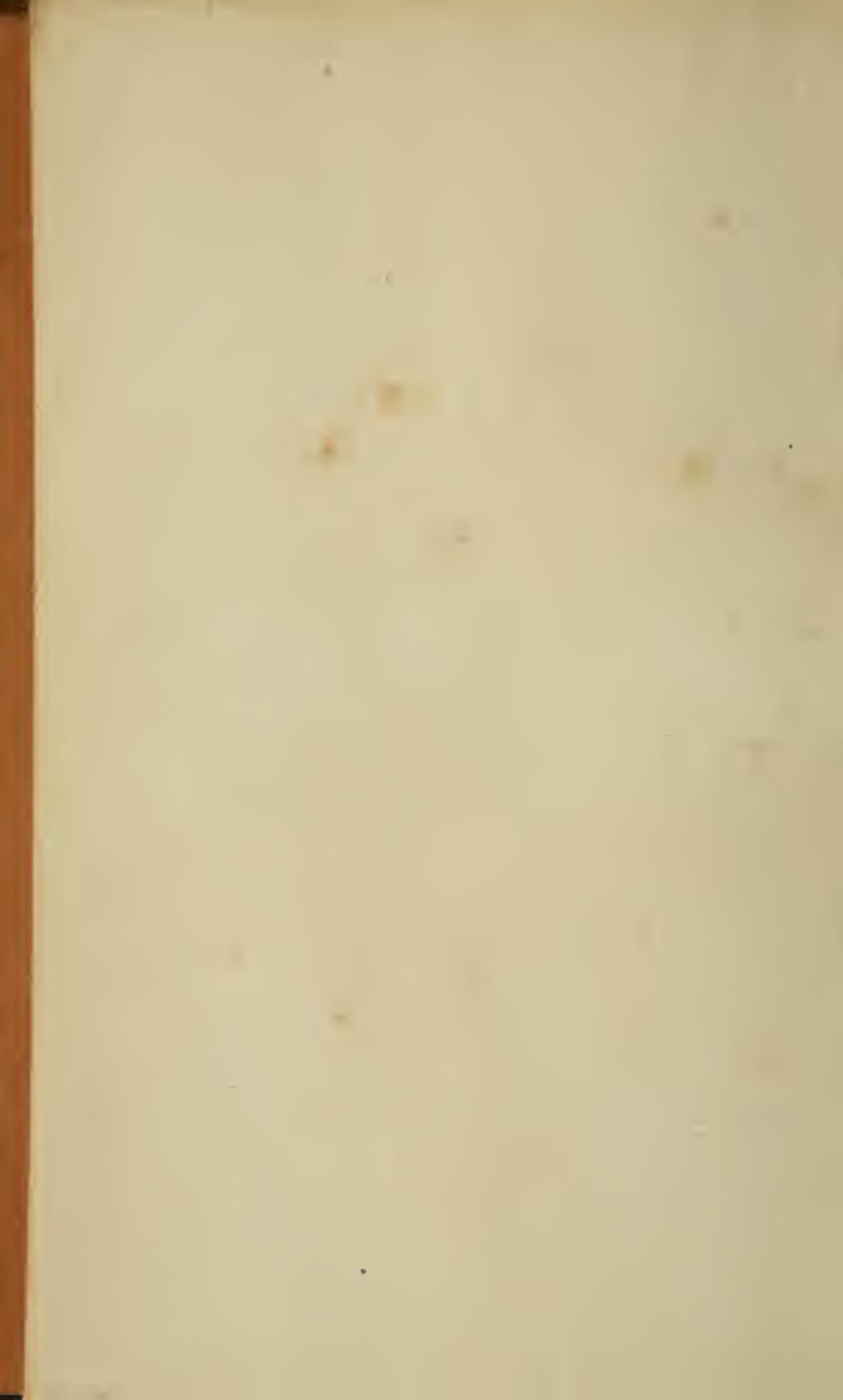


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THE OFFERTORY:

An Essay,

DEMONSTRATING THE SUPERIORITY OF

WEEKLY OFFERINGS AT EVERY SERVICE  
TO PEW RENTS

AS A SYSTEM OF CHURCH FINANCE.

“Crescit sub pondere Virtus.”

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# THE OFFERTORY.

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## CHAPTER I.

“They shall not appear empty before the Lord.”—*Deut.* xvi. 15.

IN the endeavour, which is here attempted, to demonstrate the practical utility of the Offertory, it is a satisfaction to feel assured that this is no longer a party question, calculated to awaken heartburnings and animosity, but one in the general principle of which earnest men of all shades of opinion are agreed. With respect to the offertory, the practical good sense of Englishmen has counterbalanced the weight of prejudice with which they shrunk at first from the revival of that which has been so long disused. When the Bishop of Exeter issued his “Pastoral Letter,” twenty years ago, recommending amongst other things the revival of the offertory, it seemed an innovation which the laity were jealous of receiving; but twenty years have passed away since then, and there has been time in the interim for thoughtful reflection on the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the proposal.

To be jealous of changes is the part of prudence, but to refuse to adopt them, when their advantage is demonstrated, is the result of ignorance and prejudice. This jealousy of innovation has proved the safeguard of England, whilst surrounding countries have been revolutionized, and the crowns of neighbouring kings have been tumbled in the dust; but it has always been an enlightened, and not that

blind and morbid conversatism which rejects all improvements, else we should not have seen the advance in our social institutions and political freedom, which has given England the greatest name among the nations of the earth. And yet it has been the fate of all improvements that they have aroused suspicion at their first proposal. It was so with the Reformation itself, as the "Pilgrimage of Grace," in the reign of Henry VIII., and the disturbances in Devonshire and Cornwall in that of Edward VI., made manifest; but yet the Reformation was received by the people of England as soon as it was tried and approved, and it took far deeper root within their minds than if it had been adopted without hesitation or delay. So now the recommendations of Bishop Blomfield and Bishop Philpotts, respecting the offertory, are regarded with approval by many who were loudest in its denunciation twenty years ago. They need not be ashamed to own it, for it is only an acknowledgment of what might reasonably be expected, that their judgment is riper now and more mature than in their younger days. Bishop Blomfield has gone to his rest, but the venerable Bishop of Exeter has been spared to see suggestions which were made—as all suggestions of good must be—before the day of their adoption, not only finding favour within his own diocese, but through the length and the breadth of the land. The victory was gained by means of an apparent defeat; and now to see the fruits of his travail is one of the consolations which God has given him amidst the weakness of old age and the hallowed sorrows of domestic bereavement.

In an essay like the present it would be passing over important ground, if the offertory were treated simply as a fiscal question, although its advantages in this respect is the principal object for which a prize has been offered. The superiority of weekly offerings at every service to pew rents, in respect of (I.) the amount, (II.) the certainty of revenue, (III.) the real independence of the minister, and (IV.) the spiritual benefit of the people, will be shown in

order ; but its principle rests on a deeper and more solid basis, the duty of serving God with our substance, which has ever been a part of all true religious worship.

We must go back even to the day when the first sacrifice was offered to God. It was not an offering which cost the worshipper nothing that was accepted in God's sight. It was not the flesh of any animal, which he might have found by chance, that Abel offered unto God, but it was of the firstlings of his own flock. Some self-denial thus formed a part of the act of worship, for the firstlings of the flock were valuable. It was thus early in the world's history a testimony that God was to be worshipped with the substance as well as with the soul and with the body. This idea pervaded all sacrificial worship. The animal sacrificed must be of the flocks and the herds of the worshipper, or else must be made his own by purchase. If the acknowledgement, that without shedding of blood there was no remission of sin, had been all, there would have been no need of this provision. David might have accepted the gift of Araunah, and private sacrifices might have been provided at the general expense of the state ; but this was not the case, and the abuse, which turned the temple into a house of traffic, in which the animals about to be sacrificed were sold, was an evidence of this law. Wherever, therefore, it is not expressly declared that the offering must be made from the property of the worshipper, this must always be understood. Two things may therefore be deduced from this principle: I., that offerings were presented unto God ; and II., that the presentation of these offerings constituted a part of the public service.

When the tabernacle was about to be erected, Moses was commanded to speak unto the children of Israel, "that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering" (Exodus xxv. 2). These offerings were to be gold, silver, and brass, as well as the other materials, which were used in the erection of the

tabernacle, and each one was to contribute according as he was able. Again, we find that when the people were numbered, the offering of half a shekel was to be received from each one of the children of Israel. It is called not a tax, but an offering unto the Lord; and it was to be used for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. The sum was to be equal for rich and poor, denoting that all souls were equal in God's sight; and it was called a ransom for his soul, indicating that the souls of all, as well as their wealth, were the property of God. The neglect to exact this offering was probably a part of the sin which David committed when he numbered the people without God's authority.

Furthermore, it was appointed "that every male should appear before the Lord three times in the year, in the place which He shall choose, in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty. Every one shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee" (Deut. xvi. 15, 16). The wave-offerings and first-fruits and tithes and free-will offerings were to be presented at these solemn seasons. At the feast of the passover, besides the handful of barley, the first-fruits and tithes of the cattle were presented. At pentecost, besides the two loaves, the Jews were accustomed to bring the tenths of the corn which they had threshed, and a free-will offering, whilst at the feast of tabernacles, the first-fruits and tenths of wine and oil, and the rest of their tithes, were presented. Everything was, therefore, hallowed by the offering of a portion unto God, and provision was thus made that the people should never forget that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," when they brought Him of His own, and acknowledged that His blessing only had made the seasons fruitful. It must also be remembered that the offerings were accompanied by forms of thanksgiving, which marked out the act as a solemn portion of that service which was

enjoined upon the Jews. The beautiful confession of him that offereth the basket of first-fruits, and the prayer of him that offereth his third year's tithes, which are to be found in the 26th chapter of Deuteronomy, may be taken as specimens of the form with which all offerings to God were made. We cannot otherwise discover a reason why forms of thanksgiving should be provided for these occasions, and not for others which were of a similar nature.

It will be said, perhaps, that all these observances were portions of the ceremonial law, which passed away when the dispensation of the Gospel succeeded to that of Moses; but they who say so forget how closely the moral and ceremonial law were interwoven. Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil the law. The types which were fulfilled have passed away, but that which is not fulfilled must still remain. The sacrifices of blood were fulfilled in the one great offering on Calvary; but the principle on which other portions of the ceremonial law rested still remains. They may be changed in form, but their substance is the same. The offerings of prayer and praise are still required of God's people; and why should we suppose that the first-fruits of our substance ought not to be devoted to God's service? We know that at the day of Pentecost S. Peter and S. John went up into the temple at the hour of prayer. The service which had been offered by them, and their fathers before them, was still the service of their prayers and thanksgivings. In every place whereto they bore the Gospel message the apostles first resorted to the synagogue, and the worship of the synagogue was the worship which they offered unto God.\* But the altered circumstances of the new dispensation required additional services, for which the law had not provided. The eucharistic office was, therefore, framed; but the temple services were the model to which the apostles adhered, as closely as circumstances permitted. The character of the Jewish worship

\* Freeman's "Principles of Divine Service," vol. i. 61.

was thus impressed upon the Christian Church. Although the sacrifices had ceased to be offered, and the commemorative offering of the eucharist had superseded it, what was more natural than that, with this exception, the form of worship should be as little changed as possible? If in minor particulars we may trace a close resemblance, which it would be out of place to discuss in this essay, may we not much rather expect that the great principle of offering unto the Lord of His own should be preserved? What was there in the Christian dispensation which could lead us to suppose that this rule was superseded? We can give a reason for the ceasing of burnt sacrifices and of circumcision, when the one great sacrifice for the ransom of the world had been offered, and when the sacrament of baptism had taken the place of the initiatory rite of the Jewish church; but surely there is no such reason for the cessation of those offerings by which the Jews acknowledged that their substance was increased by God's blessing, and that they were stewards and not owners of His gifts. The manner might be left more free, for the hearts of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt needed not a law to regulate their gifts. In the first outburst of their charity, when Christians called not anything they had their own, such a law would have had a tendency to limit instead of to increase their gifts, for they chose to give to God not the first-fruits only, nor the tenth—not the tithe, but the whole of their possessions. And we may not blame them, although we may think that a portion only of their goods was required. Their aim was to follow out that counsel of perfection which their Lord had given to the rich young man: "If thou wilt be perfect, go thy way and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor;" and from what S. Peter said to Ananias, we may conclude that this excessive liberality was not required of all: "Whilst it remained was it not thine own; and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?"

Besides the offerings which were made at the principal

feasts, there was also a more constant form of offering to which allusion was made by our Saviour. When Jehoash was about to repair the Temple, we read that "Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord; and the priests that kept the door had therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord" (2 Kings xii. 9). This, which was at first provided to meet the exigencies of a special occasion, appears afterwards to have become a fixed institution amongst the Jews. Therefore, in our Saviour's time, we find the treasury existing as a receptacle for the offerings of the people that all might have opportunity of presenting their gift, if they desired not to come empty into the presence of the Lord. When our Saviour was present in the Temple on one of the last few days which preceded His Crucifixion, He was watching the rich men who out of their abundance cast in their offerings to God; and, when He saw a poor widow approach and present her two mites, He took occasion, from this incident, to teach His disciples that offerings to God were acceptable, not according to their intrinsic value, but in proportion to the self-denial which they had cost the giver (S. Mark xii. 41). The place in which this incident occurred was the so-called court of the women, where stood thirteen brazen vessels shaped like trumpets, into which those who visited the Temple cast their gifts. These were distinct from the *γαζοφυλάκιον* strictly so called, which formed a separate compartment of the Temple, wherein the contributions of money cast into the thirteen vessels were from time to time deposited.\* In modern Jewish synagogues little boxes are placed near the door to receive voluntary contributions for the poor.† Our Saviour's commendation of the poor widow was a distinct approval of the practice of making offerings to God in the Temple; and its importance to the Christian is greatly increased

\* Olshausen, *in loco*.

† "Biblical Antiquities: Encyclopædia Metropolitana," p. 445.

when we consider the solemn time at which it was given. Observances which were distinctly Jewish were just about to die out, and therefore the commendation of the practice at this particular time seems to point it out as one which was to be continued under the Gospel dispensation.

But this is not all, for even at an earlier period of His ministry, our Lord had referred to the custom as one which was not to cease. In His sermon on the mount He had said : " If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift " (S. Matt. v. 23, 24). This injunction could not refer merely to a Jewish custom, because, as Bishop Sparrow observes, " whilst all the rest of our Saviour's sermon on the mount was Gospel, and concerning duties obliging us Christians, it is not likely that He should intermix one only Jewish rite amongst them."\* We must also remember that the sermon on the mount contained a code of moral laws whereof this concerning oblations was one, and that they were prefaced by this solemn sanction : " Whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments, and teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven," which could not truly be said concerning the breach of a Jewish outward rite. Some commentators, it must be acknowledged, have interpreted this text as bearing an exclusive reference to the oblation of the holy Eucharist. The spirit of brotherly love enjoined as a necessary preparation for the offering, no doubt, applies to this, but it does not therefore follow that the reference excluded all other kinds of gifts. S. Irenæus, speaking of the necessity of charity, says in his treatise, " *Contra Hæreses*," l. iv. cap. xviii : " By a gift to a king, his honour and our affection is shown, therefore our Lord, wishing us to offer with all simplicity and innocence, preached, saying, ' When thou bringest thy gift to the

\* Sparrow's " *Rationale*," p. 207.

altar,' &c. We must therefore offer of our goods to God according as Moses commanded, saying, 'Thou shalt not appear before the Lord empty.' There are offerings under the Gospel as well as under the Law; the kind of offering is the same; here is all the difference, they were offered then by servants, now by sons."

