.”

Ephes. v. 3.—“But fornication, and all uncleanness, *or covetousness*, let it not be once named among you. For ye know that no unclean person, nor *covetous* man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ or of God.”

Coloss. iii. 5.—“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and *covetousness*, which is idolatry.”

Heb. xiii. 5. “Let your conversation be *without covetousness*, and be content with such things as ye have.”

2 Tim. iii. 2.—“In the last days perilous times shall come,—men shall be *covetous*.”

That minister, therefore is “a false prophet,” “a lying deceiver,” and the *greatest enemy* of his people, who attempts to hide, or invalidate, or soften down, the declarations of the most High God, who associates not *misers* merely, but all who are covetous, with the vilest of criminals; characterizes them as “idolaters;” threatens them with the direst punishment; and excludes them absolutely from the kingdom of heaven. And hence it is the greatest kindness a minister can possibly exhibit to his people, to bring before them the enormous guilt and danger of covetousness, and the imperative necessity of christian liberality. “The love of money,” said Andrew Fuller, “will, in all probability, prove the eternal overthrow of more characters among professing people, than any other sin, because it is almost the only crime which can be indulged, and a profession of religion at the same time supported.” And what evil is more prevalent or alarming at the present day, or more fatal to the progress of true piety than this;—and what is the result? By accumulating wealth beyond the amount necessary for the comfortable support of our family, and dependants, we multiply the attractions of the world; wean our affections from the things that are above; enhance our fondness for the vain, trifling and costly ornaments of life; minister to our taste for pomp and distinction; nurture our love of ease and indolence; encourage pride, arrogance and selfishness; esteem ourselves higher and better than others; become wise in our conceits, confident in our own wisdom, dogmatic in our own opinions and overbearing in our temper; and because we

are independent *of men* and of any immediate want, we are insensibly led to feel independent *of God*, to set up our judgment in opposition to His, to dictate even to THE ETERNAL, and to go into eternity filled with a sense of our own importance. Such are the necessary *tendencies* at least, and in many cases the *actual* results of the possession of resources beyond our necessary and comfortable maintenance. And is not, I ask, this hoarding of property, the wide-spread and all-absorbing passion of the times? And is not the established and universal opinion of society *in favour* of this practice, and in opposition to the teachings of heaven? Most certainly it is. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well for thyself," and "the wicked blesseth the covetous man whom the Lord abhorreth." And it was to such persons our Saviour said, "ye are they that justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your heart, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

But if, as is universally allowed, covetousness is THE GREAT INIQUITY of our times, shall not the watchman of the Lord warn his people of it, and that so much the more as he sees how impossible it is for them to escape from its soul-destroying snares without the most lively sense of their danger, the deepest conviction of its fatality, and the most constant watchfulness and earnest prayer? Certain it is, that every *sincere* christian is anxious to *know*, in order that he may *do*, the will of his master, and the language of his heart is, "I love thy commandments above gold, yea above fine gold, I esteem thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." Believing therefore these things, and that "making collections for the poor, and other pious purposes" is, as the "Confession of Faith" teaches, an ordinance of the Church, just as much as prayer, singing praises, reading, expounding and preaching the word of God, or administering baptism and the Lord's Supper, and that it has ever been so regarded from the very days of Christ and his apostles, I feel, brethren of the ministry, and of the membership, constrained to "put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them," and though some of you may be "established" in their belief. My own heart, and my own experience, tell me

that there is no part of Christian duty more difficult, or more opposed to our natural propensities than this, and none therefore, to which we require more frequent and faithful urgency. And when you know that I feel myself included among those whom I address, that I put upon *you* none other burdens than what I am *myself* willing, and obligated to assume, and that although I may not have large resources, it is at least as difficult for a man with moderate means to give *his due* proportion of these means, as it is for those who possess much to give to the full measure of *their* ability and duty; when, I say, you remember these things, you will not impute to any other than kind and conscientious motives my importunate anxiety that you may all escape the guilt and the doom of the covetous, or of the hireling, or the false prophet, and reap the reward of the self-denying and the liberal-hearted.

