

THE
FOREIGN MISSIONARY CHRONICLE.

MARCH, 1843.

BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS.

THE BLESSING OF GOD
ATTENDING THE RIGHT USE OF WEALTH.

A Sermon:

PREACHED AT PHILADELPHIA, 4TH DECEMBER, 1842.

BY THE REV. CORNELIUS C. CUYLER, D. D.

"Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."—
Prov. iii. 9, 10.

THERE is scarcely any subject, my hearers, with respect to which the minds, hearts, and faith of men are more perplexed than the uses to which they put their worldly substance. Nothing can be more certain than that God is the great proprietor of this world, and all that it contains.—He has made it for himself, and has divided it to the nations, tribes, and families who dwell on it, according to his own will and pleasure. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." Reference is here probably had to two or three passages in the 10th chapter of Genesis—speaking of the sons of Japhet, it is said, "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in another verse it is said his days was the earth again it is said, "By Noah) were the nation earth after the flood."

VOL. XI.—9

It is not less certain that the worldly circumstances of men are essentially influenced by the providence of God. I am aware that this enters very little into the calculations which men make on the subject. Generally speaking, they attribute their success to the wisdom with which their plans are formed, the skill and industry with which they pursue them, and the economy with which they conduct their affairs—as if these were not divine gifts, or as if the providence of God had no concern whatever in shaping the circumstances of the times, in which they have lived; or as if he exercised no moral government over his intelligent creatures. And yet the word of God uses such language as the following on the subject: "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and glad- u fruitful, and rd maketh poor geth low, and his sun to rise d; and sendeth unjust."

It is on this principle, also, that man is considered as a steward, who will be called to account by God for every thing by which he might have glorified him—including the property with which God had endowed him.—If not, what does the following language mean? “Then shall he say, I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not;—and these shall go away into everlasting punishment.”—Does not the Saviour refer to the same subject, when he says: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.”—In our text the Lord teaches us not only how we may glorify God with the worldly goods with which he endows us, but how we may obtain the blessing of God upon the work of our hands.—“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”—In calling your attention to this passage of holy writ, it is my design,

I. To explain the text,

II. To enforce the duty which it inculcates. I am,

I. *To explain the Text:*

Our text speaks of the great end for which God has created and endowed us—viz: to “honour,” or glorify him;—and surely nothing can be more reasonable than this—To “honour” or glorify him, implies to entertain, cherish, and express, suitable conceptions, feelings, and conduct with respect to him. As he is the greatest and best of beings, our conceptions and thoughts of him should be expanded, admiring, and reverential. We should feel and cherish for him the most pure, warm, exalted, and constant affection; and our conduct towards him should be characterized by a spirit of reverence, humility, obedience, and gratitude. We should always speak of him, and act towards him in such a manner as would be calculated to lead all who observe us to entertain for him the same sentiments by which we are actuated, and to induce them to act towards him in a becoming manner; or, in other words, obey the

Saviour’s exhortation in the 5th chapter of Matthew: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” To honour is to employ our time, talents, and opportunities in such a manner as God has directed, and will approve.

They who truly “honour” him, “love him as the Lord their God, with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.” They feel their dependence on him;—they “acknowledge him in all their ways,” and seek to have their “steps directed by him;”—they render to him their sincere, conscientious, and constant homage and worship;—they reverence his word and keep his commandments;—they feel the restraints of his fear;—they acknowledge their obligations to him for life, and breath, and all things, and praise him for his goodness;—they make him the great end of their being;—they live to “glorify God,” and nothing will satisfy them but the hope of “enjoying him forever.”

While, however, our text embraces the general principle, it relates especially to one object, viz: the earthly good with which God may see fit to endow us.—“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thy increase.” By this I understand him to mean, our worldly property. We derive it all from him; nothing prospers in our hands, excepting only so far as his blessing attends our efforts.—Hence we often find our wisest plans and most strenuous efforts ending in disappointment and loss. The labours of an industrious and prosperous life are frequently lost in a day,—while, on the other hand, sometimes every thing to which a man puts his hand prospers.—Both of these are so frequently illustrated in the history of ordinary life, that any man’s observation may furnish him with examples sufficiently numerous and striking to convince all but atheists, that the hand of God is in it.