The only passage in which our Saviour seems to discountenance such gifts is S. Mark vii. 11: "Ye say, if a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do aught for his father and his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." It is here, however, evident that it is not against the use but against the abuse of the institution that our Saviour spoke. The Pharisees taught that Temple offerings take precedence of all gifts in behalf of parents; and, therefore, it was a common excuse, by which children evaded the duty of providing for the necessities of parents, to say that the gifts for which they were asked were already in intention devoted to the treasury. In many cases, no doubt, the vow was not performed, but even when it was, it was not an acceptable gift, because the positive commandment was neglected for the sake of that which was, after all, a free-will offering. It was as if a man should spend much in charity while he was in debt to his creditors. The conduct of such an one would be worthy of blame because he neglected the commandment, "Owe no man anything," but the condemnation of such conduct would be no reflection on the value of acts of charity when they are rightly performed. Our Saviour's warning, therefore, whilst it witnesses to the prevalence of the custom of making offerings, cannot be interpreted as any condemnation of the Corban.

This is also worthy of notice, that the money cast into the treasury was used for the maintenance of the priests, and therefore the approbation bestowed on the poor widow's act of charity is a direct commendation of the custom

of supporting the necessities of the sanctuary by voluntary offerings, a practice which, as we shall see, was early adopted in the Christian Church.

The next point which we have to establish is the practice of the apostles in continuing offerings as a direct act of service to God. Immediately after the first enlargement of the Church, which was caused by S. Peter's Pentecostal sermon, we have a brief description of the services in which the Christians at Jerusalem were engaged. To understand the passage rightly we must refer to the original Greek, in which we read ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστολῶν, καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, καὶ τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου, καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς (Acts ii. 42). This seems so plainly to refer to four separate acts that it is difficult to see why the authorized version and the Vulgate should have reduced them to three. In the authorized version the first two are united, "*in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship,*" and in the Vulgate the second and third are combined, "*in doctrinâ apostolorum, et communicatione fracti panis, et orationibus.*" The grammatical inaccuracy of the Vulgate is evident, as even if the second καὶ be omitted as it is in some MSS. τῇ κλάσει is still in the dative and not in the genitive case. Our authorized translation on the other hand alters the position of τῶν ἀποστολῶν without either authority or reason; and although the construction is not ungrammatical, the most natural position of the words should be followed unless good cause can be shown for departing from it. All difficulty, however, is removed, if we consider them as four separate acts: 1, διδάχη, the instruction which the apostles gave in the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven; 2, κοινωνία, the offertory; 3, κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου, the Eucharist; and 4, προσευχαῖς the prayers which were offered when two or three were gathered together in Christ's name. "The word κοινωνία," Olshausen says, "cannot possibly be understood of the general fellowship of the Spirit, for this could not have been represented as a separate particular, being the general principle from which everything else proceeded. And to

connect the word with *κλάσις ἄρτου*, so that *κοινωνία* and *κλάσις* may be viewed as a hendiadys is plainly precluded by the repetition of *καὶ*, which places *κοινωνία* upon the same level as the three other particulars. It only remains, therefore, that we should understand *κοινωνία*, with not only Mosheim ("De Rebus Christianis ante Const., p. 113, sqq.") but also the most recent interpreters of the Acts of the Apostles, to signify the bestowment of outward means of support, whether in money or goods." . . . "As the passage before us, however, speaks of the meetings of believers for the worship of God, this circumstance gives to *κοινωνία* a modified signification. It must denote such gifts as were presented in the public assemblies. But these were just what were named oblations at a later period, in which, therefore, we must recognize a primitive Christian institution. Mosheim rightly observes that the offering of Ananias, mentioned in chap. v., must have been such an oblation."\*

We read, indeed, that "they that believed had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need;" and it may be asked, if the Christians at Jerusalem had all things common, how was it possible for them to make offerings of their wealth whensoever they came together? In the first devotion of these early converts the natural impulse of their love appears to have been to devote all their possessions to God. The gifts they had received they esteemed to be of such exceeding value, that all they had was not too much to offer in return, and the apostles do not seem to have checked their generous impulse; but still the community of goods was never the established order of the Church. In each case the dedication was an individual act, and S. Luke represents what was commonly done, and not what was considered necessary for all to do. If it had been otherwise, S. Peter's speech to Ananias would have in-

\* Olshausen, *in loco*. See also Blunt's "Church in the First Three Centuries," p. 32.

volved a contradiction: "Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? and when it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" Ananias was not compelled to sell it, nor was he obliged to dedicate the whole, but his sin consisted in the hypocrisy of pretending to give it wholly to the Lord, whilst he kept back a part of the price for his own use. There may have been some who had nothing to offer in the Christian assemblies, because they had already given all they had, just as a monk in more recent times would make no offering because he had no possessions; but there may have been others who still retained their property; and even those who sold their possessions may have laid the price at the apostles' feet when they were assembled for Christian worship, and thus made their offerings a direct act of homage to God. The offerings of the Christians at Jerusalem were, no doubt, excessive, and surpassed the bounds of prudence; and, therefore, we do not find that a community of goods was ever adopted by other churches. The poverty of the Christians at Jerusalem, which made them objects of the charity of other churches, was taken, no doubt, as a warning, while it gave them opportunities for the generous exercise of almsgiving.

Evidence of this exercise of charity is found in the apostolic epistles, and the general principle is also laid down that the clergy should be supported by the offerings of the people; but that in which we are now chiefly concerned is to ascertain how far their offerings were a part of public worship. S. Paul's injunction seems to be clear on this point: "Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2). The passage is thus paraphrased by Dr. Hammond: "On the day of the Christian assembly it is not reasonable for any to come to the Lord empty (see Exodus xxiii. 15; Deut. xvi. 16); and, therefore, at such a time, upon such a special occasion as

this, let every one of you lay aside whatsoever by God's blessing comes to him by way of increase, so that there may be a full collection made without any more gatherings when I come among you." Here is evidence of the practice of a weekly offertory, in which S. Paul enjoins uniformity in the churches under his direction. The collection was to be made on the first day of the week, because on that day a larger number of persons were assembled than on other days. It was the day, moreover, on which the gratitude of Christians would most naturally be stirred up to acts of charity, in consideration of the hope of the resurrection, which dated its birth from that day. There may have been other reasons also for the observance. The Jews in every city where they dwelt had their collectors of alms, who went about collecting the offerings of every Jew, and on the evening of the Sabbath made distribution to the needy. This example may not unnaturally have been taken by the apostles in ordaining that on the Lord's Day Christians should lay up for the poor and make provision for them. It may be gathered also from S. Paul's words that the Christians put their offerings into a common box, which was kept in the church, for otherwise if they had kept them at home there would have been need of gathering them when the apostle came.\* We may see an evidence also of the prudential wisdom which was so eminently characteristic of the mind of S. Paul, for he well knew that if the offerings were not made at short intervals, the money, instead of being saved, would be spent in other ways, and that what was thus given would be less missed than if it was given at once in one large sum. The offertory was the application to practice of the many injunctions to charity which are given both by our Lord Himself and His apostles; and a custom so certainly apostolical, is in itself, if for no other reason, deserving of being retained in the Church, especially in a branch whose glory is to have followed the model of apostolical institution in the reformation of her system and

\* Whitby, *in loco*.

the reconstruction of her ritual. It is for this reason that the revival of the offertory appeals to English churchmen with a plea peculiar to themselves, which must test the consistency of their adherence to the principles of the Reformation.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE ANCIENT CUSTOM OF THE OFFERTORY.

“A wholesome, a liturgical, and a scriptural method of almsgiving, in which rich and poor are encouraged to unite in the fulfilment of a plain duty.”—*Bp. of Lincoln's Charge*, 1861.

THE custom of the weekly offertory, established as we have seen by S. Paul in the churches of Galatia and Corinth, we might expect to find universally adopted, and our expectations are not disappointed. From the Apology of Justin Martyr, which gives an account of the religious services of the Christians, we learn that on the Lord's Day, they that are able and willing, give what they think fit; and what is thus collected is laid up in the hands of the president, who distributes it to orphans and widows, and other Christians, as their wants require. Amongst churches whose rites and ceremonies were not uniform, we must expect to find some diversity of practice; but all appear to have agreed in making the offering, although the manner of doing this differed in different churches. In the West, offerings were made in the public assembly, immediately after the catechumens were dismissed, before the solemn prayers began; but in the East, it appears that the oblations of the people were received before the liturgy commenced;\* but different as was the practice the principle was the same. Offerings were made to God, and his worshippers thought it an unworthy thing to approach him without a gift.

\* Palmer's "Orig. Liturg.," vol. ii. 68.

These offerings were probably of two kinds; I., the weekly or daily oblations that were made at the altar, offered most likely on every occasion on which the Eucharist was celebrated; and II., the monthly oblations which were cast into the treasury of the church.\* The first of these consisted of bread and wine, out of which the elements of the Eucharist were taken, that which was needful for the *ἀγάπαι*, so long as these love feasts were continued, and also other necessaries, besides sums of money for the maintenance of the clergy and the relief of the poor. The offerings were, therefore, partly in money, and partly in kind. With respect to the latter, the original custom appears to have been to offer only those things which were used for the service of the altar, bread and wine for the Eucharistic elements, oil for the lamps, and incense for the censers. Milk and honey was permitted to be offered in the African Church, on the Saturday before Easter, on account of the mystery of the infants, for it was usual to administer a taste of milk and honey immediately after their baptism.†

The regulations made in the apostolic constitutions, and by the decrees of ancient councils, seem to indicate that other things were also offered, such as beer, birds, living creatures, and the first-fruits of the produce of the earth.‡ The original intention of these oblations probably had reference to the love feasts, but they still continued to be offered long after the love feasts had been abolished. A singular custom was prevalent in the African Church. The oblation of the first-fruits of grapes was still permitted, but because the people were accustomed to join them in the same sacrifice with the Eucharist, and they were distributed to the congregation at the same time, the XXVIIIth canon of the Council in Trullo ordered that they should have a distinct consecration, and a distinct

\* Bingham's "Antiquities," Book v. chap. 4, sect. 1.

† Ibid., Book v. chap. 4, sect 3.

‡ Canon Apost. 3, 4, 5.

distribution, if the people were desirous of eating their first-fruits in the church. “In the meantime, we may observe,” says Bingham, “that in other churches, not only the first-fruits of grapes and corn, but all other things which the people were voluntarily disposed to offer, whether money, or the like gifts, were received at the altar. For in France, the first Council of Orleans made it a rule, that of such oblations, one moiety should fall to the bishop, and the other be divided amongst the rest of the clergy.” The numerous canons which we find, specifying from whom gifts were not to be received, is a further proof of the universal prevalence of the custom of making offerings at the altar. These provisions were founded on our Lord’s command: “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”\*

Besides these offerings which were presented at the altar, Tertullian mentions the monthly offerings which were placed in the treasury by those who were charitably disposed.† From this it appears, that the treasury of the temple was adopted in the Christian churches, and that this was the origin of the poor-box, which is still amongst the necessary articles of church furniture. In this respect the custom of the synagogue and of the church was uniform. Tertullian tells us, that the Christians drew upon the treasury, not for feasts and revels, but for the relief of orphans and aged persons, of the shipwrecked and the prisoner; and as Tertullian speaks of a monthly collection, Cyprian also makes frequent mention of a monthly distribution, in which the presbyters had their shares in

\* “*Altaria, in quibus fraternitatis munera non jussit Salvator poni nisi quæ essent de pace condita.*”—*Optatus*, lib. vi. p. 93.

† “*Si quod arçæ genus est, non de ordinariâ summâ, quasi redemptæ religionis congregatur: modicam unusquisque stipem menstruâ die, vel quum velit, et si modo velit, et si modo possit, apponit: nam nemo compellitur, sed sponte confert.*”—*Tertul. Apol. c. 39.*

equal portions, and other orders after the same manner.\* What is now called *suspensio a beneficio*, was then *suspensio a divisione mensurná*.† The treasury itself was called after the Jewish corban, a name which seems to have been common both to the gift and its receptacle. Baronius thinks the ark or treasury was called corban because S. Cyprian rebukes a wealthy matron for coming to celebrate the Eucharist without having any respect to the corban, and partaking of the Lord's Supper without any sacrifice of her own.‡ Basnage, on the other hand, considers that corban was not a name for the treasury, but for the gift or oblation itself, but both usages were probably common, for our Saviour speaks of the gift as corban, and S. Matthew uses the words εἰς τὸν κορβανᾶν as the treasury, into which the priests would not put the thirty pieces of silver which Judas had cast upon the floor, because it was the price of blood. From this we may also gather, that the proceeds of the treasury, as well as the Eucharistic offerings, were applied to all church purposes, including the maintenance of the clergy, the relief of the poor, and the necessary expenses of divine worship.

The same custom appears to have prevailed in the Anglo-Saxon Church. Amongst the questions sent by Augustine to Pope Gregory for resolution, a part of the first was an inquiry into how many portions the things given by the faithful at the altar were to be divided, to which the pope answered, that "it is the custom of the apostolic see to prescribe rules to bishops newly ordained, that all emoluments which accrue are to be divided into four portions: one for the bishop and his family, because of hospitality and entertainments, another for the clergy, a third for the poor, and the fourth for the repair of churches." Augustine, being under monastic rules, would not need a separate portion; as he was not to live apart from his clergy; but it

\* "Ut et sportulis iisdem cum presbyteris honorentur et divisiones mensurnas æquatis quantitibus partiantur." *Cypr. Ep.* 34 al 39.

† *Idem, Ep.* 28 al 34.

‡ Baron., an. 44 n. 69.

was provided that those who were married should receive their portions abroad.—*Bede's Ecc. Hist.* I. xxvii.

From this we may observe that offerings were made in church, and that they who served at the altar were partakers with the altar. As the church received endowments, the amount of voluntary oblations decreased, under the idea, no doubt, that the clergy did not stand in the same need of them as formerly. This will account for their diminution in England, as well as in other churches; but it is probable that the clergy were not gainers by the establishment of a more settled source of income. S. Chrysostom complains (*Hom. lxxxvi. in Matt.*) that in his time the ancient revenue coming from oblations was greatly diminished, and that the church, with her lands and possessions, was in a worse condition than before. Her ministers were now forced to submit to secular cares, and the management of lands and houses and the business of buying and selling, for fear lest the orphans and virgins and widows of the church should starve. He therefore exhorted the people to return to the ancient liberality of oblations, which would at once end the necessity of all such cares, and make a good provision for the poor, and take off the bitter scoffs and objections that some were so ready to make and cast upon the clergy, that they were too much given to secular cares and employments, when, indeed, it was not choice but necessity which forced them to it. There were, he said, in Antioch, by the grace of God, a hundred thousand people that came to church. Now, if every one of them would but give one loaf daily to the poor, the poor would live in plenty. If every one would contribute one halfpenny, no man would want, neither would the clergy undergo so many reproaches and derisions, as if they were too intent on their possessions.