WHAT then, let me ask, IS CHRISTIAN CHARITY, and what is the rule and measure by which every man is to be guided in his exercise of the grace of liberality, and his stewardship over his property?

As to the first question, the apostle says, that charity necessarily implies, and springs from a willing mind. The heart must be ready to give; predisposed, willing, prompt. Charity does not consist in the outward *acts* of benevolence, since these may proceed from improper motives,—from selfishness, from a regard to the expectations and opinions of others, from pride, ostentation, vanity, or self-righteousness. Such acts may, therefore, be constrained, and arise neither from a disinterested nor a willing mind. The apostle, therefore, teaches, that a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet have no charity, and no true piety. It is the will, the motive, the disposition, that gives worth to the oblation, and, as it regards divine acceptance, puts the poorest giver upon the same footing with the richest. A *less* amount may thus be the *greater* charity; and where there is nothing to give, God accepts the will, when, in His judgment, it is sincere. That conduct then, is not true benevolence which arises from the working of mere natural impulses of sympathy, generosity or kindness; or which is drawn from the reluctant giver by the force of exter-

nal appeals to character, fortune or shame. To be really virtuous and christian, charity must, in the *first* place, be voluntary. Our character lies in our will, which is endued with authority to command, control and regulate all the other powers both of soul and body. In point of action, therefore, the will, as has been said, is the whole man; and a man is a moral agent, and to be regarded as acting either rightly or wrongly, only as he does, or does not, act by the free and cheerful dictate of his own will.

But in the *second* place, the outward act of giving in order to be truly charitable, must be performed from a principle of duty. An action done for amusement; for the gratification of taste; under the impulse of any of the appetites of our nature; or from a regard to the pride of station and of character; is not *virtuous*, much less *christian*. To become virtuous, an action must be performed, not only voluntarily, but also on the ground that it *ought* to be done. And it is only therefore when principle, that is, a sense of duty, operates on the will, and constrains it to determine to bestow any given amount of money or of goods, that the action is truly virtuous. Then only is such a contribution given on virtuous grounds, and in opposition to all the difficulties and the hostile inclinations that stand in the way;—and then only is the act of giving true charity.

But in the *third place*, there is something still wanting to constitute such an act of liberality, *christian* charity. To be christian charity, our gifts must be set apart not only *willingly* and because we think we *ought* to part with them,—they must be given also from a principle of love to Christ and regard to His will. If our charity is christian, the Scriptures will be our standard, and the measure of giving *there* prescribed, will be our rule of beneficence. The Christian is one who realizes that “he is not his own,” that he “is the Lord’s,” that body soul and spirit have been redeemed by Christ, and are to be consecrated to Him;—and that he is no longer, therefore, to live as his own master or for his own ends, or by his own opinions and rules, but unto “Him who died for him” and by whose blood he has been redeemed. Love to Christ is, therefore, the great animating and governing principle of the Christian. And since Christ desires him to live while here below,

for His glory, for the furtherance of His cause, and for the salvation and general good of men, the christian endeavours to consecrate his property, his talents and his whole influence unto Him who hath “loved him and given Himself for him.”

If then, brethren, you possess Christian charity, without which all your profession is as “the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal,” you have “a willing mind.” You have an inward predisposition and desire to “honour the Lord with your substance.” You are determined to set apart all that He requires to His service, and the claims of benevolence. And feeling that your property is His and not your own, and that He has a just claim to all you are and all you possess, you have such a readiness and desire to give, that even if unsolicited, you would be found, like the Macedonians, “praying us with much entreaty to receive the gift.” If actuated by Christian charity, you are more afraid of not giving as much as you ought, than of giving too much. You feel, in respect to what you contribute, that you do not so much *give* it as if it were your own, but *deliver it up* to Him whose it is, and whose stewards you are. Your language is not that which is too commonly heard: “well I suppose I *must give you* something” but it will be, as it ought to be, “I will cheerfully render unto the Lord that which is His due.” You measure your duty not by what others give; not by appearances; not by what you have given before; not by strongly excited feeling; not by the popularity of the cause; but by the word of God, by your duty to God in Christ, and by your consequent duty to your fellow men. And after you have given all that you can, you consider that you are an “unprofitable servant;”—look to the blood and righteousness of Christ alone for salvation;—and are ashamed that you should give so little in return for the innumerable and incalculable benefits Christ has conferred on you. The language and the spirit of every true christian is that of the late Lady Glenorchy, as found in her Diary, and which she now speaks to us as a voice from the tomb: “O MY gracious Saviour, as I have devoted myself, and all I have, unto thee this day upon my knees, and with my heart and tongue, I would now in thy presence confirm it with my hand; and with all sincerity of heart, solemnly give up