But what God so graciously bestows, he requires us to use in such a manner that *he may be honoured by it*. And how this may be done, and done to the divine approbation, is a question of more grave

importance than men generally imagine. There are, for instance, few, if any, in this house, whether they be old or young, who are not sufficiently confident of their own ability, and disposition too, as to feel not only *willing*, but *desirous*, of undertaking the management of a fortune, whatever responsibilities may be attached to it. And yet I am deeply persuaded, that there are very few of the rich in this world's goods, who shall be so happy as to get to heaven, who will not shudder at the risks which they have run, and wonder that with such a stewardship they have gotten there at all. No man who seriously ponders the Saviour's language, will be surprised at this remark.—“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”—Read the whole account in the 19th chap. of Matth., the 10th of Mark, and the 18th of Luke. It was a case in real life which gave occasion for the Saviour's observation; the case of that amiable, lovely, moral young man, who came to him to inquire, saying, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”—who said of the commandments, “All these have I kept from my youth up,” and then asked, with great sincerity, “What lack I yet?”—but who, when the Saviour added, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me,”—went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. With such an example set before us by Christ, is it too much to believe, that riches have kept many a man out of heaven? and yet who fears for himself? There are three points of danger in the case: 1st. Men seldom turn to the Lord while actively and eagerly engaged in the world. 2nd. When they consume their acquisitions upon the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. 3rd. When they say to themselves, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” These are not the ways in which our “substance” may be used to the “honour” of God, and our own best interests.

How then shall we use them to the honour of God? Does he not bestow them to be used by us for our earthly support and comfort? Certainly, my hearers, they are yours for these purposes, and you would sin against God by hoarding them like a miser, and living like a beggar. You may make a liberal use of them to promote your support, comforts, and convenience, provided you do not pamper pride or lust, nor let others suffer for the want of them, and give God thanks for bestowing them upon you. You would dishonour God by a different course of conduct with respect to them. Neither the miser nor the prodigal are the Lord's favourites—God is honoured by whatever we use for the real good of ourselves or our fellow creatures. Beyond that is wasteful prodigality, for which no man can safely account.

Reference is, however, had in our text, to a more direct use of our worldly substance, for the honour of God in the support and promotion of religion. This is especially had in view in these words: “And with the first fruits of all thine increase.” No child of Israel had any legal right to the produce of his inheritance in the land of Canaan, until the tenth part of every thing had been separated from it for the support of religion—for, “the honour of God.” And this was over and above all their personal offerings, voluntary and commanded. This was the express condition upon which God gave them the land of Canaan for their inheritance.

Under the New Testament he has given no specific directions concerning the amount or the manner in which he will have his people contribute for the support of religion, and the honour of his name—Their obligations, however, to open-handed liberality, under a dispensation so rich in “Truth and Grace,” and so fraught with divine blessings and privileges, can surely not be less than under one so full of types and shadows. Surely when the Lord takes away the veil and admits his people to his more immediate presence, their hearts should burn with a more intense love, and all that they are, and

have, be put at his disposal, and be made subservient to his glory. If the land of Canaan was the Lord's, and he gave it to the children of Israel for their peculiar inheritance, it is no less true that "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Whatever any may possess, be it more or less, has all been derived from him, and the accountability is in either case the same. And if it should be said, that the Christian ritual is less splendid and expensive than the Jewish, let it be considered, that there is now, in full proportion, a wider field to be cultivated, and a more extensive, important, and glorious work to be accomplished by the Church of God, which will require a multitude of labourers, and a vast amount of pecuniary resources.—I mean, filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, and reducing all nations to the obedience of the faith of Christ.—This is a sacred debt which the Church owes to her glorious Head, and which she must pay—and her cup of blessing will not be full till she has paid it. It is more than 1800 years since Christ purchased the world with his own precious blood, and gave his Church a plenary commission to go forth and take possession of it in his name, and gave her the means for accomplishing it, ten times told, and rendered her responsible, not for success—that is his own glorious prerogative—but for the use of the means.—Is the truth of this questioned? Here is the commission, containing both the duty and the warrant, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."—And here are the pledges of adequate support and ample success:—"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."—"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth."—"He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."—"And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Thus supported, could success have been problematical, if the church had done her duty! "The Saviour's arm is not short-

ened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." The whole difficulty is found in the unbelief, and sloth, and prayerlessness, and cupidity of the people of God. If they had "honoured the Lord with their substance, and with the first fruits of all their increase," instead of hoarding it to curse themselves and their children, or expending it to pamper the pride of their hearts, or the lusts of the flesh, and laboured diligently, each in their sphere, according to the ability given them of God, the world would long ago have been converted to him. The means have been ample.

