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ALMSGIVING

AND THE

OFFERTORY.

*A Paper read at the Conference between the Clergy and Laity
of the Archdeaconry of Rochester, held under the presidency
of the Bishop, in the Chapter Room of the Cathedral,
on Friday, November 16th, 1866,*

BY THE

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SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION.

“PRIVATE CHARITY AND THE POOR LAW; HOW TO
“ADJUST THE INDULGENCE AND EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN
“PHILANTHROPY, WITH THE OPERATION OF SYSTEMATIC
“LEGAL RELIEF? THE RULE OF ALMSGIVING, ESPECI-
“ALLY IN RELATION TO THE WEEKLY OFFERTORY.”

My Lord Bishop! My Reverend Brethren! Brethren of the Laity! I have thought it better to write what I have prepared, for this reason: that the subject as it stands seems to present extraordinary temptations to diffuseness, and I am anxious to be exact.

I must appeal to the compassion of my audience, when I remind them that I have to handle four such subjects as “Christian Philanthropy,” “Systematic legal relief,” “The Rule of Almsgiving,” and “The Weekly Offertory.”

Let us plunge boldly in *medias res*.

Christian Philanthropy, *i.e.*, the love of your fellow man, because of Christ's dear love towards you, is based on the grand idea so familiar to us in the words of St. Paul, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”* The grandeur of

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

this idea lies in the self-sacrifice implied. It is one thing to be sorry for, *i.e.*, to give sentimental pity to, or to shed morbid tears over, other people's sufferings. It is another thing to make yourself poorer that they may be richer.

Christian Philanthropy then, or a love of man because Christ first loved you, has as its basis a deliberate intention to sacrifice yourself, to look round upon the world, to find out who are poorer than they ought to be, and, having found that out, to tax yourself in such money, such leisure, such gifts of sympathy, such powers of work, as you possess, in order to give them away. Do not deceive yourself with the idea that you are either "*indulging*" or "*exercising*" (please observe the words in the printed paper before you) Christian Philanthropy if you merely give away *your loose cash* in a desultory manner.

It is always *kind* to give anything to anybody, but you are not engaged in the "exercise of Christian Philanthropy"—far less can you be said to enjoy the "indulgence" of that holy luxury, of which the Lord Himself is the great example—unless both you and your family are conscious that you are depriving yourselves of something which would have been an indulgence to your lower natures, but which now you cannot have.

I hope the quotation of this text, and the assertion of this principle will not be taken as a common place.

We may rest assured that unless the principle of real self sacrifice for Christ's sake lies at the root of a benevolent enterprize, a blight will rest upon it which it will not recover. There may be a little warmth of kindly feeling to begin with—but it will soon become so "lukewarm, neither

hot nor cold," that He to whom it is offered (to use His own awful words) will "spue it out of His mouth."

So much then for the principle of Christian Philanthropy; its "exercise" involves real hard work, perhaps painful work, its "indulgence" implies the giving up of other lower indulgences which might fairly be yours.

2. I pass to the second point. In looking around you upon the seething mass of human suffering, you find a certain beneficent institution established by law, the theory of which is that no one shall lack the bare necessities of life. No wise man can fail to see that this is a great saving of energy and of money, as far as your voluntary action is concerned.

For supposing you had resolved like Jacob to give God your tenth, or like Zaccheus to give God's poor your half, or like S. Barnabas to give God's Church your all; still, whatever it is—even a fabulous amount like £150,000—it becomes like a drop of rain when you think of a nation's poverty.

The question therefore is pressed on your mind by common sense—how am I to utilize the agency already existing and apply my alms to cases not touched by that, *i.e.*, in the technical language of the paper before you, how am I "to adjust the indulgence and exercise of Christian Philanthropy with the operation of systematic legal relief."

And this brings me to say a few words about the Poor Law. My words must necessarily, if they are to be of any use in this connection, be brief statements of principle. The Poor Law seems to me then, *in principle*, to be a magnificent and gigantic charitable undertaking. It may never

have occurred to some of you to feel it so, but the money you pay in poor rate is really alms given to Christ for the support of His poor. If you have never regarded it in this light I advise you to give it with this intention for the future, and however prosy may be the manner in which you have to give it, when it is paid I would counsel you to say in your heart, "Lord of thine own have I given Thee." If the Poor Law did not exist you would assuredly be bound in conscience to create another immense machinery to do the same thing. You would perhaps call it by a high sounding title, (we are so fond of doing that now-a-days) but it would be the same for all that—and if it was to be so gigantic in size you could not possibly prevent evils and neglects from growing up in it in the course of years.