and commit to thee my soul, body and spirit; my life, reputation, goods, friends, relations, health and outward comforts; my understanding, will, and affections; in short all that I am and have, to be disposed of as shall be most for the glory of thy name, and eternal good of my soul. Guide and conduct me through life; be with me to support me and comfort me in death, and receive me at last into thy kingdom and glory, to be ever with thee throughout eternity. And the whole glory and praise shall be ascribed unto the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God for ever and ever."

Have you then, this charity which never faileth? If you have, blessed are ye,—yea "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." But if you are without this charity, then you are "nothing;" your profession will profit you nothing; your benefactions, however large you may think them, will be counted as less than nothing; your "hope will be destroyed;" all your vain confidence will be overthrown; and "when weighed in the balance you will be found wanting."*

What then, you will now ask, is THE RULE AND MEASURE BY WHICH THIS CHARITY IS TO BE GUIDED? The rule by which christian charity is to be measured and guided in its promptings is at the same time merciful and just. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not." This rule is *merciful*, because it does not require impossibilities. It does not enjoin absolutely any given amount, irrespective of our circumstances. It does not so connect our giving with God's blessing as that we shall not enjoy God's favour if wholly *unable* to exercise liberality.

It places charity *essentially* in the heart and the disposition. And if there exists the spirit of charity without the ability to manifest it in deeds, God accepts the will, and hears the prayer, and blesses the merciful desire. The poor and the rich are thus put upon an equality. The poor may gain as much acceptance and reward as the rich. If the poor can *give* nothing, they can still be truly charitable in the sight of God, "who looketh upon the heart," and who will treasure up in remembrance all their tears of pity, their sighs and moans, their prayers and aspirations;

* See Note A.

their counsel and advice, their activity and zeal, their humility and lowliness, their faith and hope. Even their "cup of cold water shall not lose its reward" but shall be gratefully acknowledged before an assembled universe. And if out of their deep poverty the poor can find in their heart to contribute something to the cause of Christ,—if depending upon future resources they are willing to give all they have, though it be but a mite, the gift will not be spurned by God, but will be esteemed by Him greater than the abundance of the rich, and receive at his hands a more munificent reward.

Believer ! Hath the Lord increased,
 With bounteous hand thy store ?
 And while thy neighbour's wealth hath ceased,
 Doth thine augment the more !
 Then let the poor, the wretched, share
 A portion of thy gain ;
 But give in faith, and give with pray'r
 Else all thy gifts are vain.

'Tis writ that once the Saviour stood,
 While crowds the temple sought ;
 And with unerring glance review'd
 The varied gifts they brought.
 The rich, the great, swept proudly by,
 And cast their offerings in ;
 But oft the haughty step and eye
 Defiled the act with sin.

At length a widow, poor and lone,
 Comes bent with years and woes ;
 Two mites are all she calls her own,
 And in those mites she throws.
 Ill can that weak and shrivelled hand
 The scanty pittance spare ;
 But faith and love the gift demand,
 And lo ! the gift is there.

And doubtless some that gift beheld
 With wonder and with pain ;
 And some the act had fain repell'd
 With ill-concealed disdain.
 But Christ the holy motive prized,
 And heard the contrite sigh ;
 And taught that deeds by men despised
 May have their praise on high.