Possidius tells us in his life of S. Augustine of Hippo, that when he found the possessions of the church were become a little invidious, he used to tell the laity that he had rather live upon the oblations of the people than

undergo the care and trouble which these possessions involved, and that he was ready to part with them provided all the servants and ministers of God might live as they did under the Old Testament, when, as we read, they that served at the altar were partakers of the altar; but although he often made this proposal to the people, they would never accept of it. This Bingham considers as an argument that the people also thought that the reduction of the maintenance of the clergy to the precise model of the Old Testament would have laid greater charges on them, since the oblations of the Old Testament included tithes and first-fruits.\*

The endowment of the Church was the necessary consequence of her position when Christianity became the national religion of the people, and not for a moment should any proposal to confiscate her property be entertained; but yet when we consider how many parishes are inadequately endowed, or without any endowment at all, the exhortations of S. Chrysostom and S. Augustine seem specially applicable to our own times. What is that which they advocate? Not pew-rents as a source of income, an institution plainly inconsistent with the whole spirit of Christianity, but the revival of that liberality which the early Christians displayed in the oblations which they offered in God's house. S. Chrysostom's demand was not extravagant; one halfpenny a day was all he asked of the Christians of Antioch; and yet if they had contributed this, the clergy could have afforded to exchange for it all their earthly possessions, and still there would have been more than enough to supply their need, and a large fund would have remained for distribution to the poor. What, indeed, might not be effected by the restoration of this

\* Dum forte (ut adsolet) de possessionibus ipsis invidia clericis fieret, alloquebatur plebis Dei, malle se ex collationibus plebis Dei vivere quam illarum possessionum curam vel jubernationem pati; et paratum se illis cedere, ut eo modo omnes Dei servi et ministri viverent, quo in Veteri Testamento leguntur altari deservientes de eodem comparticipari. Sed nunquam id laici suscipere voluerunt.—*Possid Vit. Aug. c. 23.*

good and ancient custom? Not only might the clergy be supported when they have need, but the means would not be wanting of carrying out great schemes of Christian benevolence.

In England, as at Antioch, the oblations of the people diminished as the clergy became a wealthy corporation; but still traces of the ancient custom remained as landmarks to point out the course which we are now engaged in urging. The first of these was the *customary dues*, and the second was *the poor man's box*, in which the tradition of the ancient corban was retained. The offerings of English churchmen for the maintenance of the clergy never fell wholly into disuse. When tithes were appropriated to the church, and ecclesiastical corporations became possessors of property, the amount was no doubt greatly diminished, but yet, as we shall see, the duty remained. At a synod held at Exeter on the 16th of April, 1287, under the presidency of Peter Quivil, the bishop, the 54th Canon enjoins that "all priests celebrating the communion in chapels annexed to churches shall restore fairly whatever oblations they receive to the rector of the church." From this it appears, that in the thirteenth century oblations for the maintenance of the clergy were made at the eucharistic offertory. Henry Woodlake, Bishop of Winchester, in his constitutions of 1308, enjoined every person over eighteen years of age, who had sufficient means, to offer due and customary oblations on four great feast days in the year.

In 1367, Simon Langham, Archbishop of Canterbury, took measures to try a dispute between the clergy of London and the citizens, who were unwilling to pay the oblations which the clergy alleged to be due from every house in proportion to its value. By the statute of Edward VI., § 2 & 3, c. 13, it was enacted, "that all persons who, by the laws and customs of the realm, ought to make or pay their offerings, shall yearly well and truly content to pay the same to the parson, vicar, proprietor, or their deputies, or farmers of the parishes where they shall dwell

or abide, and that at four such offering-days as at any time heretofore within the space of four years last past hath been used and accustomed for the payment of the same ; and in default thereof to pay the said offerings at Easter the next following." The four offering-days were Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, and the feast of the dedication of the parish church.\* The English liturgy, in the year 1549, contained the following rubric : " In the mean time, while the clerks do sing the offertory, so many as are disposed shall offer to the poor-man's box, every one according to his ability and charitable mind ; and at the offering-days appointed, every man and woman shall pay to the curate the due and accustomed offering." The rubric in Elizabeth's book was as following : " Then shall the churchwardens, or some others by them appointed, gather the devotions of the people and put the same into the poor-man's box, and upon the offering-days appointed, every man and woman shall pay to the curate the due and accustomed offerings." So it stood in the books of 1559, 1607, and 1634. In 1662, the rubric was changed to the following : " The churchwardens shall receive the alms for the poor, and *other devotions of the people*, in a decent basin, to be provided by the parish for that purpose, and reverently bring it to the priest, who shall humbly present and place it on the holy table." " The other devotions of the people " was no doubt identical with the due and accustomed offering mentioned in the older rubric, and both are explained by another rubric, at the end of the office, which, at the last review, only underwent a slight verbal alteration : " And note, that every parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one. And yearly, at Easter, every parishioner shall reckon with the parson, vicar, or curate, or his or their deputy or deputies, and pay to him or them all ecclesiastical duties accustomedly due then and at that time to be paid." From this we may gather that the offerings were

\* Burns' " Ecclesiastical Law," iii. 20.

presented at the holy communion, although reckoning might have been made before, and that the reason why they were now to be presented at Easter was because on that day no parishioner would be absent from the celebration of the eucharist.

We must not pass on without briefly adverting to another change, which was made at the last review, by the restoration of the words in the prayer for the Church militant, "*and oblations.*" Some interpret these words to have reference to the customary dues, and as these are not now offered in the church, but collected at the houses of the parishioners, it is not uncommon to hear these words omitted, on the plea that no oblations are offered with the alms of the people; but Wheatley and Blunt consider that the oblations had no respect to the dues, but to the bread and wine, which had just been laid upon the altar. In the first book of Edward VI., the bread and wine were ordered to be laid upon the table, as in our present rubric, and agreeing with this, the words "and oblations" occurred in the prayer for the Church militant. Both disappeared in the second book of Edward VI., and were not restored, until both were together revived at the last review. The dues were received during the time that the words "and oblations" were omitted, but when the bread and wine were again ordered to be laid upon the holy table, the corresponding expression was restored, from which we may conclude that one had reference to the other.\* The natural order, alms and oblations, moreover, strictly corresponded with the preceding rubric, for the alms were first to be presented, and immediately afterwards the bread and wine.†

It would, no doubt, be interesting to discover the reason why Easter dues ceased to be offered in the church, and the custom arose of collecting them on Easter Monday at the houses of the parishioners. We may, however, conjecture with some probability that the neglect of the rule which

\* Blunt's "Duties of the Parish Priest," 332.

† Wheatley "On the Prayer Book."

would require all parishioners to communicate on Easter Day was the cause of this. Some may have absented themselves to avoid making the offering, and the clergy desired to deprive them of the excuse; or else when the neglect had become prevalent, the present custom was adopted to compensate the clergy for the loss of income which would have been incurred through the neglect of the Easter communion.

The other custom, in which the tradition of the liberality of Christians in church is preserved, is the "poor-box." We find it enacted, 27th Henry VIII., in an Act for the punishment of sturdy vagabonds, "that money collected for the poor should be kept in the common coffer or box standing in the church of every parish." It is not here spoken of as the introduction of a new thing, but the reference seems to imply that the box was already there, a relic of the corban, or treasury, of the ancient Church, although perhaps little use was accustomed to be made of it. Possibly on account of the little use made of the poor-box, whilst the monasteries undertook the care of the poor, the law of Henry provided for its restoration. But even this does not appear to have been universally obeyed; for the 84th Canon of 1603 ordered that the churchwardens "shall provide and have, within three months after the publishing of these constitutions, a strong chest, with a hole in the upper part thereof, to be provided at the charge of the parish, if there be none such provided already; . . . which chest they shall set and fasten in the most convenient place, to the intent the parishioners may put into it their alms for their poor neighbours."

Another rubrical difficulty here occurs. In Elizabeth's time the alms collected at the offertory were to be put into the *poor man's box*; but it appears from the subsequent order of the canon that, in many churches, no poor-box existed. From this we may conclude that the poor-box mentioned in the rubric was not the chest, which was to be placed in some convenient place in the church, but a little

box which the churchwardens carried about with them in their hands. Wheatley mentions the practice of carrying little boxes to receive the offerings as being still in his time the custom at the Temple Church in London, and in many churches collecting-boxes are even now found in use. If the fixed and permanent poor-box had been used, we must suppose that the custom of laying the alms on the altar was intended to be abandoned, and there is no reason for such a supposition, which the retention of the form of offering in the prayer for the Church militant seems to preclude. The use of the decent basin was adopted from the Scotch office, as more convenient for being laid upon the altar. Wheatley mentions a diversity of custom in collecting the alms. In some places they were collected from seat to seat, whilst in others the churchwardens stood at the entrance of the chancel to receive the offerings of the people as they drew towards the altar. This last he considers more conformable to the practice of the primitive Church, which, in pursuance of S. Matthew v. 23, ordered that the people should come up to the rails of the altar, and there make their offerings to God. It would however appear that in some churches the people not only came up to the rails of the altar, but actually laid their gifts upon the altar itself. It is related of Theodosius, after his reconciliation with the Church, that when the time came for presenting the oblation at the altar, instead of retiring from the chancel, he remained through forgetfulness within the rails, according to the custom of the Eastern Church, there to receive the sacrament. Ambrose ventured not to relax one tittle of the stern discipline of the Latins even to reward a penitent monarch. He sent his archdeacon to signify to him that none but ordained persons were allowed to remain in the sanctuary, on which the emperor promptly retired. But he was not offended at this exercise of discipline; for Theodoret relates that, on his return to Constantinople, one day after making the offering at the altar as usual, he retired, as he had learned from Ambrose to do, but was re-

called by the patriarch Lecturius. Upon this he observed, "Of all whom I have met, Ambrose is the only bishop."\* Some relic of this ancient custom of making the offering directly at the altar is still preserved in the English Church. At the coronation the sovereign offers not only a mark of gold, but also the bread and wine which are to form the eucharistic elements. It is also the custom at Westminster Abbey and at some other cathedrals for the officiating clergymen to go in turn and kneel before the altar, and there make their offering, before the alms of the people are collected. The usual custom, however, is for each to make his offering whilst the bags or plates are being handed round, and these being collected and received by the priest, are laid with reverence on the altar.

The use of bags instead of plates is not, as is thought by some, a rubrical innovation. The decent basin spoken of in the rubric is probably the large alms-dish which we usually see in cathedrals and college chapels. The alms are collected in some more convenient vessels, and placed in the alms-dish to be laid on the altar. It does not matter, therefore, whether the actual collection is made in a box, basin, or bag, so long as it is placed on the alms-dish, in order that it may be laid on the altar. And as there are many advantages in bags, of which not the least is the prevention of ostentation in alms-giving, no fear of transgressing the directions of the rubric need restrain their use.

Respecting the propriety of laying the offerings, collected at the celebration of the holy communion, on the altar, no question can arise, since the law of the Church requires that they should be so presented; and where collections are made at other services, it seems more reasonable that they should be presented at the altar when collected, than carried at once into the vestry. The objection is that the Church does not enjoin the custom; but neither, we may answer, does she forbid it. She never contemplated, when the prayer-book was compiled, the collection of alms at other services

\* "The Church of the Fathers," p. 52.

than the holy communion; and, therefore, objection might as well be raised to making a collection at all, as to presenting the alms at the altar.

It may also be said that the custom of the early Church was to place offerings in the ark, or corban, which answers to our modern poor-box, and the similar receptacle which is found in Jewish synagogues. This custom we still may follow. When the churches are open to the people, as the Bishop of London has recommended, for the purpose of private devotion, thank-offerings will no doubt be often cast into the poor-box; but when collections are made at any service, there are strong reasons for laying them on the altar. 1. The holy communion is the chief and central act of Christian worship, round which all others radiate. The ancient liturgies or eucharistic offices were the models on which all other services were framed; and with this principle the oblation of the alms is most consistent. 2. As the altar is the symbol of sacrifice, by laying them thereon we make our alms more directly offerings to God, than if they were carried at once into the vestry. 3. Our Saviour's words, "when thou bringest thy gift to the altar," &c., are a direct sanction for the custom, which serves to recall continually to our mind the necessity of seasoning our alms with charity and good-will, in order that they may be acceptable to God. The principle on which alms are made at every service is also an application of the eucharistic idea. Alms are then collected to mark our thankfulness for being admitted to the highest Christian privilege. Then, indeed, should they be larger, as implying our greater thankfulness; but if there is a blessing promised to common worship, and we can realize the truth of our Saviour's saying, that where two or three are gathered in His name, there is He in the midst, our natural feelings would suggest the propriety of approaching Him with a gift whensoever we come into His presence. It will thus have the effect of teaching us to value the blessings of public worship, and to realize the communion of saints, by making offerings when-

soever we are assembled in the congregation for the maintenance of God's ministers and the relief of the necessities of the poor. The principle of course attaches to all services; but its application may be regulated by circumstances. Sundays and festival days will receive a higher dignity if collections are made at the services then, and thus alms may become special acts of thanksgiving for the blessings commemorated in the services of that day.

The sentences of the offertory which are passages of Scripture, which inculcate the duty and privilege of almsgiving, took the place of the Anthem which, in the old English office books, was sung during the collection of the alms. In the ancient Church intervals of time were usually filled up with psalmody, and the practice of singing whilst the alms were being collected was probably a very old custom. Cardinal Bona thought that S. Augustine alluded to this custom as commenced at Carthage in his time, when hymns from the Book of Psalms were sung at the altar either before the oblation, or when that which was offered was distributed to the people.\* Anthems for the offertory are found in the sacramentary of S. Gregory, who is reputed by some to be its author. They appear in all the liturgies which were used in the English Church before the Reformation, and, therefore, it is probable that they were either introduced by S. Augustine, or found by him already in the use of the ancient British Church.† In England it had been customary for the officiating priest to chant the offertory with his ministers, and this was, probably, the reason which induced the reformers of the liturgy to direct that it should be read by the priest instead of being chanted by the choir as is the custom in the Church of Rome. The purpose of this was probably to make the

\* *Morem qui tunc esse apud Carthaginem cœperat, ut hymni ad altare dicerentur de Psalmorum libro, sive ante oblationem, sive cum distribueretur populo quod fuisset oblatum.*—*Augustin*, lib. ii., *Retract*, c. xi.

† *Palmer's Orig. Litur.*, vol. ii, p. 73. *Deinde dicitur offertorium.*—*Miss. Ebor.* vol. 73. *Sacerdos—canat cum suis ministris offertorium.*—*Miss. Hereford.* *Deinde dicitur offertorium.*—*Miss. Sar.* vol. 73.

exhortation to liberality more impressive as being an authoritative declaration of the precepts of the Gospel.