This is the first point that in fact it is a great charitable institution. I know that a Guardian has been heard to say "We're not administering a charitable society, we are administering the Poor Law;" but the reprobation with which every good Guardian would greet the sentiment proves clearly that my statement is true, and that the Poor Law is merely the largest and noblest of our relief societies.

But then, there comes another point. From the nature of the case, from the incessant attempts at imposition, from continual mixing with the scum of the earth, and from a variety of causes which I have not time or power to describe—it is manifest that this great relief society must confine itself to the averting of the worst forms of evil, and of the grander calamities of life. It must avert starvation and all open forms of misery, and must confine itself, speaking generally, to such limits.

The question therefore for you in looking round, how to

apply your little tenth, and make it go as far as it can, is to enquire in each case; "is this a case to be relieved by the Guardians?" If the Poor Law has done all it ought to do, and still suffering remains which you can alleviate, then do you begin your blessed work. On this some of you may remark that you know of cases in which the Guardians will not carry out the charitable intention of the Poor Law. What are you to do ?

This opens a subject which might be taken up by some speaker hereafter, but which I must dismiss for want of time, with this obvious reflection: that in a country like England if a great national institution is not doing its work, each person ought to move public opinion to make it do so: and that if any person is in a position to prove a special neglect or incompetency, it is part of the Christian Philanthropy we are discussing to try with modesty and kindness, but with courage, to set it right.

To sum up then this part of the subject, it is the duty of a benevolent person when he comes across a case of suffering to consider whether the case is one which would be dealt with wholly or in part by the relieving officer. If it is such a case, to urge the sufferer or his friends to apply; then failing this, to apply himself; then if it still fails, to stir further as he shall find occasion.

To this end, if the person in question be a clergyman who constantly comes in contact with such cases, it is desirable that he should have a good understanding with the relieving officer as to the details of their working together; and if his parish is very large he would do wisely to have some special arrangements which I need not touch on in detail, such as the appointment of a sidesman, or lay reader

or lay deacon, call it what you will, whose business it would be to be constantly en rapport with the relieving officer for such purposes.

But after all, when all is done by legal relief, it is obvious that only a certain number can be dealt with fully by the Poor Law—that a large number of cases must be only partially relieved—and a certain number cannot be satisfactorily touched at all. As an illustration of this last, one has heard of broken down professional men being subjected to the tyranny of pauper officials who have been convicted of felony. Without going into the question whether such statements are true or not, one cannot help feeling a desire that the “Christian Philanthropy” of this country, which is so abundant, could be so “adjusted” to the cases which are calling out for it, as to prevent professional men from sinking to such a bitter fate, as would render this possible. If our conferences could lead to such results as the prevention of such anomalies, our Bishop would not have called us together in vain.

Perhaps by a little business-like sifting of cases on the one hand, and a little more self-sacrifice on the other, the thing might be done. The various cases manifestly beyond the reach of legal relief might be dealt with by loving individual Christian Philanthropy. Each man might do what he could—one might, privately, and with delicate tact, make known the case of suffering to another, and so in an ideal Christian republic (and why is Plato’s to be the only ideal republic?) it would be possible to imagine that, while on the one hand all the commoner cases of suffering were promptly dealt with by the hand of a merciful law,—on the other, all cases, where legal relief would inflict misery, would be dealt with by individual love—and so the saying

would be fulfilled, "He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack." (2 Cor. viii, 15.)

3 and 4. There remain the two last subjects, "the rule of almsgiving and the weekly offertory."

We come now to regard almsgiving, not as heretofore, from the stand point of the individual, but as a member of the Church of Christ would look at it.

I am on delicate ground because the opinions of pious and devoted men differ in the points to be discussed, and I desire to speak with all modesty on disputed points. Yet of what use is it to have an introducer of a subject if he does not express an opinion when a debated point is distinctly (*totidem verbis*) put into his mouth. I say this because, though I will try and state principles instead of giving opinions, I know my bias is sure to be discovered.