"That widow mark, whose hoary head
 Has long with anguish striven ;
 Her's is the noblest gift," He said,
 "Which has this day been given !
 The rich, the great, whose means o'erflow,
 A fraction here let fall ;
 But she from home of want and woe
 Comes forth and gives HER ALL !"

“I want to give the widow’s mite,” said an old lady worth her thousands, as she handed *ten cents* to give the bread of life to millions perishing in ignorance and sin.

Said a gentleman of a large income, “I suppose I must give my mite,” as he very reluctantly handed *a dollar* to one collecting funds to send the gospel to the destitute.

It is not uncommon for those who receive the offerings of the people for the Lord’s treasury, to hear such allusions to the poor widow whose benevolence is recorded in Mark xii. 41–44. The example is evidently quoted with self-complacency, and as an apology for giving a very small sum, far below the ability God has given. Is it intended as a cloak for their covetousness, or do they really think that the *smaller* the sum, the more acceptable it is to God? It was not the *smallness* of what the widow gave that drew forth the commendation of the Saviour, but the greatness of her benevolence. The rich gave of their abundance, a part only of their surplus; she gave all she had, yea, all her living.

The measure of benevolence, then, is not the amount *given*, but the amount *left* from which the offering is taken. No person can exceed the poor widow in benevolence. How few come up to her! How many would call it an act of imprudence to imitate her! None can properly claim to imitate her till they give all they have, *yea, all their living*.

How *merciful* then is the rule of christian charity, as here laid down. How much does it bespeak the goodness of Him who “considers the poor,” whose tender mercies are over all His other works, and who while he allots to every one their measure of good and ill, of health and sickness, of wealth and poverty, equalizes to His own children every condition of life, whether prosperous or adverse; leaves no ground for murmuring or discontent; makes every thing to work together for good, and proportions the measure of their present peace and future blessedness not to their outward circumstances but to their inward faith, and hope, and holy devotedness.

But while the rule of charity here laid down is thus merciful and compassionate to the poor, it is equally just in its application to those who have any means which might be employed in the

cause of charity. The same God who can discover the spirit and purpose of charity where there is nothing to bestow, can as certainly determine when there *are* means which might be devoted to His cause, were there first a willing and a charitable spirit. And just as certainly as God will accept the will for the deed, where there is no ability to perform it, will He reject the assumption of charity, where there is not the employment of every possible means in carrying that will out into the overt act of charity. The secrets of our condition are all known to God, however concealed from man. There is nothing hidden from His all-searching eye. And He will render to every man in exact accordance to what such a man could, and might, and ought to have done. "For," says the apostle, "it is accepted according to what a man hath." There must be a proportion between a man's means and his giving. He that has little must give, though he can give but little. He that has more must give more. He that has much must give much. And he that has large resources must give largely. ALL MUST GIVE, AND ALL MUST GIVE IN EXACT ACCORDANCE WITH THE MEANS WHICH GOD HAS ENTRUSTED TO THEIR STEWARDSHIP. Nay more, the real charity of the gift and the consequent recompense of which it is worthy, according to the rule of the divine *mercy* (for in *justice* we can deserve nothing, since we can give nothing but what we have first received,) depends not only on the amount a man actually gives, but also as has been said, upon the *amount in each case retained*. On this principle Christ pronounced the widow to have given more than all the wealthy, for she retained nothing—and so, may we be assured, He judges now; and when, in the end, He shall reckon with those who, in the meantime are His stewards and no more—on this principle He will decide in every case. To withhold, from mere love of keeping, when God condescends to ask anything for His work—then to bestow our substance upon vanity, or unnecessary personal indulgence, to the setting aside of His claim, or to the crippling of our ability to answer it—is to expose ourselves to great evil. "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that

is waste, and ye run every man into his own house." So to deal with God will certainly be to impoverish ourselves and them that come after us, and to deprive ourselves and them of God's blessing on what we possess, and of the comfort in using His mercies that blessing implies. It will be to bring the "moth on our garments"—"the canker on our gold and silver." The very "*rust*" of them—the evidence of their being unemployed, contrary to God's mind—will "witness against us," and "eat our flesh as it were fire!"