The offertory was formerly invariable, as is now the case in the Church of Rome, having reference rather to the services of the day, than to the special duty of charity. This alteration shows the importance which the reformers attached to the duty of almsgiving, and, perhaps, also the necessity which existed at the time of enforcing it more strongly than it had been in the age that preceded. It could not have been without much care and thought that the compilers of the Prayer-book gave such prominence to the offertory, and this is a consideration which can be of no little weight with those who venerate their memory.

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## CHAPTER III.

### PEW RENTS.

“Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandize.”—*S. John ii. 16.*

THE preceding chapters are but preliminary to the special purpose of this essay, which is to show the superiority of offertory collections to pew rents. The principle upon which the offertory rests and the use which the Church has made of it in past ages has been shown, and now considering the present position of the question, we find that the Church provides for collections being made whenever the communion office is used, whether there is a celebration or not, and that the purpose of this collection may be gathered from the offertory sentences to be the maintenance of the clergy and the relief of the poor. Many of the sentences have special reference to the former, many to the latter purpose; whilst others enjoin almsgiving as a general duty, and therefore it appears that the same purpose for which rents have been adopted has already been provided for by the offertory. The offertory, therefore, is the rule of the

Church, whilst pew rents have never received her sanction. The only excuse for the custom of pew rents must be made on the principle of expediency; and the object of this essay is to show that the principle of expediency no less than Christian duty requires that pew rents should be altogether abandoned.

The appropriation of seats for the consideration of rent is a distinct invasion of the rights of the parishioners. It is as much so as the letting common land would be. If a common were parcelled out, and let in several small tenements, the rights of commonage would be invaded. Those to whom the common rights belonged, who should be fortunate enough to obtain an allotment, would be oppressed by the exaction of a rent, whilst those who received no portion of the common land would be still more oppressed, inasmuch as they would be shut out from the use of that to which they had a right. And it is just so with the parish church. As the freehold of the common belongs to the lord of the manor for the use of the parishioners, so does the freehold of the church belong to the incumbent for the use of the people; and it is the duty of the churchwardens to arrange them according to their station; but except in the case of some churches built under a special Act of Parliament, in the reign of Queen Anne, the law recognises no rent as a consideration for the use of the seats which belong by right to the parishioners. New districts, being for all ecclesiastical purposes as distinct as the mother parishes from which they were formed, cannot be exempted from this rule, and, therefore, the exaction of pew rents in district churches is as illegal a tax as it would be in the mother church. The recent bill for the consolidation of the Acts under which district churches have been built, which was thrown out in the last session of parliament, contemplated the legalization of those rents which by custom have been exacted; but happily the bill was lost, and the intended violation of the rights of the parishioners was frustrated.

The origin of pews appears to have been the selection of some portion of the church for their private use by the founders and patrons of churches. The rest of the church was free to the parishioners. The seats consisted usually of movable benches, which were the property of the incumbent, and were often devised by will to his successor, and sometimes to other persons. But it is easy to understand how in time other parishioners would try to imitate the pomp of the patron, and erect pews for themselves. This explains a canon made by Bishop Quivil's council at Exeter, A.D. 1287, which says, "Also we have heard that parishioners often quarrel concerning the seats in the church, two or more of them claiming the same seat, whereby great scandal arises and divine service is often hindered; we therefore enact that no person in future shall be allowed to claim any seat as his own; the nobility and patrons of churches being alone excepted; but he who first comes to church to pray shall choose his own place for prayers." When we read this canon we might almost fancy that it was made in the nineteenth century, for we can call to mind many instances of the scandal arising from disputes about pews; but if any bishop would have the courage to imitate the example of Bishop Quivil, and assert the law of the Church as plainly and fearlessly, an end would be put to those dissensions which so often vex the peace of country parishes. Little trouble was given to the ecclesiastical courts before the time of the Reformation by disputes respecting seats. Burn says, that the common law books mention but two or three, and these relate to the chancels and seats of persons of great quality. The patrons of churches had seats appropriated to them, and these were sometimes of magnificent construction, as the ancient pews, still remaining in the church at Lavenham in Suffolk attest, whilst the rest of the parishioners had only a common right to the use of the floor of the church. The evil which was crushed in its infancy by Bishop Quivil grew up again after the Reformation; and now the church

authorities met the difficulty by another expedient which they converted into a source of profit; and that expedient was granting faculties for the appropriation of seats by particular persons. Happily the application for faculties has disappeared, and no one can now claim the exclusive appropriation of a seat unless he has a faculty for its possession. The appropriation is, therefore, only a matter of arrangement between the churchwardens and the parishioners; but although the churchwardens are bound to seat the parishioners according to their quality, they have no right to exact rents, or to appropriate seats to individuals or to the inhabitants of certain houses in perpetuity. The assignment of seats may be made at every service, or at stated times, but no churchwardens can be bound by the appropriation of their predecessors, nor can they assign seats to persons who do not occupy them.

The violation of these rights has been productive of the following evils:

I. The best seats have been assigned to persons who could afford to pay the highest rents, and thus the injunction of S. James has been set at nought: "If there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect unto the man that weareth the gold ring, and say unto him, 'Sit thou here in a good place,' and say to the poor, 'Stand thou there,' or, 'Sit thou here under my foot-stool,' are ye not partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to those that love him; but ye have despised the poor." (S. James ii. 3—6.)

II. The poor, who could afford to pay no rents, have been practically shut out of the church. Accommodation has been provided for them in the worst parts of the church, where oftentimes they could neither see nor hear, in places

which were unsuitable for pews, because they were in situations where no one would choose to rent them; or, at best, the setting apart of "free seats" for the poor has had the effect of stamping them with the stigma of poverty in church, from which the independence of the peasantry of the present day has revolted. The consequence of this has been that the poor, in great measure, have ceased to frequent the parish church at all. In rural parishes, where the feudal influence of the landed proprietors still exists, the evil has in some degree been counterbalanced by the fear of losing the good-will of their employers and benefactors; but in city parishes, where no such influence is felt, the free seats are comparatively empty. Between the rich and the poor there is, moreover, a middle class, too proud to occupy the free seats and too poor to rent pews, and the effects of the system on this class has been to alienate them altogether from the church. The middle class, with its increasing power, influence and intelligence, has been for the most part lost to the Church of England. Those who are influenced by religious convictions are found in the ranks of dissent, and those, who are not, exercise by their example the worst possible influence over the class which is placed immediately below them, and with whom they are brought into the most intimate contact, whilst small indeed—lamentably small—is the portion that remains faithful to the church.

III. And besides these evils, there is another of no lesser magnitude which affects the renters of pews. They cannot divest themselves of the idea that they enjoy a privilege for which their money has paid. Where rich and poor meet together, and God is the maker of them all, they look forth from their pews, and eye their poorer brethren placed on seats of a different kind,—and they find it hard to realize that they are all equal in God's sight. A class feeling is engendered where it ought to be forgotten, and the separation between rich and poor is nowhere so apparent as it is

in church. The feeling of distinction, thus fostered, is carried with them into the world, and they learn to regard the poor as men of a different race, instead of being, as they are, of the same flesh and blood with themselves. The idea of the church as a type of heaven here below is marred, and the pattern of the things shown on the mount is disregarded. There was no distinction in the Temple at Jerusalem which money could obtain, and the places of highest dignity in heaven are not to be purchased, but shall be given unto them for whom they are prepared.

Amidst the bustle and the turmoil of the world it is refreshing to think of the church as a type of heaven. It is there that we are learning the hymns of praise which the redeemed shall sing in their glory. It is there that we should yearn for the communion of saints with God, in which consists the chiefest joy of the inhabitants of heaven. There, where two or three are gathered in his name, Christ is present in the midst, present to the eyes of faith in anticipation of that presence which we shall behold with our sight, when not two or three, but the assembled host of all the ransomed of every age and nation shall be gathered before the Throne, and the Lamb shall be present in the midst as the object of adoration, before whom all shall bow. There, when the Saviour comes to meet his people, the angels, too, are present, and because of them the women are bidden by S. Paul to cover their heads. In so august a presence, then, how can distinctions of earthly rank be recognised? The church is different from the world without. In the world there must be social distinctions; but how greatly is the idea of the church, as a type of heaven, marred, when the most honourable places can be purchased with money! Can the thrones of heaven be so obtained? and is not the rebuke of Simon Magus in some degree applicable to the renters of pews? "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God can be purchased with money."

If the idea of the church as a place of assembly for Christ's

people, whether they be rich or poor, is to be realized, the accommodation provided for all must be without distinction ; and this is scarcely possible where the system of pew rents prevails. Objections will be made by some, who admit the truth of this in theory, that there are some practical difficulties which ought to be considered. It is fancied by some that the abolition of social distinctions in church may have an injurious effect upon the poor, and be productive of inconvenience to the higher classes. Instances are imagined of persons redolent of tobacco or the stable, seating themselves beside their more refined neighbours, to their great annoyance and inconvenience ; and it is often said that, on this account, if our churches were free and open, the wealthier classes would be driven away. But the practical experience of all who have tried the experiment is an evidence that the objection exists only in imagination. If there was any fear of it the remedy would exist in the hands of the churchwardens, to whom the duty pertains of seating the people according to the most convenient regulations ; but the interference of the churchwarden will never be found necessary, for the natural good taste and delicacy of the poor always leads them so to seat themselves that their position shall be no annoyance to others. Just as the rich will seat themselves together amongst their acquaintance, so will the poor do also. No complaints are ever heard of inconvenience arising from the mixture of rich and poor in the public meeting held in the parish school-room for a missionary or any other purpose ; without any interference, they so arrange themselves that the rich have no intrusion to complain of, and it is difficult to see why the same arrangement will not naturally be followed in the church. The objectors may be satisfied with the assurance that all experience proves that the good taste and delicacy of the poor may always be relied on, and that if any interference is necessary, it is to induce the poor to take better places than they would naturally choose for themselves.

It is also objected that the abolition of appropriations

and pew rents would be a great inconvenience to the persons who now rent pews, because they like to have a settled place in church where they can sit with their families. Even if it were so, the great advantage of the change ought to counterbalance the private inconvenience, for the inconvenience would be confined to themselves, while the advantage would be general, inasmuch as the poor would be admitted, not by sufferance, as now, to places which are a stigma on their poverty, but to those to which they have equal right with the rest of the parishioners. But after all, they need not fear, for here again experience shows that the objection is more in idea than in reality. In open churches, Sunday after Sunday, we see the same people in the same places, and families sitting together just as much as they did under the old pew system. Without the assertion of any rights, or any dispute respecting them, regular churchgoers, who come before the service commences, find the seats left for them which they are accustomed to occupy. Their habitual custom, or their predilection for that particular place, is well known to their fellow-parishioners, who will always be ready to show a good-natured respect for their habit. This we could not have anticipated before we had experience that such is the case, but as in many places this has been the result of the experiment, good old-fashioned people, who like always to sit in the same place, need not fear that their prejudice will not be respected. Two things, however, they must bear in mind; first, that it will be necessary to come to church before the service commences, for if they lounge in afterwards they cannot expect to find their accustomed seats unoccupied; and secondly, that under the free-church system it will not be possible for one or two persons to occupy the accommodation which is sufficient for six or eight,—as they are accustomed to do, when they shut their pew doors and exclude all but the members of their own family. It is unnecessary to say that the amount of church accommodation will be greatly

increased when the appropriation of sittings has ceased to exist.

Another objection to free churches is, that where the church is filled, and the amount of the offertory is quite sufficient for all requirements, the congregation does not consist of the parishioners, but of strangers from all parts, who, coming early, preoccupy the seats which ought to be preserved for the accommodation of the parishioners. All Saints, Margaret Street, is specially pointed at as an instance of this; but it can scarcely be said that the example is a fair one, when we consider the peculiar position which All Saints occupies in London. On account of the richness of its decorations, and the style in which the services are performed, it presents attractions which other churches do not usually afford. We could not expect that the services in all churches would be similarly attractive; but if all were free and open, and pains were taken to render the services as attractive as circumstances would permit—and for this the offertory would provide the funds—the parishioners would have less inducement to leave their own parish church in search of greater attractions elsewhere. A healthy rivalry would be created, when it was found that unless services were made attractive the parishioners would wander off to other churches; for all things being equal, people will always be found to prefer their own parish church. They will desire to cultivate the pastoral relationship between their parish priest and themselves, and many associations will make their parish church preferable to any other, and the convenience of proximity will tend to increase this influence.

Of course there will always be exceptions. Popular preaching and beautiful music will always make some churches more attractive than others; but this is found to be the case quite as much under the pew-rent as under the open-church system. Nevertheless, the introduction of the offertory will render it possible for every parish to keep pace with its neighbours. If the parish be slenderly

endowed, the parishoners may, if they desire it, provide the funds requisite for an efficient choir. If eloquence be not the incumbent's gift, the offertory will furnish means for obtaining the assistance of earnest and attractive preachers, and therefore he never need complain that his poverty places him in an unfavourable position in comparison with the incumbents of surrounding parishes.

Another advantage of the offertory over pew rents is the opportunity given to the poor of contributing to the fund thus raised. We often hear it said that it is better to exact a small pew rent from the poor than to supply them with seats entirely free, because they are accustomed to value that which they pay for, more than that which costs them nothing. There is some force in the argument, for we invariably find that the attendance of children at school is far more regular where a weekly payment is exacted, than where they are gratuitously educated; and it is possible that the attendance of the poor at church would be more regular, and their appreciation of the blessing greater, if they paid something for their seat, than if it was entirely free. There is some force, but that force is not against the system advocated, but against the division of the church into rented pews and free seats; it altogether tells in favour of the offertory as a substitute for pew rents, for the advantage of giving the people a more decided interest in the service of the church would be obtained, whilst the disadvantages attending pew rents would be avoided. There would be two disadvantages which appear to have escaped the notice of the advocates of cheap sittings. We will suppose that a sitting has been hired at a rental of a shilling a quarter. The shilling is paid in advance, and for the next three months the occupant is regularly seen in his place; but when the next quarter comes round, he may be out of work, or may have had some unusual domestic expense to meet, and the shilling is not forthcoming; consequently he is unable to renew the hire of his sitting. It is let to another, and he is never more seen at church.

The other disadvantage is that which belongs equally to rich and poor, the idea of exclusiveness in the house of God; and the evil produced on the mind is even greater in the case of the poor than in that of the rich, resulting from the feeling that their money has purchased the privileges to which they are admitted in public worship.

The offertory, however, collected from the whole congregation, and not from the rich only, will give the poor an opportunity of making contributions for the maintenance of the clergy and the services of the church, which will enable them to feel that they take their share in furthering these objects. It will interest them as much in the services as if they paid pew rents, and the object aimed at by the advocates of cheap pews will thus be obtained. In prosperous times their gifts would far exceed the amount exacted as pew rent, whilst at a season of adversity their inability to raise a shilling would not deprive them of the blessings of public worship. They will give less when they have less, and nothing when they are destitute; but the difference in their offering will scarcely be observed; and they will still come to church as gladly as before, in the persuasion that if they had more to give it would be most willingly offered.

