

The Visitor's Pulpit.

Christian Giving.

"Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."

The subject of Christian giving is as difficult as it is generally unpopular. It is among the least understood, and the most constantly neglected of all the duties enjoined by special Divine precept upon the followers of Christ.

DEFECTIVE TEACHING.

Our churches have never been properly instructed in the matter of giving. It is seldom kept before them as it should be, with "line upon line, and precept upon precept."

NEEDED REFORM.

Nothing in our denominational economy calls more loudly for reform than our method of beneficence. It is safe to affirm that in most of our churches there is no thoroughly organized system of giving.

I. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE OBLIGATION. "Let every one of you." There can be no mistake here. The language is as plain as the requirement is absolute.

IGNORANCE NO EXCUSE.

Ignorance of the nature and universality of the obligation will not excuse its neglect. Christians are bound by the same law to contribute of their substance for the spread of the gospel, as they are to believe in Christ, to pray, or perform any other religious duty or act of worship.

EVEN THE POOREST CAN GIVE.

But it may be asked: What of the poor who have nothing to give? Are they to

be held under condemnation for non-compliance with a law, the requirements of which they have no means to fulfil? A sufficient reply to all this is, that the law in relation to giving is from above. Its divine author never made a mistake. He enjoins no impossibilities.

A GOOD DEFINITION.

Beneficence has been described as a gracious disposition of the mind, capable of a high degree of culture, even among the poor. Its favor will not be restrained, or content itself with the mere expression of good wishes and anxious desires.

II. THE RULE FOR ITS OBSERVANCE. "On the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him."

NO CAST-IRON RULE.

In applying this rule, we do not understand it as being intended to restrict our giving to any particular time or place. We may give anywhere, or to any object worthy of our benevolence, just as it is right to pray, or preach the gospel wherever opportunity may offer.

THE BETTER DAY, THE BETTER DEED, was never more appropriate than when applied to the case in hand. The association of giving with the other parts of our public worship, attaches to it a sacredness, and confers upon it a dignity that lifts it above the low plane of the secular.

A RULE FOR ALL TIMES. The rule enjoined upon the churches of Galatia and Corinth, as indicated in the text, was undoubtedly intended to indicate the method of benevolence to be perpetuated among God's people through all time.

III. Our third and last point is, THE MEASURE OF THE REQUIREMENT. "As God hath prospered him." And here, as always and everywhere, let us "to the law and to the testimony; if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us."

BIBLE LIGHTS.

The question may be asked: Does the Bible give any definite rule to determine the measure of Christian giving? Or does it leave the whole question in blissful uncertainty, and each individual to decide for himself as to how often or how much he will give?

He that hath two coats, let him part to him that hath none, and he that hath bread, let him do likewise." By his apostles he says: "He that giveth let him do it with simplicity; he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness."

THE RULE MADE OUT.

If from these passages, with nothing obscure or ambiguous as to their meaning or expression, and with an obvious bearing upon every phase of the subject in hand, a rule may not be made out to determine the measure of Christian giving, it is difficult to see what more could be desired for that purpose.

THE RULE UNDER THE LAW.

Under the Mosaic economy, the measure of giving was fixed and regulated by unvarying law. It required of the people one-tenth of all their income annually for the maintenance of the ministering tribe of Levi.

PRACTICAL BENEVICENCE.

It may be interesting at this point to note some examples of the forms and extent of practical beneficence developed under the operation of this law.

in the wilderness were called for, the people of all classes responded by an illustrious display of voluntary liberality. "They came, both men and women" (Exodus 35) as many were willing hearted, and brought an offering of gold unto the Lord.

OTHER EXAMPLES.

A still more illustrious example is furnished in connection with the preparation made for the erection of the temple at Jerusalem. From the record in Chronicles we learn that David, with the aid of his assistants and subordinates, brought forward offerings amounting to thousands of millions of dollars!

TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

It can scarcely be doubted that the examples of liberality exhibited by the Israelites of old were intended as a pattern to be imitated by the New Testament church. May we not rather believe, as one says, that "the offerings then made may be considered as typical or emblematical of the more splendid offering which would be exhibited by New Testament saints, when God shall appear in his glory to men, to build up the walls of his Jerusalem, and cause Zion to appear beautiful and glorious in the eyes of the nations?"

A CONSUMMATION DEVOUTELY TO BE WISHED.

But is there anything in Scripture to warrant us to expect it as one of the results of the advancing glory of the Redeemer's Kingdom? Is it possible to interpret certain predictions of the prophets, otherwise than as distinct foreshadows of the larger beneficence that would be developed as a marked feature connected with the gathering in of the Gentiles?

BUT WHEN SHALL IT BE?

Has the time not already come? Should not the churches of this land begin to awake to a sense of their duty and responsibility in this re-

gard? Should we not evince the sincerity of our devotion and desire, by coming forward with enlarged hearts and more liberal offerings, thus indicating a readiness to receive the answer to our daily prayer: "Thy Kingdom come?"

NEW TESTAMENT LIGHTS.

But it may be asked, Is there nothing in the New Testament to corroborate the theory of beneficence constructed upon the basis of the law and the prophets? What have we to do with the Jewish economy? Has that not long since passed away? The Jewish dispensation has passed away; but the law of God—the law of moral obligation—gratitude—beneficence remains, unaltered and unalterable.

CHRIST LOVES THE CHEERFUL GIVER.

When Zaccheus stood before him and said: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold," can anything be stronger than Christ's approval of his munificent generosity, accepting it as proof of the genuineness of his conversion and holding it up as a pattern to be imitated by his followers through all time?

APOSTOLIC DICTA.

We have seen how Christ himself regarded these things, but what of his apostles? The words of Paul sufficiently show that he strongly inculcated the duty of liberal Christian beneficence upon the churches both of Galatia and Corinth. Writing to the latter from Philippi he says: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye."

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

And now brethren, taking these passages together I submit, that the theory of beneficence for which we plead, is built, not upon the law and the prophets alone, but upon the foundation of the apostles, as well as the teaching and example of Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. With scarcely more clearness do they inculcate the principle, than they indicate the measure of Christian giving. True, in the gospel there is an absence of the rigid arithmetical rules which were binding under the law. Here, the principle is laid down, leaving the measure to be determined by the conscience of each individual.