God will not accept our offerings therefore, unless they are willingly and liberally bestowed. Such offerings are not charity. They are not evidences of a truly charitable and willing mind. They are merely given as excuses, to silence conscience, to meet the expectations of the church, to appease the frown of an otherwise dissatisfied community, and to compound with God for the *full measure* of our obligations. God will justly punish the imputation such offerings throw upon His character. He will reject all such gifts, however great. He will "spue them out of his mouth." He will say to such contributors, as he did of old "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offering of rams, and the fat of fed beasts. Bring no more vain oblations. Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse, because ye have robbed me, from the least even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness."

So much then for the rule and measure of charity. Two questions, however, still present themselves, necessary to be answered, before we can fully understand this rule. First, what may a man be said to have, out of which he is required to give? A man, we reply, has all that income which arises from his salary in office,—his wages for service, or his interest on money already accumulated. But further than this, a man has not only what he now possesses, but what, by proper industry and exertion, he might obtain; and also what, by strict economy and self-denial, he might be able to *save*. Many persons, by a little increased exertion, could earn what would enable them to bestow something

in charity ; and it may be safely affirmed that millions are annually expended without necessity, even by christian families in “useless, nay worse than useless, luxuries of dress, equipage and decoration, in feasting and gluttony, and in the thousand ways by which we engender pride, impair health, and minister to the injury and ruin of the soul.” Now, for all that we have, for all that we waste, and for all that we *might* obtain, God holds us accountable ; and this is what He will make the standard of our personal responsibility, when we “give our account unto Him.” The christian is therefore required to “be diligent in business,” “working with his hands, the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth,” and ministers are to “charge them that are rich in the world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. But they that WILL be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition, for the love of money is the root of all evil ; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

The other question to be answered is, what is that proportion of what a man has, which the Lord demands, in the exercise of Christian charity. This amount must, it is plain, be in exact proportion to the means, which every individual possesses, or may secure by frugality, economy, and simplicity of living and of dress. And what that exact proportion is must be decided by such general rules as these : “Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase.” “Take no thought for the morrow.” “Freely ye have received, freely give.” “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him. He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, while he that soweth liberally shall reap also bountifully.” And if you still desire a more definite understanding of the amount implied in this proposition, I will give you the opinion of one of the wisest christians that

have ever lived, I mean the venerable Baxter. "A tenth part of their entire income is," he says, "too much for some, and much too little for others; but for the most part it is, I think, as likely a proportion as it is fit for another to prescribe in particular." And by this he means not a tenth, after deducting our expenses for our families or our persons, but a tenth of our whole income; "for," says he, "after such provision is deducted, it is far more than a tenth, if not all, that must be given." Dr. Fell in his life of Dr. Hammond, says, "the rate and sum of what the doctor devoted, was the tenth of all his income, wherein he was so strictly punctual, that commonly the first thing he did was to compute and separate the poor man's share." And precisely in the same spirit I have heard of an excellent minister of Christ, who having received an unexpected legacy of \$50,000 from a man who happened to enter the church in which he was preaching, and derived benefit from his ministry, immediately set apart \$5,000 for the cause of God, and, what was more remarkable, a friend who knew his habit of devoting a tenth to God, sent him a thousand pounds that his ten might be unbroken, and of this he also devoted £100. Let us be followers of such men, even as they followed Christ, remembering that He gave himself for us.