Under the present pew system, the fund raised is collected only from the rich, and the poor have no opportunity of contributing; but our Lord has taught us, in the lesson which he elicited from the widow's mite cast into the treasury, that such gifts are not to be despised, for they are offerings to God, who esteems them according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. She had cast in more, measured by that rule, than all the rich men, who gave out of their abundance, and her gift was proportionably valued in His sight; but the pew system deprives the poor of this opportunity of laying up treasure in heaven, and of showing their love to Him who came to preach the Gospel to the poor. Surely an injustice is done

to them by withholding the opportunity of presenting their offering to God, which is scarcely less than that by which they are banished to the most inconvenient parts of the church, or are excluded from it altogether.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE AMOUNT AND CERTAINTY OF REVENUE.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” — *Acts* xx. 35.

If the reader has followed out the train of thought which has found expression in the foregoing pages, he will now be ready to relinquish the principle on which the establishment of pew rents rests, and prepared for the substitution of voluntary offerings in their stead. Many would think this a bold experiment, and certainly that clergyman, whoever he may have been, who first proposed to his parishioners to exchange pew rents for an offertory must have been regarded as a somewhat adventurous person.

The well endowed parish, and the ecclesiastical district in which the incumbent has been entirely dependent on pew rents, are two distinct cases. The experiment might be made by the rector of the endowed parish with little injury to himself, but the incumbent of the unendowed district, to whom the pew rents have provided the whole of his maintenance, must necessarily consider the matter very seriously before he throws himself on the voluntary contributions of his congregation. It is right that he should weigh every objection carefully and do nothing hastily. No wise man would exchange a certain for a precarious income, and if he has a wife and family depending on him, he would not be justified in making a rash experiment for the sake of a correct idea; but if it can be proved that there is no uncertainty in the matter, all his scruples will vanish.

In a parish sufficiently endowed, the maintenance of the clergy may be omitted in the distribution of the alms; but this is the only difference which need be considered, for if it can be shown that the offertory will raise an amount sufficient for all requirements, the incumbent of the unendowed district need no longer fear to make the experiment. Where the offertory has been attempted, various circumstances have led to its adoption. In some parishes the insufficiency of subscriptions for the support of local charities has led the parishioners to this resource, In others, the absence of church rates has necessitated an appeal to the voluntary offerings of the people for those expenses which were usually chargeable on the rate. In some, again, the desire of making almsgiving a part of public worship, has been the motive for its introduction; whilst in others the offertory has superseded pew rents. In all of them the experiment has almost invariably proved successful, and at least no instance of failure after a fair trial has ever been made public. An example of the first may be found in the parish of Kidderminster, where neither church rates nor pew rents were abolished. The inconvenience of collecting subscriptions and the insufficiency of their amount induced the vicar of Kidderminster to introduce a weekly offertory in his parish. The result proved more than equal to his expectations, for in the year 1861 the amount collected in three churches, was respectively £359 6s. 3d.; £390 4s. 11d., and £150 15s. 7d., sums which greatly exceeded those which appeared in the subscription lists, which were now laid aside. With the exception of some special offertories, the whole was divided into three portions, which were applied to the following objects:—

- I. The relief of the sick and needy.
- II. The support of schools.
- III. The expenses of Divine worship which are not chargeable on the church rate.

Surely there was encouragement here for the abolition

of the objectionable system of pew rents, for if the amount of these had simply been added to the sums collected at the offertory, the incumbents would have lost nothing; but, if the money so collected for charitable objects exceeded the amount of subscriptions formerly raised, why should we doubt but that a similar increase would have taken place in the sums offered for the maintenance of the clergy?

The rejection of church rates has, in many parishes, led to the introduction of the offertory; and although the abolition of church rates would be an invasion of the rightful property of the Church, and no argument in favour of such a step can fairly be drawn from these cases, the result has been that where the experiment has been made the amount has considerably exceeded that which was formerly collected by the rate.

Where rates existed, and there was no necessity for supplementing the endowment, the offertory has in many parishes been revived simply and purely for the sake of establishing almsgiving as a portion of Divine worship. As a matter of principle it was adopted, and as such accepted by the congregation. Thus, where there might have been greater difficulty in convincing the parishioners of the necessity for such a step, it has invariably been productive of the most beneficial results. The people have contracted the habit of liberality, which must ever bring a blessing on their heads, and a fund has been raised which has facilitated the establishment of many useful parochial institutions.

In other parishes, again, incumbents encouraged by the success of the offertory collected for other purposes, and convinced of the impropriety of the pew-rent system, have had what seemed at first the hardihood to throw themselves on the voluntary offerings of the people, and of all who have made the experiment we have never heard of any one who has regretted it. If the incumbents of parishes have contented themselves with no larger income than was formerly raised, it has enabled them to increase their ministerial usefulness by obtaining the services of additional curates.

The reasons for this increase will be obvious when we consider its cause.

1. *That which has been given has been given as an offering to God.*

That which was contributed under the pew-rent system was a sum paid for the purchase of the money's worth. The value of a pew was estimated according to its situation in the church, and when a scale of charges was settled, the money was paid without any idea of making it an offering to God. All responsibilities were liquidated by the payment, and no thought was ever entertained of making additions to it in proportion to the blessings which the giver was conscious of having received. It was simply a mercantile transaction with which both parties to the bargain were satisfied, and the only complaint ever heard on the one hand was that the pew rents were high, and on the other that many of the sittings were unlet. But the offertory introduces an entire change in the principle on which the payments are made. It is no longer a mercantile transaction, but an act of homage to God. The contribution which was simply the fulfilment of a bargain before, will now be affected by many considerations.

First and foremost will be that of gratitude to the Giver of all blessings for the spiritual benefits which they have received in the church. Many are the devout worshippers who will make the reckoning within their own hearts, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath done unto me?" They have been admitted to the privilege of public worship. They have come to meet their Saviour in the place which He has appointed, where two or three are gathered in His name, and He has promised His presence in the midst; they have drawn near unto Him with the confession of their sins, and His appointed minister has made an authoritative declaration of His mercy to all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel. They have joined in the song of

praise which, offered up by Christ's people on earth, mingles with the unceasing hymns which the angels sing in heaven. Their service, if heartily used, has been a foretaste of heaven, and when they remembered dear friends who once walked with them in the house of God now departed to their rest, they felt that they were nearer to them whilst they sang on earth the praise of the same Lord whom their dear departed ones were praising in Paradise. The words of Holy Scripture which they heard read gave precepts of holy counsel, the chart by which their course must be guided as they sailed over the waves of this troublesome world; and the sermon enforced these lessons and brought them home to their hearts. If there is any blessing in the ordinance of preaching, they must have felt it most when the exhortations of God's minister had scarcely died upon their ears. Explanations of the way of salvation, counsels for the difficulties, and comfort for the sorrows of life, each unfolding the richness of God's love, were the themes on which the preacher dwelt; and if the word preached was mixed with faith in them that heard it, when would their liberality be more aroused than when the offertory bags were handed round amongst the congregation? The love of God would seem to speak within them then, and say in the poet's words:

Give all thou canst. High heaven disdains the lore  
Of nicely calculated less or more.

Perhaps they are about to partake of the sacred mysteries of their Lord's undying love. Their souls were faint and hungry, and they are about to be fed with the living bread which cometh down from heaven. If they had learned to act on the principle of returning to God a thank-offering in proportion to their sense of blessing, what earnest desire must they feel at such a time to give all they can for the love of their Master, who has said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Nor will the feeling of gratitude to God's ministers be absent from their thoughts. Although their hearts will pass

on to Him who is the source of every blessing, they will remember that He has made use of His ministers as the earthen vessels through which spiritual benefits are conveyed to themselves, and that a debt is due to them also on this account. S. Paul thought it not unmeet to remind Philemon of this debt when he sent back Onesimus with the epistle in which he wrote, "If he hath wronged thee or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account. I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it, albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self beside." (Philem. 18, 19.) And they will feel that to each one of them in some measure these words apply. Although the ministers of Christ are all His ambassadors and act only in His name, yet the same natural feeling which would have led Philemon to consider that he owed his very self to S. Paul, will cause the people to remember how Christ's ministers were made the channels through which such great blessings were received from the day of their baptism even to that hour when they have just been listening to the exhortations spoken by their mouths, and are about to receive at their hands the body which was broken and the blood which was shed for their salvation. The time and circumstances under which the collection is made renders it more than probable that the offering will be larger and more cheerfully given than when the stipulated pew rent was called for by the clerk during the long hours of secular employment. This will hold good of every collection made during Divine service. The inducement to liberality will be greater at the holy communion, but it will not be wanting at any time when the congregation is gathered in Christ's name within the walls of the sanctuary.

II. *When the habit of giving is contracted, liberality increases.* This will invariably be found to be the case. To whom do persons in distress apply for relief? Not to the richest, or to those who are known never to give, but to those who are always giving away their money. They know that from

such their application will meet with consideration and a kind response, and therefore it is to such that they will make known their distress. When liberality has become a habit, those who have acquired it will find a pleasure in bestowing their alms upon the needy, and they will be more ready to give than those who only do so on rare occasions. There are many reasons for this. That which Aristotle says, of things being pleasant when they become habitual, is true of charity as of all things else; and as the habit is formed from a succession of actions, the oft-repeated collection will be more gladly responded to than that which is infrequent and exceptional. The duty of liberality in proportion to our wealth has been much overlooked of late; but when men are once convinced that it is a duty, the sense of its being a burden will gradually disappear, and it will be regarded rather in the light of a privilege. The existence of the offertory will give many opportunities to the clergy of inculcating the duty, and of encouraging those who are acquiring the habit of devoting a portion of their goods to God's service. Men who are unaccustomed to give fear lest they should miss that which they are asked to give, but when they make the trial they discover how little they seem to lose by it. Money so spent brings them more satisfaction than that which is bestowed on the purchase of luxuries. They feel the duty of liberality, and the responsibility attaching to them as stewards of the wealth committed to their charge; and when they are told that almsgiving is valued in God's sight, not by the intrinsic worth of the gift, but by the measure of self-denial which it costs them, they will feel ashamed that their gifts involve so little sacrifice, and instead of grudging what they give they will rather wish to increase their alms. This is the reason why offertories grow larger from year to year, when they become the established custom of a congregation.

The duty of setting apart some certain portion of their income for God's service is one which men will very easily

learn to comprehend. If the Jews gave a tenth of all things, the Christian should surely give no less. No settled rule was laid down under the Gospel, that Christian liberality might be all the more free and generous. It was not to ease men of a burden that no rule was made by our Saviour, but rather that they might learn that their alms should be proportioned to their gratitude. It can scarcely be supposed that the first Christians would have contented themselves with the limit of Jewish charity. Their love led them rather to reserve nothing for themselves, like the Christians at Jerusalem, than to consider how small a portion of their goods would satisfy the claims of God. Encouragements to liberality are often found in the epistles of S. Paul, but nowhere had he occasion to rebuke Christians for their indisposition to contribute to the needs of others. And the reason of this was, that charity is the natural consequence of Christian love. To have enjoined the duty of devoting a tenth would have been to set a limit, where no limit was intended to exist. Christianity was a true and real bond of fellowship, and the Christian felt his brother's needs as if they were his own. We can scarcely imagine the need of a charity sermon, in the modern sense of the word, in apostolic times. There was no necessity for strong appeals when each man's conscience told him that the doctrine of the communion of saints was a blessed reality, which supplied the principle on which his alms must be bestowed. That, which was given for Christ's sake, was given to Him, and, as a gift done unto Himself, He would accept it in that day when even the cup of cold water should not be forgotten.

III. *The promises attached to liberality must not be forgotten.* Many are the instances in which the wise man's words have been verified: "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." We may see many of our most prosperous manufacturers amongst the most liberal dispensers of their wealth, and we may ask whether their liberality is the consequence of

their wealth, or their wealth the consequence of their liberality. When the promise is so often repeated in Holy Scripture, can we doubt that the increase of their wealth is the blessing of God bestowed on their liberality? "Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it;" and in the building up of a fortune we must acknowledge that all is the gift of God, and that without His blessing the wisest schemes cannot command success. We know of the instance of a man who rose from a humble station, amassing a princely fortune by his trade, and the secret of his success he always attributed to the resolution he had made in youth, and in which he had steadily persevered all through his life, of devoting a tenth of all his gains to charitable uses.\* It may be that such instances are permitted to occur for our encouragement, that we may learn how even in temporal things God will bless our store, if we dedicate to him the first-fruits of our gains; but that this should be universally the case would be ill suited to our present condition, in which reverse of fortune, poverty, and sorrow, are oftentimes necessary to our spiritual health. Yet, nevertheless, God will be faithful to his word, and the promise attached to charity will be fulfilled. Although our earthly stores be not increased, we may find that for the corruptible riches of the earth we receive the imperishable wealth of heaven; for the things that perish in the using, spiritual blessings which are far more exceeding worth. Although the gift of God cannot be purchased with money, he will reward liberality with the increase of spiritual graces; and thus the more we give, if it be done simply for the love of Christ, and without ostentation or display, for which the offertory affords no opportunity, we shall find our hearts more disposed to liberality. For the graces and the consolations which we receive we shall ever have a thank-offering to bestow, and this is another reason why the offertory collected week by week, and year by year, will always be found to increase.

\* The late Mr. Finzell, of Bristol.

Another reason for the offertory exceeding the amount of pew rents is, that *the collection is made frequently, and from the whole congregation.* The frequency of the collection is especially suited to those whose income is constantly coming in, who constitute the bulk of an ordinary congregation. It is on the same principle that coal and clothing clubs and benefit societies are established, for many who would find a difficulty in subscribing a pound a year, find it a much easier matter to set apart a shilling or sixpence a week. When work is plenty, and gains are proportionately large, they can give as God hath prospered them in the week past; while at times when employment is scarce, or provisions are dear, the offering can be decreased without attracting observation. When no settled sum is fixed, the ability which they possess at one time will counterbalance their inability at another, and thus, although the amount of the offertory may fluctuate, its average will not be diminished by reason of scarcity and want. When collections are seldom made, a wet Sunday, or the absence from home of some members of the congregation, will influence their amount; but, when they are of constant occurrence, these influences will not operate, for those who are absent on one Sunday will be present on the next, and supply the lack which their absence occasioned.

The offertory is collected from the whole congregation. The poor as well as the rich have an opportunity of giving, and the pence of the poor will very considerably swell the amount; so that not only will the voluntary offerings of the rich exceed the sum formerly contributed as pew rent, but the offerings of the poor, who paid no rent, will form a very considerable addition. At Mr. Akroyd's church, at Haley Hill, account was kept, during the first year, of the proportions of gold, silver, and copper, which were contributed to the offertory, and the result was found to be as follows:—

.	Gold, £50.	Silver, £144.	Copper, £60.
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Since the amount of copper exceeded that of gold, it is clear that the addition of the pence was no inconsiderable advantage, for we may not unreasonably conclude that the givers of the copper would have had no opportunity of contributing anything under the pew-rent system. The only objection that can be made to this conclusion is the supposition that persons contented themselves with giving pence who could have afforded silver, and would have been ready to pay more for the hire of a sitting. This objection may be met by the answer, that the amount of silver, 144*l.*, was not small, and that in other churches, after both systems have been tried, the amount of the offertory has been found greatly to exceed the pew rents. At S. Philip's, Clerkenwell, for instance, the pew rents amounted to 80*l.* per annum; but since these have been abolished, 400*l.* to 500*l.* per annum has been obtained from the offertory. At S. Matthias, Stoke Newington, the offertory averages 1000*l.* per annum, a sum certainly greater than could be obtained by pew rents, and this, it must be remembered, is not collected from a rich congregation like that of S. Andrew's, Well Street, or All Saints, Margaret Street, but from one which is mostly composed of the middle and lower classes. This has been found sufficient not only to double the endowments, which the incumbent receives, but also to provide curates, and to defray the expenses of all the parochial institutions.