Now the alternative from the weekly offertory (which is the thing mentioned in the printed paper) is obviously the subscription list. The question before us is, which of these is the best. I must first ask you to take for granted that the money, if collected from a congregation "on the first day of the week," is collected in bags, or in closed boxes, or in some other way which prevents your left hand from seeing what your right hand doeth. (S. Mat. vi. 3.) The reason why I ask you to grant this is, that the principle of a weekly offertory is based on the evangelical precept of laying by in store on the first day of the week as the Lord hath prospered you. (1 Cor. xvi. 2.) Of course, in this point of view, it will never do for your neighbour to see what you put in. The answer to this is, that if you put in a sovereign and your neighbour sees it—the example of your generosity is both good in itself and contagious as regards him.

Granted! but then what become of the evangelical precepts alluded to.

Again I think it must be taken for granted that if you have the weekly offertory, you must make it thoroughly voluntary. Let there be no pressure of any kind. Leave it all to the action of Christian principle, and if any man even thinks it right to make clear to you, either as his clergyman, or as his churchwarden, that he never gives in that way, don't deprive him of any kind of privilege, no not even of your smile, or your kind word, in consequence of his mistaken view.

These two points being taken for granted—[I know they are not conceded always—but you must kindly grant them to me now for argument's sake, because I believe they belong to the essence of the evangelical principles I think involved]—These two points being taken for granted—the secret giving—and the entire removal of all pressure from the giver.

Query—Which is the best the weekly offertory or the subscription list?

Here we must pause and make another enquiry. What do you mean by the word “best?” Do you mean which secures most money in the end? or do you mean which does most good to the giver? or do you mean which does most good on the whole, taking into view the giver, and the object, and the persons concerned in collecting?

If you mean which secures most money! That is one point a subsequent speaker might take up. I dare say several speakers will get up presently and tell us that the offertory is more successful in a financial point of view. I wish

speakers would not persist in saying this so positively and without limitation—for I am sure it is only partially true. When an offertory is substituted for a subscription list, the whole basis of giving is shifted. The process may be gradual, but it is certain. Let me give an instance of what I mean: A very good fellow most kindly disposed to help me with my charities, said to me when the cotton famine was pressing, “Well, if you have a collection in Church I shall give probably 1s., whereas, if you have a subscription list, of course I shall give a guinea.” Here then you lose 20s. by the offertory. But to set against this you would probably find one man who for the love of Christ would give secretly £1, because he felt you were obeying the instructions of Christ, and you would also probably get from 30 to 35 people who would give small sums. Now in some cases these would more than make it up—in other cases they would do less than make it up. Many advocates for the offertory persist in saying that it is always better in the end. The true statement to make is, I think, that it is *generally* better where the population is large, and the conditions tolerably favourable. Of course if 500 people subscribe £500 a-year by subscription list, *if they choose*, they can subscribe the same by the offertory. *But what if they don't choose?* then if the same amount is to be raised still, it can only be by what I have described as the gradual shifting of the whole basis of giving. This will sometimes be far more successful financially—sometimes it will be otherwise. But to go on asserting the certainty of its success in *every* case, is to put the discussion on a false issue.

In my humble judgment the question is not “which is most productive of money,” but “which is most right—which is nearest to the evangelical precepts.” We clergy or

pious laity are not like the taskmasters set over the children of Israel. We have not a master who only looks to see that the tale of the bricks is fulfilled; our master will not ask us "how many thousands of pounds did you collect?" But "how did you teach 'the flock that was given to thee, thy beautiful flock?'" If you collect a few hundreds less in your life time and do more good in the process of collecting it—if you remove all pressure from without, and leave people to be worked on by the love of Christ, and the love of Christ *alone* in giving it, would you not have done something for your Lord better than bringing in material gold and silver into His treasury.

Again I ask you to forgive the bias which exists in these words. Perhaps I am almost bound, after using them, to go a little into detail as to the faults I conceive to belong to the system of the subscription list.