Certain it is, that with comparatively few opportunities of doing good; with much less enforcement to benevolence; and with no motive at all equal to the ever boundless obligations under which we are laid by the full disclosures of redeeming love; the Jewish people were anciently required to give one tenth of all their income of every kind, besides voluntary offerings, which were manifold.*

My brethren, is not this discussion most timely and most necessary? Does it not concern us all? Does it not enter deeply into our preparation to live holy lives and to die peaceful and happy deaths? Is there not much infidelity, and much practical atheism on this subject? Do we not regard ourselves lords of all we possess? Do we not consider charity as something voluntary and supererogatory; as something not essential to our Christian duty, and the omission of which does not invalidate our

* See Note B.

christian hopes? Is there not a disposition to regard collections for the poor and other pious objects as an intrusion upon the house of God; an addition to God's worship and ordinances; an unwelcome duty; a device of ministers; and a mere worldly and carnal object? Are there none among us who give nothing they can avoid; who are full of excuses; and who love their money better than their souls, and better than their God? Are there not many, who never give on principle and according to the full measure of what God has given to them, and what God requires from them,—who give, therefore, *merely* by impulse, and only when they can give without in *any way* inconveniencing themselves? Are there not many who make their past givings an excuse for their present covetous withholdings, altho' God has been still continuing to bless them? Are there not many who make temporary and partial losses of what they might have gained or might have retained, a ground for refusing to give according to what they *still have* and continue to possess? Are there not many who make the contributions of *other* and *poorer persons*, or persons who are covetous and illiberal, the standard of their benefactions? Are there not many who never deny themselves or their families whatever they desire, who nevertheless, habitually deny the Lord, what He claims at their hands? Are there not many who feel unhappy, dissatisfied, or even fretted, when any cause of charity is pressed upon their attention? Are there not many who, if absent from church when any object is presented for its support, never think of giving their proportion towards it, even though it be one of the regular seasons of systematic contribution? And are not our churches altogether in fault when censure or discipline is extended towards other shortcomings and sins of christians, and when christian professors who are known to be covetous and penurious in their charity are allowed to pass and unreprieved?

I confess, Brethren, I have deep feelings and great fears on these points? I sit in judgment upon no individual, but “I have continual heaviness of heart” on account of this very matter. Bear with me, then, if even by general surmise I give pain to any heart conscious of a *right spirit* and a right purpose in

this matter. But be assured, the warning is not unnecessary, nor any subject more needful to be frequently, fully, and faithfully examined.

The subject of christian liberality, is a great, a practical and a vitally important matter, and stands intimately connected with your own personal salvation and the salvation of others, with the prosperity of our churches, and with the extension of the kingdom of Christ.

Be ye then, my brethren, instructed and warned. Remember, that the mere approbation of the worth and goodness of any cause—the wishing of its prosperity and advancement—or an inclination to assist it—*is not charity*, because all these may exist, while there is no will to *give*—no recognition of our duty and obligation to *give*—and no conscientious conformity to the rule here laid down for our *giving*. The disposition of men's hearts is revealed by those many excuses by which they apologize for their own conscious neglect of this great duty. "It is wonderful to consider," says the celebrated Dr. South, "how a command or call to be liberal either upon a civil or religious account, all of a sudden impoverishes the rich, breaks the merchant, shuts up every private man's exchequer, and makes those men in a minute have nothing at all to give, who at the very same instant want nothing to spend. So that instead of relieving the poor, such a command strangely increases their number, and transforms rich men into beggars presently." Now if a man really has nothing to give this is a sufficient reason for his not giving both to God and man, but if he has means from which he might give, such an excuse as Dr. South says, "is an intolerable hypocrisy towards both. And do men in good earnest think that God will be put off so? Never then pretend that thou hast a heart to pray, while thou hast no heart to give, since he that serves Mammon with his *estate* cannot possibly serve God with his *heart*; for as in the heathen worship of God a sacrifice without a *heart* was accounted ominous, so, in the christian worship of Him, a heart without a sacrifice is worthless and impertinent. Consider therefore," he adds, "with thyself that there is a God, who is not to be flattered off with lies, who knows

exactly what thou canst do and what thou canst not ; and consider in the next place, that it is not the best husbandry in the world to be damned to save" the expenses of christian charity.