Instances of the success of the offertory might be indefinitely multiplied, and these might be taken from every kind of parish and every sort of congregation. Indeed it is one of the advantages of the offertory, that it is suitable to all circumstances. Of course cases might be adduced of ill-will being stirred up by its adoption, when it has been introduced in violation of the wishes of the parishioners; but this has not arisen from any objection to the offertory in itself, but from the supposition that it was a party badge, or an indication of some form of ritualism to which the feelings of the people were repugnant, but even in such

cases the opposition has almost always died away when the reasonableness of the custom was understood and when its advantageous results were perceived. Great wisdom and tact will, of course, be required at its first introduction, but the necessity of perfect unanimity may be doubted, since this is a thing always hard, and sometimes impossible to be obtained. In all cases, when the incumbent is satisfied with the desirableness of the introduction of the offertory, he should clearly explain his motives to the congregation, and if possible take such counsel with them that the proposal may appear to emanate from themselves. It is well if it can be adopted, as at Kidderminster, by the unanimous resolution of the people; but Kidderminster was a happy parish, and its vicar possessed of more tact perhaps than ordinarily falls to the share of parochial clergymen. In most parishes some will be found ready to oppose every proposition which is made to them, and we can scarcely suppose that the offertory will escape their objections. But if it is right in principle and expedient in practice, why should we be afraid of a little opposition? When, at the Oxford Church Congress, Mr. Claughton suggested that it should never be adopted except as the unanimous resolution of the parishioners, Mr. Pierrepont gave the assembly the result of his own experience at Warrington. When it was first introduced by the present Bishop of Sodor and Man, he was himself opposed to it. For some time he made it his habit, as a kind of silent protest, not to contribute more frequently than he had been accustomed when alms were collected once a month; but he gradually became convinced that the rector was in the right, and he was not ashamed to declare the discovery of his mistake; but he confessed his opinion that if the rector had waited until all opposition was disarmed, the offertory would never have been adopted. This is one of those cases in which the test of experience is the most convincing answer to opponents. It is certainly desirable

\* Report of the Oxford Church Congress, 113.

to convince the parishioners of its propriety beforehand ; but when prejudice still exists there is every reason to hope that this will be removed when the success of the offertory is seen.

In strict principle, pew rents should cease as soon as the offertory is adopted, but yet it cannot be denied that the offertory has been found very successful where pew rents have been still maintained. At the church of the Holy Trinity, Tottenham High Cross, pew rents have not been abandoned, and yet the offertory last year exceeded 250*l*. The principle on which it was adopted was the duty of habitual almsgiving ; but its success would certainly be an encouragement to substitute the offertory for pew rents. One curate is here supported out of the offertory, and this is a step in the right direction, for if one clergyman can be so maintained, why should not three ?

To secure the success of the offertory, it will be necessary to enlist the interest of the parishioners, as far as possible, in its distribution. The fund so formed may be divided into three portions, of which the first should be appropriated to the support of the clergy ; the second to the maintenance of the church (where there is no rate) and its services, including the expenses of the choir ; whilst the third should be devoted to various charitable purposes, parochial institutions, as well as home and foreign missions. This may be done by having separate offertories for different purposes, or by the custom of wrapping up the offerings in paper, indicating the objects to which they are devoted ; but another plan, which would be very feasible, is for the incumbent, with the assistance of the churchwardens, and, perhaps, a committee of the congregation, to divide the whole amount of the offertory in such proportions as may be requisite. This last plan has one advantage in particular, and that is that the incumbent, and those of the parishioners who are specially interested in the management of the parochial charities, know better than the congregation in general the proportions in which the divisions

can most advantageously be made. Yet, on the other hand, if it is found that the congregation like to know the special object beforehand to which their alms are to be devoted, it may be well to adopt one of the other plans.

One thing, however, should never be omitted, and that is the publication of a statement of the amount of every offertory, and an account of its expenditure. This is necessary in order to give the congregation confidence in the proper appropriation of their offerings, and to secure the incumbent against all suspicion. It will, moreover, give the incumbent an opportunity of printing an annual address to his parishioners on the advantage of almsgiving, and of furnishing them with valuable particulars respecting the success of those parochial institutions which are supported from the offertory, which will always have a tendency to increase their zeal and stimulate their liberality. However small the amount may be, and however limited the parish, the publication of such a statement, accompanied by a pastoral address, will always be found expedient. It will be valued by the parishioners themselves, and in many instances circulated amongst their friends at a distance, and thus prepare the way for the adoption of the offertory in places remote from that from whence the address first emanated. The liberality of one parish will thus stir up the emulation of another, and its effects will be productive of results which will be advantageous to the Church at large.

It will also be beneficial to ascertain the feelings of the people with respect to the offertory, and to converse often with them on its advantage, and the weakness of the objections raised. This should be done not in sermons only, but in the course of pastoral visitation. To ascertain objections where they exist, will always be the first step towards their removal, and they can be more effectually answered in the course of conversation than in sermons. In conversation objections can be met step by step, and the objector having opportunity of reply, will find the ground sink from under him; while, in listening to a sermon, however

clear the argument may be, the objector will think that whilst the clergyman is speaking from the pulpit, he must have it all his own way, and that the statement is one-sided, since he has no opportunity of urging his objections. The objections will often be found to be of such a nature as to cause a smile, such as would never have been anticipated, and good-natured forbearance will often be necessary; but the minister of Christ must be able to condescend to the weakness of all, that he may remove every obstacle which stands in the way of the success of so right and holy a custom. Of such a nature was the objection once made to the writer by a very well-meaning parishioner, that by our frequent collections we were assimilating ourselves to the dissenters. "*Fas est et ab hoste doceri,*" clothed in intelligible language, will be an overpowering answer; and the churchman must confess that it would be an unworthy thing to allow the more munificent liberality of the dissenters to put us to shame, and that in things that are right, it cannot be wrong to follow the example of those whose opinions in other respects we may not approve. The very weakness of the objections should give courage to the reviver of the offertory, and instead of lamenting the unreasonableness of his parishioners, he should rather rejoice that their arguments are capable of so easy an answer.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE REAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE MINISTER.

"Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."—1 *Thess.* v. 13.

THE real independence of the clergyman is the next point to be considered. The objection is often made that the substitution of the offertory for pew rents would make the clergyman more dependent on the caprice of the congregation. This is urged by many who approve the principle of

the offertory, and are prepared to adopt it as a means of raising a fund for charitable purposes. The general principle of the offertory is of course applicable to all parishes; but the question of supporting the clergy out of it is one which only applies to those parishes where the clergyman has been dependent on pew rents. The field of argument is therefore narrowed to the consideration of the circumstances of these parishes.

It is said that where pew rents exist parishioners will hire their sittings for a year, and although they may take offence at something in the course of that time, they will not leave the church at once, because they would lose the value of the rent which they had paid, and before the end of the year their misunderstanding may be removed, or their anger be softened, and they will then take on their seat for another year; whereas, if the clergyman is dependent on the offertory, he might find himself suddenly deserted by the most influential and wealthy members of his congregation. There is much that is specious in the argument, and therefore it demands attention; but an attentive consideration will rather remove than substantiate the objection. People will take offence sometimes, and with the utmost tact a faithful pastor will often find it impossible to avoid treading on a sore point. Independence is necessary to the influence of a clergyman, and this is one advantage of endowments, that they remove him from dependence on the favour of the people; but where no endowments exist, it is desirable that he should be placed in as independent a position as is possible. Absolute independence is a very difficult thing to be obtained. Even where endowments are ample, considerations of popularity may make a clergyman in great measure dependent on his parishioners; and even with those that are above such unworthy influences, the fear of doing anything which may cause the weak brother to be offended may greatly diminish the independence of the most faithful and diligent pastors. If absolute independence is so difficult to be obtained, the question must be considered as

one only of degree. It will, therefore, be necessary first to show that under the system of pew rents no clergyman is independent, and then that he is really more so when he relies on the offertory for support.

Cases will sometimes occur where the clergyman gives offence to some portion of his congregation. The causes may be either grave or trivial. It once happened that many of the principal members of the congregation of a proprietary chapel suddenly forsook their pews and carried home their cushions because a pew-opener, who had been illegally dismissed, was obliged to be reinstated in his office. A painted window or an ornamental reredos has sometimes been the means of dispersing a congregation; and in such cases the prejudices aroused are so strong as altogether to weigh down the commercial consideration of the impolicy of losing half a year's rent of a pew by not occupying it. Offence is sometimes taken at a sermon, or at some ritual change, and then the offended pew-renter, if he is very zealous, carries off his cushions and his books, and his secession is made in the most ostentatious manner. If he is a man of a more peaceful disposition he may retain his seat until the end of the year, and sometimes appear in it; but when the year is ended he will relinquish it, and even if he does not state his reasons for dissatisfaction to the churchwardens or the incumbent, the cause of his relinquishing his pew is well known and generally canvassed amongst the congregation. A change of ministers will always induce some persons to give up their pews. Clergymen do not like to see the best pews in the church untenanted, and the fear of this will be a great temptation to them to please particular members of the congregation rather than to be faithful, and no one in whom such influences operate can ever be really independent.

Under the pew-rent system, the secession of a member of the congregation must always be a somewhat ostentatious step. He is no longer seen in his pew. The cushions and books have been taken away, and the reasons for his de-

parture will be a topic of conversation amongst those who remain. This will make his return a matter of considerable difficulty, for he will be obliged to avow that he has been mistaken, or that he acted too hastily in giving up his pew. He will, therefore, naturally shrink from coming forward and applying again for sittings which he had so ostentatiously relinquished, especially when the application must be made to the same persons to whom, perhaps, his reasons for secession were stated with some considerable warmth of feeling. Of course, when a man is convinced of a mistake or a wrong action, he ought not to be ashamed to avow it; but we must take men as we find them, and as a matter of fact, many are found ready to profit by past experience, and to act differently for the future, who shrink from a public avowal of their change of mind. For these reasons, we generally see that under the pew system, when a man gives up his seat, he leaves that church, and never returns to it again.

But if churches are free and open, and the offertory substituted for pew rents, the clergyman will be far more independent. He is not supported by a few members, but by the general mass of the congregation, and therefore the withdrawal of the support of one or two individuals will make little real difference in the course of the year. If some go away offended, others will take their places, and their absence will scarcely be observed, except perhaps by the anxious eyes of their pastor. It is impossible but that offences will come, and therefore we must always anticipate their probability, but when the church is open and free those who depart offended take no step at their departure which will require to be retracted before they come again. They went away, and the utmost they could do was to absent themselves. There was no need to write to the incumbent or the churchwardens a statement of their reasons for ceasing to attend that church. There was no formal act like the resignation of a pew. If they continue to stay away others take their place; and if they wish to return, they can do so, because

the church is open and free. The other members of the congregation will not care to investigate the cause of their absence. They may have been away from home, or suffering from indisposition, or they may have been led by some inducement to frequent the services of another church, but the seats are all open and free; no questions will be asked; and they can return when they like. They have thought over the offence they took, and it seems to them less grave than it appeared at first. They have talked it over with friends, or reasoned it out in their minds, and have become convinced that they were wrong, and then there is no impediment to their return. There is nothing to be unsaid or undone before they come again. Every one who has had to do with free and open churches can remember instances of this, and doubtless there were many more which never came to his knowledge. The clergyman will be less influenced by the fear of giving offence, that great hindrance to usefulness, when he finds that the effect of the offence taken is not indelible; and in proportion as this influence is removed, his independence will be increased. The pastor who cultivates an intimate acquaintance with his people will probably be the first to observe their absence, and will be anxious to seek them out in order to ascertain its cause. He may therefore be the only one to discover the ground of offence, which a little quiet conversation will generally avail to remove, for where there is no open act of secession, like the surrender of a pew, there will be no other impediment to their return when the misunderstanding is removed.

The facility with which the wanderer may be recovered by kind and judicious reasoning is no small reason for the greater independence of a clergyman, who is thrown upon the offertory for support, than of another who is maintained by pew rents; and this is the pleasantest aspect in which to view the question. But it must also be considered that, supposing the persons offended should remove to another church, as they must be expected sometimes to do, their

places will easily be supplied. That which is a cause of offence to some will be an object of attraction to others, and the very same reason which deprives the congregation of some of its members may also increase it by the addition of others. Where uniformity of ritual is little insisted on, as in our churches, this will always be found to be the case, the adoption of some particular ritual observance may seem objectionable to some persons, who will go to other churches in consequence. They will, of course, make selection of a church where that ritual observance is wanting; but then there will be some worshippers in the church, to which they betake themselves, who, lamenting the absence of that ritual observance, will, on that account, leave their church and go to that one which, from this cause, has been deserted by others, and so in this manner there will be an exchange by which neither congregation will be diminished. A difference in the style of service will be productive of the same results. Many men have many minds, and as it will be impossible to reduce the tastes and opinions of all to one Procrustean level, we must not expect that in large towns the parochial system will, under our present circumstances, be very strictly adhered to. Theoretically, of course, it is right that every man should attend his own parish church, but practically, it would be found impossible to enforce the rule, unless uniformity were first established.

If all churches are free and open, and the clergy supported by the offertory, it will soon be found that incumbents are much more independent than under the pew system. People can come or go as they please, although habit and other influences will of course attract them to their own particular church. If they can go without the formality of relinquishing their pew, they can come without the still greater formality of making application for one, to which they will be bound for a year. And if they should take offence and depart, the very thing which is a cause of offence to them will be an attraction to others, so that their departure will entail no pecuniary loss on the incum-

bent. And if at Haley Hill the pence exceeded the gold in amount, it is a certain proof that the clergyman is not dependent on the few rich members of the congregation, but on the whole body. Dependence on a multitude comes nearer to independence than dependence on a few, for although popular clamour may intoxicate a multitude for a time, there is enough common sense and right feeling in the people at large to secure a patient hearing and a fair judgment in the case; and if we wanted a proof of this, the progress of the offertory movement is sufficient evidence of its truth. The prejudice which existed against it twenty years ago has almost entirely disappeared, and some whose opinions are most opposed to those of its first adherents, are now found amongst its most strenuous supporters. Let a clergyman only do his duty faithfully and earnestly, and he may have confidence that whatever may have been the case under the pew-rent system, he will not be left without support if he trusts himself to the liberality of his congregation. The mutual trust will create a sympathy which will increase his influence. For temporal things he trusts himself to his people, and in spiritual matters they trust themselves to him. A mutual confidence will thus be gained, which will make the pastoral tie more deep and real. A pew rent is a mercantile transaction. It is paid in advance. It is a stipulated sum; and all these are circumstances which imply a want of confidence, which will be wholly wanting in the offertory. There is no stipulation there, no payment in advance, but each contributes according to his sense of duty and his feelings of gratitude towards God and His Church for the spiritual benefits which he has received. Why then should the clergyman, now dependent on pew rents, fear that he would lose his independence if pew rents were abolished, and an offertory at every service substituted in its stead? Under the pew-rent system he certainly is not independent. Not only the pews, but his own ministrations are rented; and if he should give offence, and the pew renters should

all agree to give up their seats, he would be starved out. He is almost as dependent on his congregation as that most dependent of all men, *an independent minister*, a veritable "*lucus a non lucendo*," who is voted in, and may be voted out, by the suffrages of those to whom he ministers. In a free and open church, this dependence could not exist. If the congregation should all forsake their minister, the very fact of their so doing, unless it were for a cause discreditable to himself, would serve as an advertisement, which would draw a crowd from curiosity, it might be, at first, to ascertain the cause, but from out of these a new congregation would be formed, who might value those ministrations which the former one rejected. We are supposing an extreme case, which would seldom, if ever, happen; but even if it should, that which would ruin the clergyman who is supported by pew rents would rather tend to increase the maintenance of him who throws himself upon the offertory.