There is nothing like an example. A curate in one of the richest West End London parishes told me the other day that it would often happen that the collector would have to call for a subscription 9 or 10 times. Have we not many of us a good deal of experience not unlike this, which however, we should be unwilling to reveal? Do you not see what hours and hours of weary work are here hinted at. God forbid that the clergy should ever shrink from any hard work in His dear service. "I had rather be a door-keeper," said David, and "I had rather serve tables," would every Christian minister say, "than be deprived of that Holy office which, God knows, is my very life!"—but oh! that the Christian laity would make enquiry how much of the time of their clergy is thus employed! Gladly, oh! how gladly! would we spend these hours over our Hebrew Bible, or in thumbing the Fathers. "It is not reason that

we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." (Acts vi. 2.) Christian laymen! why do you educate us from our very boyhood in Latin, and Greek, and Hebrew? why do you look so carefully for the M.A. at the end of our name, which proves to you that we have spent costly years of careful training at those glorious universities which are the boast of our land—if after all you use us to do the work of tax gatherers and office clerks? We do not refuse to do it—but why do you not wake up and forbid it? Why do you suffer a blood horse to work at the plough—why take the keen blade of Damascus to chop wood for your fire?

Again I ask you (knowing the difference of opinion which exists among good men) to forgive the bias which exists in my words.

There is one point in this connection which I have not touched upon. The offertory is, in my humble judgment, more consistent with Church principles than the subscription list. But I need say the less on this subject because I am sure of this, that the true basis on which every part of our Church system should be placed is that hinted at in the preface to our Prayer Book—conformity to the Scriptures and the mind of the old Fathers. And when you have proved a thing to be thoroughly Scriptural, or thoroughly primitive, you have at the same moment proved it to be thoroughly in conformity with the principles of our branch of the Catholic Church.

Lastly, it is my business to touch on the "rule of almsgiving" with special reference to this subject of the offertory.

"The rule of Almsgiving!" If I understand these words aright they imply that you do not give on impulse or from pressure, but give a fixed proportion of your income, which

you previously determine from a solemn sense of duty—and give a certain part to the offertory.

Of course you will enquire to what purposes the offertory is devoted. The Churchwardens, if they be wise men, will (with the co-operation of the minister) publish each Sunday what was collected on the last Sunday, and every Easter they will audit and publish the accounts, stating exactly what was done with every shilling collected during the past year, and what will be done (speaking generally) with the money that is to be collected during the ensuing year. Knowing then exactly to what purposes the offertory is to be devoted, you will sit down and consider what other objects have a claim on you, as in the sight of God, and you will give regularly, periodically, (1 Cor. xvi. 2) and (wherever you can escape from the tormenting and miserable pressure of public opinion) you will give secretly. (S. Mat. vi. 3.)

There is one point left, and that is the amount in proportion to your income which you ought to give: this is of course alluded to in the words “the rule of Almsgiving.” Speaking generally, *but only generally*, it is to be accounted a privilege, at which all would do well to aim, to give a tenth of income to God.

But I must frankly say that I think a higher teaching than this should be given from the pulpit. If the Saviour had meant it to be a rigid rule He would have given it to us in His sermons.

Suppose while you were preaching that a man should give a tenth—there were some Zacchæus listening to you who already had reached so far in the Divine life as giving half. We know that the laity are always thinking, while we are

preaching,—“What does the Preacher do himself?”—What if this Zacchæus should be saying to himself, “the Preacher has only reached as far as giving a tenth in subscription lists, while I enjoy the privilege of giving a half secretly.” Would he not think this poor teaching? What if the mantle of S. Barnabas had fallen on some one who was listening to you? Has the spirit of S. Barnabas utterly left our Church in these days? I trow not! What would a man think of your preaching who was in some very real sense giving his *all* to God?

No, I think this parcelling out of the exact amount—when we know perfectly well that some men—the most pious of our flock perhaps, *can't* give a tenth (we know it because we have been privately helping them to enable them to *live at all*) while others would not feel that giving even a half was enough to satisfy them, is barren and meagre teaching.

I venture to say respectfully to my reverend brethren, do not let us say much about giving from the pulpit of wood or stone, but let us say a great deal from the pulpit of our lives.

And the true rule of Almsgiving we should teach, I think, is this:

Give all *thou canst!* High Heaven rejects the store
Of nicely calculated less or more!

GODFREY JOHN BAYNES, PRINTER, HIGH STREET,
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