Assuredly times are coming which will try men's principles. "Merchandize and hire SHALL BE holiness to the Lord." "Beyond their power" men will again "communicate, and pray with much entreaty for a reception of the gift." Sordid excuses and reservations will be no longer made. Superfluity and luxury will be ashamed of their indulgence. Inconvenience and self-denial will pour in their offerings. And "the gold and silver will be found to be the Lord's," not only in fact, but by the actual and willing consecration of its possessors. "To whom much is given from them much is required." And the question therefore, for each of us to decide in the presence of conscience and an omniscient God, is, "AM I DOING ALL I CAN AND ALL I OUGHT, AND AM I DETERMINED, ACCORDING TO MY ABILITY, TO HONOUR THE LORD BY A REGULAR, SYSTEMATIC, AND CHEERFUL APPROPRIATION OF MY MEANS, AS GOD HATH PROSPERED ME. May God enable us on the one hand to rejoice in the *mercifulness* of this rule, and on the other to acknowledge its *justice*, to behold the goodness of God to them that love him, and His severity towards them who are disobedient. And are any thinking seriously about^t their souls and their duty publicly to devote themselves to Christ and His cause? To such let me say, that when a certain young man came to Christ in order to know what good thing he was to do in order to obtain eternal life, the whole discourse of Christ consisted in this advice—"Go sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and then come and follow me." And if any man is now unwilling to give up his property and to hold it in trust for Christ and His cause, then it is as true of him now, as it was of the young man, that "he is none of Christ's." "He is not worthy of Him."

Merciful God, in whose hands our hearts are, incline them to do Thy will, and to spend and be spent in Thy service.

NOTE A.

THE PARSIMONY OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

In my opinion, there is nothing which lays the Church more open to infidel attack and contempt, than its parsimony to the cause of Christ. Professors of religion, in general, give nothing in comparison to what they ought to give. Some *literally* give nothing, or somewhere in that immediate neighbourhood. I shall not inquire whether such persons are really Christian men. One might almost question whether they are *human*.

I have used the word *give* ; I must correct my language. *Deliver up*, I ought to say, when speaking of Christians who have so often acknowledged themselves as not their own, but *themselves* and *their's* to be the Lord's. Not a farthing, or not much more, will some of these deliver up, of all that their Lord has given them in trust. What stewards we Christians are ! We act as if we were undisputed owners and sovereign proprietors of all ; when we know, and, if pressed, acknowledge, it is no such thing. The infidels know that we profess to be but stewards, and in our devotional hours, we write on everything we have, "This is the Lord's ;" and they naturally expect to see some correspondence between our profession and practice ; and when they perceive it is but bare profession, and that we do not mean anything by it, they are very apt to conclude that this is true of our religion generally. Moreover, these shrewd characters see common humanity constraining men of the world to greater liberality than the love of Christ constrains his reputed disciples to exercise ; and that, though they hear Christians continually saying that there is no principle which has such power to carry men out to deeds and sacrifices of benevolence as the love of Christ. What must they conclude from this ? Either that there is no such principle, or that Christians do not feel the force of it.

Again : Infidels hear us speak of giving, as *lending* to the Lord. Now, they don't believe any such thing ; but since we do, they are astonished that we do not lend more liberally to such a paymaster, and on such security. *They* are in the habit of lending liberally, and they wonder Christians do not. They hear us also repeating and admiring that sentiment, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Must they not think us insincere

in our commendations of this sentiment, or else that we have very faint aspirations after the more blessed part, when they look on, and see with how much more complacency and good humour we receive a great deal, than give a little.

But about the parsimony of Christians. I do not hesitate to say, having well considered the import of my words, that men are not so *mean* (I must use the word) to any cause, as Christians, in general, are to Christ's cause. They give more sparingly to it than to any other.

Many persons never give until they have done everything else ; and when any pressure occurs, it is the first thing they stop doing. They go on spending, not only for necessities and comforts, but even for luxuries, never minding the pressure. They only stop giving ; commencing retrenchment with their donations, and generally ending it with them. They are liberal still for everything but charity. You could never suppose, to look at their dress, equipage, furniture, table, &c., that the times were any way hard. No ; they forget that, till they are called on to give ; then they feel the pressure of the times.