Nothing, of course, is less desirable than that a clergyman should make the experiment by giving needless offence to his congregation; but if it should happen that his choice must be made between his duty and his popularity, he has no reason to fear the result, if he should decide in favour of his duty. We must suppose also that the services in the church are conducted with propriety, and that the clergyman is a zealous preacher and an active minister. If it be otherwise, or the services are lifeless and careless, he would probably lose his congregation in either case, and therefore his failure to obtain a maintenance from the offertory would be no argument against the system. The necessities of his case might, however, prove a healthy spur to his energies, and then he might regain the congregation which he had lost under the system of pew rents. If these arguments should convince one clergyman, who is in doubt, of the possibility of substituting the offertory for the objectionable rent, the labour bestowed on this essay will not have been expended in vain.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE SPIRITUAL BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE.

“ It is twice blessed.

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”—*Merchant of Venice*.

THE last advantage of the introduction of the offertory is not the least, and it is reserved as the crowning argument of this essay, because all that has gone before is subservient to this. The offertory system has been proved to be in accordance with the custom of the ancient Church, after the model of which our own has been reformed. Its superiority to pew rents as a system of Church finance has been shown both in respect to amount and the certainty of income. The greater independence of the minister who is maintained by the offertory has been proved ; and now this last chapter will be devoted to the consideration of the practice as conducing to the spiritual benefit of the people. It will, therefore, be consistent with this design to consider it first as giving an opportunity for the acquirement of the *habit of almsgiving*.

We are not our own, but we are bought with a price. The baptized Christian can claim no right either in himself or in his possessions. This principle lies at the very root of Christianity ; we, and all that we have, are God's. It would be so even apart from our redemption ; for what have we that we have not received ? Our lives were God's creation, our possessions were the gifts of his bounty ; we had no right to destroy the one, or to waste the other ; but our duty in respect to each is greatly increased by our redemption. If we are no longer our own, but bought with a price, we are the servants of Him, by whom we are redeemed. Our lives must be spent in His service, and our wealth expended according to His directions who committed the stewardship unto us. The idea of sacrifice extends over

both, for if we are included in the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, we must present our bodies and our souls as holy and acceptable offerings to God. The whole idea of worship is involved in this, but to be acceptable to God it must be habitual. The offering of ourselves to God is not to be made on some great occasions only, but to be continually renewed by prayer and the holy communion. Prayer must be habitual, and for this reason special times of prayer and solemn services have ever been appointed in the Church; but from them is derived the spirit of prayer which must pervade our hearts in the intervening season. Prayer is the solemn act of dedication to God, but the spirit which it arouses dwells with us as we go forth to the performance of our daily tasks. The holy communion again is a solemn act of worship through which we obtain unity with Christ; but this unity is not divided when the act of reception is over, for it continues to abide with the faithful-communicant until he renews it, when he next partakes of the eucharistic feast. It supplies the principle which bears fruit in the daily life of the Christian.

The same is also true of almsgiving. In prayer we worship God; in the holy communion we obtain that unity with Christ which is essential to our spiritual life; but almsgiving is no less an act of homage to the Creator. By offering to Him a portion of our substance we acknowledge that all is His gift, and that since we are His stewards, He has a right over its expenditure. This should never be forgotten, but ought to be remembered and acted on every day of our lives. When this is done continually, the remembrance has become a habit; but as habits are only to be acquired by a succession of individual acts, it is well that there should be stated times and occasions at which we may make our offerings to God, and this is just the purpose of the offertory. An offering is made to God as an acknowledgment of His property in our wealth, and the act helps us to act on the principle every day that we live.

Liberality in itself does not supply the principle. A man may give largely in charity because he takes a pleasure in relieving the necessities of others. This is in performance of a human but not of a strictly Christian duty. Another may give liberally at times, but still regard his wealth as a property of his own, and spend it in selfish uses on the ordinary days of his life. Both of these may have no thought of God in the gift. In the latter case, however large may be the acts of charity, no habit is acquired. It can only be produced by oft-repeated acts, and, therefore, he who so gives may be all the while a stranger to the principle which regulates the Christian's charity. He may give from ostentatious motives, and in receiving the praise of men he has all the reward which he desired. The other may give from simple good-nature, without a thought of God, and he is satisfied with the pleasure which results from witnessing the benefits which he bestows on the recipients of his bounty.

There is an importance in having stated times for almsgiving. It may be said that we can give alms whenever occasion requires ; but may not the same be said of prayer ? We may pray whenever our needs require it, but we should never acquire the habit of prayer unless there were stated seasons for its exercise. Who would pray in the day of adversity who had not made it his daily practice ? We must hold constant intercourse with our heavenly Father before we can acquire that perfect confidence which leads us to lay before Him all our cares and griefs. The whole design of religious observances was intended to foster the habit by a succession of acts of devotion ; we find it even in Eden, when God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, that accustomed hour, most likely, when the Creator manifested His presence, that by an act of intercourse our first parents might acquire the habit of walking with him continually. The recurrence of the weekly Sabbath, as a day of rest from labour, taught men to look beyond the toil of earth to that rest of which the Sabbath was a type ; and,

therefore, the shadow of the Sabbath was cast as a hallowing influence over the ordinary days of the week. And now, under the Christian dispensation, the recurrence of holy seasons and festivals produces the same effect. The joy of Easter is not done when the commemoration of our Lord's resurrection is over; and the penitential heart-searchings of Lent are not forgotten when they are lighted up by Easter joy; but yet it is well that there should be stated seasons for Easter joy and for Lenten sorrow, to recall our hearts from their own imaginings and from the busy cares which pertain to this our present earthly state. If we apply the same reasoning to the offertory, we shall see the spiritual benefit which it is calculated to bring to Christ's people. The solemn setting apart of some portion of our goods, and presenting them as an offering to God will accustom our minds to receiving all as from Him, and to being ready to give unto Him that which is His own. The duty of thus offering to God of our substance was not constituted on any mere utilitarian principle. It entered into the idea of the ancient sacrifices when the sacrifice was wholly consumed by fire, for the animal sacrificed was the property of the offerer, either by previous possession or by purchase. This was necessary to make it acceptable, and, therefore, David rejected the munificent offering of Araunah, and insisted on paying a price for that which he offered in sacrifice.

The *κοινωνία* of the early Christians was no doubt a sacrificial act, which was designed to foster that life of sacrifice in which they gave themselves wholly unto God; and the discontinuance of the offertory of late may account for that selfish view of life and property which has been the prevailing sin of the present age. The remedy for this evil will be found in its revival, inasmuch as it will recall the minds of men to the lessons which they cannot fail to learn whilst they make their offering to God. It is laid upon the altar in token of its being a sacrifice to God, and those who witness the act will ask themselves the question: "What

mean ye by this service?" The answer will suggest a train of thought which will lead them back to the sacrificial idea which pervades the whole Christian life, that idea which was never absent from the minds of the first disciples, but which comes to too many amongst ourselves almost in the light of a new doctrine.

*Almsgiving makes our prayers acceptab'e unto God.* The prayers and alms of Cornelius came up for a *memorial* unto the Lord (Acts xi. 4). The correspondence of this expression with one which plainly speaks of sacrifice, illustrates the meaning of the words which were spoken by the angel: "The priest shall take from the meat-offering a *memorial* thereof, and shall burn it. It is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto God." (Lev. ii. 9.) We see the close resemblance between the memorial of the meat-offering ascending to God in the smoke of the fire as a sweet savour; and the prayers and alms, the outward expression of the heart's inward devotion going up as a sweet savour unto God. Both were outward expressions proceeding from the same source, and, therefore, we must not think, as men are too apt to do, of the one as carnal and the other as spiritual. Prayer as well as alms was the outward expression of the feelings which existed in the heart, and one without the other would have been imperfect. Devotional feelings are without form until they are brought out by the words in which our petitions are framed; and alms are, in like manner, the outward expression of that love which must pervade the heart of the Christian. It was this that made the alms of Cornelius no less acceptable to God than his prayers. It was not that the favour of God could be purchased with money, but that without that disposition of heart which produced alms as well as prayers, he could not find acceptance with God. If any one objects that alms may be a mere formal act, the same objection may be made to prayer; for the words of prayer might be recited as a mere formal act, although they would not reach the ear of God, just as money might

be given to the poor, and yet be no real expression of the heart's desire. Such were the alms of the Pharisees, who had their reward in the praise which they received from men, and made long prayers standing in the streets that men might see them. Neither were acceptable to God, because they were not the genuine expressions of the heart, whilst the prayers and the alms of Cornelius came up for a memorial, because they had their root in a devout and loving heart. What God hath joined together we may not put asunder; and in depriving the people of the offertory, we deprive them of half the blessing of Cornelius.

But almsgiving has a double object. Its root as a religious service is grateful love, which leads the Christian to ask: "What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" (Ps. cxvi. 11.) But that love which rises up to God is to be extended to all mankind, for this is the characteristic of the love of God: "Whoso loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And this commandment have we from God, "that he who loveth God loves his brother also" (1 S. John iii. 20, 21); and therefore the gift is not consumed with fire as of old, but expended upon those that have need of it. Viewed on one side, it is a thank-offering to God, and the frequent repetition of the thank-offering has a tendency to draw out and increase our gratitude; but viewed upon the other side, it is an act of charity to our neighbour, and the frequent repetition of the gift has a similar tendency to enlarge our love towards our brethren; and if this increase of our love towards God and our neighbour can be effected by means of the offertory, it cannot be otherwise than productive of spiritual blessing.

Into this consideration the disposition of the offertory must also enter. The gift is presented to God, but the earthly objects on which it is bestowed will not be absent from the mind of the giver. Each purpose to which it is devoted will be remembered. A portion may be set aside for the repairs of the church and the maintenance of the

services. The blessing of public worship could not be enjoyed unless we had churches in which we may assemble, and other expenses are incurred in making the church worthy to be God's house, and the services worthy of His honour. Each who contributes to this cause will esteem it a privilege to take his share in the cost; and the very act of giving will create an interest which those who have no concern in it will not experience. The giver will be led to estimate the value of that which his gift secures him. He will reason on the proportion which his gift bears to that which he has received, and he will learn to estimate the sanctuary of God, the services of prayer and praise and the blessings of the sacraments in a manner that he never would have thought of, if it had not been presented to him in this light. The value which he sets on these blessings, and his desire to contribute with a willing mind, will increase in equal proportion; so that the words of the Psalmist will be the true expression of his feelings: "I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the Lord. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will wish thee prosperity. Yea, because of the house of the Lord I will seek to do thee good" (Ps. cxxii. 1, 8, 9).

The maintenance of the clergy is another object to which the offertory is devoted; and what has been said of the increased value set upon the house of God will be also true respecting the services of his ministers. The Levite had no inheritance in Israel; but the people were commanded never to forget the Levite in their tithings and their offerings (Deut. xiv. 28, 29). A portion of the sacrifices was reserved for the priest, and thus each offerer contributed to his maintenance. And under the Christian dispensation the same rule was established. They who waited at the altar were to be partakers with the altar, and provision was made for them out of the offerings of the people: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your worldly things? Do ye not know that they who minister about holy things live of the sacrifice? and

they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord also ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 13). The services of God's ministers were never more greatly valued than when this provision was made for them, in which all bore a share. Although it would be sacrilege to deprive the clergy of their endowments where they exist; yet, where they do not, it may be well to consider how the advantage to the people, derived from ministering unto them that teach, counterbalances the disadvantage which arises from the absence of endowments. S. Chrysostom and S. Augustine thought that the advantage weighed down the balance, and desired to return to voluntary offerings; and there was much reason in the arguments which they adduced. Certainly the mutual interchange which was the idea of the first provision for the clergy largely cements the bond of sympathy between them. Who among the clergy cannot remember the pleasure with which he has received the little offerings of gratitude which have been presented to him by the poor, which he knew to be as great a satisfaction to the giver as to himself? The clergy were ordained to stand between God and the congregation. They are the channels, earthen vessels though they be, through whom the blessings of heaven are received. By them the sacraments are administered, and the blessed tidings of the Gospel preached. They minister peace to the penitent and comfort to the sorrowing; and the desire to present some token of their love is but the natural impulse of a grateful heart. Cowper's picture of the tithe-day represents a state of things now happily passed away, when all was without love and warmth, and the ministry of the pastor and the devotion of the people were equally cold and spiritless. But when God's ministers are earnest and loving, and the duty of supporting them and the advantage of their ministry is felt, their maintenance will be esteemed no burden, but a privilege. The gratitude of the people will be stirred up by the opportunity which is afforded them of making their

gifts, and the habitual exercise of this will teach them to set an increasing value on the labours of those whom they are instrumental in supporting. This will be a blessing if it draws out their love towards their pastors, and leads them to esteem them very highly for their work's sake.

In common things it is frequently observed that men value more what they pay for. It is on this principle that we receive a weekly payment from parents for the education of their children. It goes but a little way towards defraying the expenses of the parish school, but it is found to be an immense advantage in increasing the value which the poor set upon the education of their children. And if the poor contribute towards the maintenance of the schoolmaster, why should they not towards that of their pastor? They do not respect the schoolmaster the less because they pay something towards his salary, but they esteem the advantages of education more. Neither will they respect their pastor the less because they are instrumental in supporting him, but they will set a higher value on the blessings which he ministers to them. No unwilling gift is extorted from them, but a free-will offering is asked proportioned to the readiness of their mind, their sense of blessing, and the largeness of their gratitude. This is an offering which each will make according to his means. The rich will do it out of their abundance, but the gift of the widow, who has only her mite to offer, will be no less acceptable in the sight of God. The poor will value the opportunity of giving no less than the rich, because it will make them feel that they have a real part in their minister. And the clergyman will be drawn towards his people by the good-will which they manifest in their readiness to give; and next to a sense of his position as Christ's ambassador, there is nothing that will give greater energy to his zeal than the discovery of the little sacrifices which the people are willing to make for him.