Nor, according to our text, would they have suffered any earthly loss by "honouring the Lord," even in the most liberal manner, "with their substance," for it is added, "So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Of the truth of this the children of Israel were living witnesses while they dwelt in the land of Canaan.—Every seventh year was a Sabbatical year, so that in every seven years they enjoyed the fruits of only five years' tillage, and yet, while they lived in obedience to God's commandments, they never lacked any necessary earthly good. The Lord's promises were richly fulfilled to them;—It was only when, in the strong language of the Lord by Malachi, they "robbed God," by withholding their "tithes and offerings from his store house," that they suffered in their worldly circumstances. Then their land was visited with drought and famine.—The Lord made them feel the truth of the declaration, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth: and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.—The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself. Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

These declarations all proceed upon the principle that God is both the natural and moral Governor of this world, and that in ordering its affairs he has a special regard to the welfare of those who love, fear, and obey him. It would be a difficult thing to find an instance in which the

Lord has not more than made up to his people all they have ever expended for his glory. He does not send them on warfare at their own charges; He has an interest in every cup of cold water that is given in the name of a disciple. Many have, with heartfelt gratitude, acknowledged that the more they gave for the Lord's service, the more he has enabled them to give. This has sometimes been so palpable as to have been a matter of observation and remark by those who were destitute of religious feeling. I have heard it said of a man with whom I was for several years associated, as a ruling elder in the church of Christ, that he could not make himself poor.—With very moderate means he supported an aged father and mother, was as a father to a whole neighbourhood in which there was a large amount of destitution, and the cause of Christ had not a more liberal contributor than he was—and if the history of Christian liberality were written, as it can not be, for its most liberal ones do not let their left hands know what their right hands do, it would be found that the special blessing of God was upon the basket and the store of those who “honour the Lord with their substance.”

A consistent Christian can afford to do more than others of the same worldly circumstances. If they are consistent, they expend much less to gratify pride, luxury, pleasure, folly, sin, and thus the Lord makes them blessings to themselves as well as to others. And they are the happier for what they contribute, for every rightly constituted mind feels “that it is more blessed to *give* than to *receive*.”—So testifies our blessed Saviour, “Who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.” Such, my dear hearers, are the instructions which our text gives on this highly-important subject.—I proceed,

II. *To enforce the duty which it inculcates.*

There are many considerations which, if rightly considered, would manifest that it is as much our interest as it is our duty, to use all our worldly goods in such

a manner as to make them productive of the greatest amount of good to ourselves and our fellow-creatures, and to connect both, so far as it can be done, with the glory of God, which we should always seek to aim at in all things. This God invariably requires of us.—It is also quite certain that whatever we expend on ourselves, over and above the real conveniences and comforts of life, interferes with those simple tastes and habits in the indulgence of which we are always the happiest; which, when we pass, we are in danger of running into luxury, pride, and ostentation, by which in one way or other, we always injure ourselves and others. Indulgence in these respects it is very difficult to restrain and keep within the bounds of moderation and reason. Under such circumstances we shall feel as if we had but little that we could spare for the honour of God or the good of our neighbours. We should consult our own best interests by meeting these claims in a liberal manner, and greatly abridging our personal expenses.

The poor are a legacy which God has left to the care of the rich and prosperous from generation to generation, to afford them the luxury of doing good, and to put upon them the high honour of being the almoners of his bounties to his needy creatures. It has seemed to me, from reading the latter part of the 25th chap. of Matt., as if Jesus Christ had clothed himself in all the forms of human destitution and misery, and came in their persons to those upon whom he had liberally bestowed his rich bounties, to give them an opportunity of imitating his gracious example, and, as it were, ministering to *him* personally, who laid down his life for them. This honour which God thus puts upon his people, will be held out to their acceptance, as long as there shall be destitutions on earth. And the reflections arising from such a use of property will be sweeter on a death-bed, than to have lived in a palace, fared sumptuously every day, died under a gorgeous canopy, and bequeathed a princely fortune to every child.—That part of your “substance” will not have been put into a bag with

holes ;—"neither moth, nor rust, nor thieves" will touch it.

Nor is it less our duty to give of our substance to support the gospel and ordinances of Christ, so that we and those with whom we are united in the social relations may enjoy those means by which life and immortality have been brought to light, and by the use of which men are trained up for the everlasting enjoyment of God in heaven. The general neglect of this would soon banish the gospel of the grace of God, with all its humanizing, purifying, benevolent, and soul-comforting influences from our sin-ruined world, and change some of its fairest fields into wild deserts and habitations of cruelty. All restraint would soon be taken away from sin, and all incentives to well-doing and holiness would cease. Most of the influence which God and the things of the invisible world now exert over our race would in a measure cease, and unmitigated selfishness and unrestrained passion would break up the peace of earth, and "blot out every hope of heaven." The removal of the Church would be succeeded by that of the College, the Academy, and the school-house. All that is sweet and hallowed in the domestic circle has been induced by the religion of the Bible, and it will depart with it. Religion is not only the grand solace of life—it is not only the only hope of a blessed immortality—but it is the parent of the social virtues, justice, honesty, sobriety, industry, humanity, benevolence, love, and order. The exercise of these make earthly thrift. The good man does not expend by far as much for the support of religion, as religion adds to his earthly store,—so that liberal religion is good economy. Men are the richer for the support which they give it.