The manner in which some persons give is worthy of no very commendatory notice. They say, when applied to, "well, I suppose I must give you something." Mark the word *must*, where *will* ought to be ; and *give* where *contribute*, or strictly speaking, *yield up*, should have been ; and you—*give you*. It is no such thing. The man is no beggar. He is not asking any thing for himself. He has himself given to the same object ; and more than money—his time and thought, his cares and efforts ;—nay, perhaps, has given his own person to the service which he asks others to aid by their pecuniary contributions. Christians, so called, talk of giving to the support of missionariaes, as if they laid the missionaries under some obligations to them. Preposterous ! How it sounds to hear a real Christian indulge such a remark in reference to the richly gifted, and profoundly learned *Martyn*, who, when he might have shone at home, went into the sickly East, to hold up the light of life in those dark places ! To call men who give themselves to the work of the Lord, and to labour and die for their fellow-men, the protégés, beneficiaries, and obligated dependants of us who live and luxuriate at home, is really too bad ; men, who, when the alternative is to go or send, consent to the weightier branch of the alternative, and go ; that they should be looked upon as inferior to us, who choose the lighter part of the alternative, and only send ! I say it is too bad. "I must give you something !" Really !

I do not wonder, for my part, that God does not give "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven," to the present generation of saints. Their souls are not sufficiently expanded to receive it. It will require a race of Christians of *great hearts* to take possession of the world in the name of Jesus—Christians who shall be constrained

by his love, and who shall feel the full force of the consideration presented in 2 Cor. viii. 9.

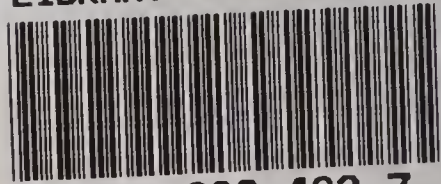
Many Christians now think they feel it; but is it feeling the force of that consideration, for a man who has an income of some thousands a year, to give a few surplus pounds annually to support missions, or to circulate the Bible? I do not say that, because Christ impoverished himself, therefore all his followers ought literally to do the same; but I say they ought to come nearer to it than they do. If, being rich, they should not become poor, as he did, yet surely they ought to be more free with their riches. If the Master gave his whole *principal*, certainly the disciples might give their *interest*. That would not be too closely imitating him. If He *emptied* himself, they at least might forego further accumulation. They need not become poor; but why should they be so solicitous to become more rich? That is being as unlike the model as possible.

NOTE B.

THE CHARITIES REQUIRED BY THE JEWISH LAW.

The Jews were required to give one tenth—a tithe—of all their income to the Lord.

There are probably many who are in the habit of regarding the *tithe system*, or dedication of one-tenth to religious uses, as a part of the Mosaic or Jewish economy, and only intended, like many other of their laws, to serve a temporary purpose, and abrogated on the dissolution of that economy. It will be perceived, however, by reference to the 14th chapter of the book of Genesis, that this principle was admitted and this practice maintained before the era of the Jewish Institute. For, on his return from the slaughter of the kings, and before the change of his name, Abram was met by Melchizedek priest of the most High God;



and having received his benediction, the patriarch gave him *tithes of all.*

Again, we have another illustration in the case of the patriarch Jacob, recorded in the 28th chapter of Genesis. After the vision of the ladder which he had at Bethel, (or Luz,) "Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: and this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the *tenth* unto thee."

Grotius argues very justly, that those virtues required by God under the ancient economy, ought to be fulfilled by Christians now, in a greater degree, from their superior knowledge and higher motives, and because the promises of heaven are more clear. And he instances in the law of the Sabbath, and of tithes."*

But their tithes were far from being all the charity required of the Jews. They never came before the Lord in public worship without an offering of some sort. They had laws of compulsory giving and laws of voluntary giving—the one necessary and the other left to the liberality of the donor. There were two chests in every synagogue, and regular weekly collections, besides special collections, when each member was solicited individually to give.

The real amount the Jews gave in charity could not, therefore, have been less than one third of all their income.

* On War, Vol. 1., p. 39.