Under the pew system, no such feelings were called forth, for the whole business was a mere mercantile transaction. Where there is no offertory, the clergyman has

often no opportunity of ascertaining whether the people appreciate his labours. This may, in some cases, be a healthy discipline, but many is the number of faithful and zealous labourers in the vineyard whose hearts are depressed and cast down because they know not the sympathy with which the people regard them. Englishmen are by nature undemonstrative, and, unless they have such an opportunity as the offertory affords, they will find great difficulty in giving such expression to their feelings as will strengthen and cheer the hearts of their pastors. Even S. Paul, though he wished to be chargeable to none, was not above such considerations. It was an unspeakable comfort to him, in the midst of all his trials, to be able to write to the Galatians, "I bear ye record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Gal. v. 15). And whatever would strengthen the heart of the minister would tend also to increase his energy, so that the people would be doubly blessed; blessed in the clearer perception of the blessings which result from the existence of a Christian ministry, and blessed in the unwearied zeal with which their pastors would labour amongst them.

The *κοινωνία* was a thank-offering to God, proportioned to the sense of blessings impressed upon the Christian's heart; and when we consider the depth of gratitude which the newness of the Gospel message would engender, we cannot wonder at what would otherwise seem to us a profuse and extravagant liberality. We to whom the blessings of the Gospel are no novelty can scarcely sound the depth of gratitude which stirred the hearts of the Pentecostal converts. The truths of Christianity dawned upon us in our earliest childhood, and we have grown up beneath their sacred influence. But if the Gospel had burst forth upon us in the full light of day, as it did on those who were converted on the day of Pentecost, it is probable that we too should have thought the whole of our possessions no greater offering than our hearts would have constrained

us to present in return for the wondrous mercy which God has shown us. We, too, might have been amongst the company who sold their possessions and laid the price at the apostles' feet; but, nevertheless, although the duty of doing all we can is more difficult to be realized now, we must not forget that the blessings we enjoy are no less than those which the first Christians found themselves suddenly possessed of, and the thought of this should enhance our desire to present a worthy offering unto the Lord, and to show that, for their work's sake, we highly esteem His ministers. When this feeling has thoroughly impregnated our hearts, we shall then be satisfied with no pew-rent bargain, but shall desire to make our offerings as liberal as we can, remembering with thankfulness that God accepts them not according to what a man hath not, but according to what he hath.

But the simple offering to God, although more prominent, was not the whole idea of the *κοινωνία*. It was an expression of the Christian's deep-seated faith in the communion of saints. It seems to be a principle inherent in human nature that the expression of our feelings quickens and invigorates them. We draw them from a fountain, from which the more largely we draw the more freely the waters flow. Is it not so always? Expressions of anger or envy deepen these feelings in our hearts, and therefore we should set a bridle on our lips; but our desires after God are increased by our expressions of those desires in the secret intercourse which the heart is privileged to hold in prayer with our heavenly Father. The constant repetition of the Creed strengthens our faith in all its articles, and just so our appreciation of the deep reality of the communion of saints is increased by every practical application of the doctrine. The brotherhood of the members of Christ's body was one of the cardinal doctrines of the Gospel, and the practical result of the doctrine was seen in the liberality of Christians who called nothing their own, but considered that their brethren in Christ had an equal

right with them in their possessions. It may have been an exaggerated application of the principle, and the general distress which succeeded may have shown that, as regards worldly expediency, they were mistaken. They may have forgotten that other truth which is so clearly laid down in the Gospel, that we are set as stewards over that which is committed to our charge, and that instead of yielding up our stewardship by the total resignation of our wealth, it is better to husband it prudently, and to spend it for Christ according as He hath need of it. But we must remember that the first Christians expected that the time of our Lord's second appearing was at hand, and acting on this supposition, they felt constrained to watch whilst it was day. Soon, they thought, their goods would be of no use to themselves or others, and, therefore, that they might not be lost in the general destruction at the last day, it was better to resign them all to God at once. When we think of this, we can no longer blame them, for their liberality took a right direction, although their supposition was a mistaken one. Now that eighteen hundred years have passed, and the Lord still delayeth his coming, although the times and seasons are hidden from our sight, we are more apt to settle down in the belief that many generations may yet succeed before the final day shall come. The principle on which the liberality of the first Christians was founded is not changed, although in practice its application may be altered. Although we need not lay our wealth in one great sacrifice upon the altar, the communion of saints is yet a doctrine which we profess to believe.

If this be true the *κοινωνία* follows as a natural sequence. If Christians were fellow-members in that one body of which Christ was the head, the necessities of each must be the concern of the rest. Our Saviour had specially taught this in the description of the Last Judgment, in which acts of charity done unto the least amongst His brethren, were regarded as done unto Himself. And the duty of charity was not left to chance occasions, but it formed a special fea-

ture in the public worship of the first Christians. As a part of public worship it was exalted to a place beside the holy communion, preaching, and prayer. It was at once an expression of faith and the means of building up a habit. Faith was increased by the expression, and the habit was formed by the oft-repeated act. And these are just the blessings which we may expect to see from the revival of the offertory. Alms are given for those that are in need, not as a common act of humanity, but as an act of communion with the Church at large. The Christian took something from his own store that he might impart it to his brethren, because they were one with him in Christ. The poor man felt the reality of this communion when in the distribution of the alms he shared in the goods of his more wealthy neighbours, and the rich man rejoiced that the poor accepted his gift. There was none of that stern and selfish independence which is too often applauded in the present day. All were willing to communicate their goods. The poor man helped the poor as far as he was able, and the rich man contributed of his wealth; but what was given in simple love was not lost to the giver. The prayers of the poor profited the rich, and the rich and poor giver both laid up a store in the securest bank, where they shall receive their own again with usury.

Godliness hath a promise for the life that now is, as well as for that which is to come. Here on earth they would receive for earthly things spiritual blessings, and in heaven the act of charity was written by the recording angel in the book of remembrance which was kept before the Lord. None could lose, but all would be gainers by the exchange, and this thought, impregnating the minds of the early Christians, produced the liberality of which we read in the Acts of the Apostles. And can we believe that it would be less so now? The revival of the offertory as a solemn act of public worship would rather tend to restore the doctrine of the communion of saints to its true position in the Christian's creed.

The feeling of loneliness and isolation, which is a trial to so many, would in great measure be removed. The idea of the Christian brotherhood would be revived; the poor would feel that the offertory was an institution for their benefit in earthly things, and the more prosperous would regard the poor as God's messengers, angels sent to convey that which was given for Christ's sake to the mansions above, where it would survive the wreck of this present earth and all that it contains. The poor, in receiving alms, would experience no sense of degradation, for they would receive them from a common fund, to which they had themselves contributed according to their means. By the outward act of communication the jealousies which divide the harmony of different ranks would be obliterated, for nothing could teach them all more powerfully, the holy communion excepted, that they were all one in Christ. The poor would see that the rich clung to their wealth with no selfish grasp, but that for Christ's sake they were glad to communicate and willing to distribute it. The feeling thus formed would exert its influence in all the transactions of life, and the habit of brotherly love thus formed would be seen in all the relations in which they were brought in contact. The command which we have received from God that he who loves God shall love his brother also, would then find a practical fulfilment, and the two parts of the commandment would be seen in all their harmony. That which in the first place was an act of love to God, would be converted into an act of charity towards the brethren.

By means of the offertory, a fund for other purposes would be raised, and from each purpose to which it was devoted a special blessing would be derived by the giver. The repair of God's house and the maintenance of the service would be a simple act of love to Him, which would not be without its reward. The support of God's ministers would enhance the value which the people would set on the blessings of which they were made the instruments of conveyance. Bounty to the poor would be rewarded by

their Lord as acts of charity done unto Himself; whilst the objects to which the rest of the fund would be devoted would not be without blessings annexed to each.

In the missionary work of the Church all would be enabled to take a share, for under this head all those purposes would fall which have not already been considered. The evangelization of the world by means of home and foreign missions is a great and noble work, and God has willed that it should be effected through the instrumentality of men. This is our privilege, that we may be all sharers in our Saviour's triumph as we have part in His cross and passion; and although we may not all be able to devote our individual assistance to the work, yet we all may aid it by the help of our alms. The object is to win souls to Christ, and each who takes part in the work has a share in the promise that "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. xii. 3). Schools and missions, both at home and abroad, are established for this purpose, and they who aid them shall share in the reward of their success.

There are so many considerations which arise to encourage and support this duty, that enlargement on them would convert this essay into a missionary sermon, but still they cannot but be glanced at in a chapter which treats of the spiritual benefits resulting to the people from the offertory. We started with it simply as a substitute for pew rents, but it is as a river which widens as it flows on. It will soon become a fund too large to be simply a substitute for that objectionable system, for the duty on which it rests embraces other objects, and the hand which has learnt the blessedness of giving cannot easily be stayed, and therefore it will grow and increase, and become a river, whose streams will flow out into all the nations of the earth. The missionary prayer, "Thy kingdom come," will be felt to be vain unless we do what we can to enlarge the boundaries of our Master's kingdom. The blessings of the Gospel, realized in the stated offering presented by

each grateful heart to God, will stir up our compassion for those to whom the Gospel is not preached, whilst the thought that others lack what we prize so dearly, will increase yet more our gratitude to God, for why, we shall ask, are we more favoured than they? and thus the offertory will tend to widen our sympathies, whilst it will serve also to deepen our gratitude and love. Into all enterprises for the spiritual benefit of his fellow-men, the willing giver gladly and zealously enters, and he cannot do this without receiving a blessing in his own soul, since that which he bestows he lendeth to the Lord.

One spiritual advantage of the offertory system, which has not yet been considered, cannot altogether be overlooked, and this is the opportunity which it gives for secret alms. When the collection is made in bags, a plan much to be recommended, the amount contributed by each is a secret between God and his own soul. The benefit of many an offering is lost to the giver by the ostentatious display of a subscription list. To many the temptation thus offered is too strong to be resisted, and they give what they do to be seen of men, rather than as an act of secret love to God. Satan sets his snares around our holiest works that he may convert them to his own uses, and rob us of their reward; and thus it often happens that acts of charity degenerate into ostentation and display, but the offertory affords us opportunities of almsgiving without any danger of this. It reconciles the precept of our Lord, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works" (S. Matt. v. 16), with that other commandment, which at first sight seems a contradiction, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven; but when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (S. Matt. vi. 1). In respect to the act, our light shines before men, whilst in respect to the

amount we give, our alms are done in secret. Let it not be thought that the secrecy of the gift will diminish its amount, for all experience proves the contrary. It is true that there are some who will not give largely, unless their munificence is known and applauded of men; but the number of those is greater who will give more for the love of God in secret than they would like men to know that they gave. If the amount of their gifts were known, some who did not understand how the dispersion of wealth increases it, would say that they gave more than they could afford; whilst others might attribute it to ostentation and display, and therefore when gifts are made in secret it will be found that in the aggregate they will be far greater in amount.

By the weekly offertory a facility is also given for the good and righteous custom of laying aside for God a fixed proportion of our income. What proportion this should be must be left to the decision of each man's conscience, but to have a settled rule will be as the offering of the first-fruits, which will bring a blessing on all the rest of our substance. The example of Bishop Wilson may be instructive on this point. He began when he was a young man by devoting a tenth to God, but this he subsequently increased from time to time, as we find from entries in his "*Sacra Privata*," until he was enabled to form the following resolution: "The Lord having convinced me by an experience of more than forty years that he will be no man's debtor, and having in every station of life in which his providence has placed me, given me much more than what was necessary for a decent support, in a humble gratitude to my gracious Benefactor, I do from henceforth dedicate one-half of all my rents to pious uses, as also the whole interest of all my moneys, one-tenth in corn of the profits of the demesnes, and of all customs paid in moneys."—*Sacra Privata*, p. 285.

To those who revere the memory of this great saint, and look upon his example as valuable for imitation, the weekly offertory affords a great facility for devoting a fixed

proportion of their gains to God. It is easier to calculate week by week what we can give, according to the apostolic injunction, than if the offering was only made on rare occasions; and we shall be more likely to be stedfast in our resolution than if a considerable time elapsed between our acts of charity, and, therefore, although this subject is distinct from that which is the purpose of this essay, the opportunity thus afforded must be mentioned amongst the many advantages of the offertory.

No doubt in the middle ages the exercise of charity was often abused, when men who had led unholy lives thought they could compound for their sins by giving their lands to the Church on their death-beds. This indeed was no real charity, for they were but giving away what was no longer of any use to themselves. They fell perhaps into the mistake of thinking that an entrance to heaven could be purchased by their costly gifts. It was a grievous mistake indeed, and a most baseless superstition; but in our revulsion from it we have too often fallen into the other extreme of undervaluing works of charity. But there is no doctrine more clearly revealed to us in the New Testament than this, that our works do follow us, and that no act of charity rightly performed shall be without its reward in heaven. The Saviour cannot have unduly exalted the value of works, and therefore his precepts must be safe to follow and his promises such as we may take for our encouragement. Gold cannot purchase heaven, nor can it wipe away the stain of sin. The price which the Redeemer paid for our salvation can only effect this; but yet habits of charity are the needful preparation for heaven. It is part of that mind which must be formed within us here on earth, that we may be fit for the enjoyment of the glories of heaven hereafter. Without the formation of such habits we cannot follow the example of the Saviour, the actions of whose life are a law for us to obey; but if acts of charity are rightly done, there will be no room for vainglory or spiritual pride. Liberality is one of those graces which God bestows upon his people; and when

we rightly perform acts of charity, Christ himself is working them in us. And the certainty of the reward does not diminish the sense of our unworthiness, or destroy our humility. Though each one such act shall be as a jewel which shall shine in the crown for which we look, the redeemed shall cast their crowns before the throne of God, ascribing the honour unto him alone, and acknowledging that nothing was done without his aid. Therefore, when this is remembered, exhortations to liberality cannot be regarded as an undue exaltation of our own merits, since all good works are the effects of God's grace, which is freely given to those that diligently seek it.

But, after all, arguments are mere words, and there are some minds which arguments will never reach. The course of reasoning may be quite correct and yet fail to convince; yet we do not fear, for if there should still remain a doubt respecting any portion of what has been advanced, the remedy is a simple one. If any should fear the failure of the offertory as a system of church finance, let it only be tried. If any one doubts its expediency, the only fair answer is to make the experiment and see the results. If a clergyman has doubts respecting his own independence, these also will vanish; and as regards the spiritual benefit of the people, if God's promises are true, let the sternest objector to the offertory only make use of his opportunity, and his mind will soon change, when he has learned the blessedness of giving alms as an habitual exercise of charity and a solemn act of worship. All this is not mere conjecture, for the experiment has now been made in a sufficient number of cases to justify the induction which assures us of the probability of its success wherever it may be tried. It was the primitive custom of the early Church; and, although it has been discontinued for a while, the tradition still remains enshrined in the services of our Prayer-book. That which is the common practice of the Presbyterians in Scotland can scarcely be regarded as a popish innovation, and that which has been adopted and recommended by men of

every shade of opinion can no longer be regarded as a party badge. It is sufficient to appeal to the candid judgment of every one who may read these words.

And now, in concluding this essay, in which a humble attempt has been made to illustrate a subject which has for many years occupied the attention of the writer, he desires to sum up all that he has said in the words of one who spoke the conclusion of a long personal experience: "It is but the first essay of charity to give alms. Whosoever shows mercy to men will certainly receive mercy from God."—*Bp. Wilson, Sacra Privata*, p. 302.