But were it otherwise—were all that men withhold from the Lord to avail to the increase of their substance ; nay, that it were the very condition of their becoming rich,—what then ? Why, then, perhaps, they would become covetous, or miserly, and their children would curse them, or wish them dead, and they would load themselves down with care and anx-

iety,—or perhaps, they would grow proud and vain-glorious, and say with Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom." Or perhaps they would become luxurious, and consume it upon their lusts, and forget God, and thus ruin both soul and body,—or perhaps, they may leave it to their children who, in a majority of cases, would dissipate it faster than their parents had collected it. Many of them, too, raised with the expectation of a fortune which would preclude the necessity of active exertion, would become either the drones or the butterflies of society, a blessing to nobody, and a burden to themselves.

And why is all this ? Because the man has not sanctified God's gifts by devoting a proper proportion of them to those purposes for which he had bestowed them. Large earthly possessions are not blessings unless they are sanctified. Of the many millions which the members of this community possessed six or eight years ago, all that is now recollected with pleasure or gratitude, is the comparatively little which has been expended for comfortable self-support, the supply of the needy, the maintenance of religion, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. The rest, as multitudes have experienced with painful regret, has turned out to be, "Vanity and vexation of spirit." The account of that which has been used for some useful purpose, viz : for the promotion of God's glory, or the welfare of his creatures, is all that will have a sweet savour in the day of judgment. My hearers ; God will have his own, and if men refuse to give it willingly, he will take his own, and if it can be, with usury. Enough has, within a few years, been carried away as with a whirlwind to have filled the earth, instrumentally, with his salvation. This, however, is not only a work which God will have performed by men, but he will have it carried on with hearty good-will. He will own no other service as done for him.

There is an amazing amount of arrearage in this account between God and his

Church, and it is alarmingly conspicuous with respect to the state and progress of the Christian religion in the world. After the lapse of eighteen centuries since Christ gave the great commandment, "Preach the gospel to every creature," and gave a pledge of all needed divine aid to insure success in the work in the promise of the Spirit, which in ten days afterwards was fulfilled in a plenary manner, and which he has ever since been fulfilling to the full extent of his people's faith, prayers, and exertions, the greater part of our world remains in a state of moral and spiritual darkness and death, and millions on millions of our race are every year going to an unblessed eternity, yet is there not vitality enough in the church, by whose instrumentality the world's conversion is to be accomplished, to create an alarm, or to excite the people of God to exertion. The foolish and the wise appear to be slumbering and sleeping together, as though the bridegroom would never come;—"Their lamps are gone out," and who knows whether they have any "oil in their vessels?" And of them all, few seem to sleep more soundly than those of our own beloved Zion. Restored to a state of peace, with our counsels united and harmonious, several missions established and proceeding under favourable auspices, a considerable number of promising young men, of ardent piety, and qualified by talents and education for the work to which they have devoted themselves, with many promising fields of labour open to receive them, and at the same time no lack of ability in sixteen or eighteen hundred churches, and a hundred and fifty thousand communicants, to send out and to sustain hundreds in the field of labour, which He who died to redeem us with his precious blood has commanded us to cultivate, we seem to be content to sit down and enjoy our rich heritage, in dereliction of that for which we have been redeemed and called, as though Christ had never spoken on the subject, or as if there were some other way to redeem the world from iniquity, or as if the souls of the heathen were of no value. The members of the

Presbyterian church in these United States contribute, on an average, twenty-eight cents a piece for the conversion of a world lying in wickedness. I should like to know how much they expend for toys and sugar plums?

There is verily something wrong on this important subject which needs rectification, and I know not how we can better proceed in investigating it than by bringing it to the law and testimony. We profess to believe God's word to be an unerring rule of faith and practice—the test of character, and the guide of life. We have fallen upon evil and trying times—no man remembers a period of equal embarrassment and loss; so many, and such sad reverses are not in the ordinary course of divine providence. Now, whatever influence second causes may have exercised on them, we are bound, as Christians, to recognize the hand of God in them. A sparrow falls not to the ground without his will. Has not his hand then had something to do with these great and sad changes? I have even heard it said that professing Christians have suffered even more in proportion than others. Why has this been so? God never acts without a wise and good cause. There must then have been something in their state and conduct to have induced it. Why then are not their barns filled with plenty? And why do not their presses burst out with new wine? The answer of the text would be, They have not honoured the Lord with their substance, nor with the *first fruits* of all their increase. It would be well worth the while of Christians to inquire into this matter. I take for granted, if you *are* Christians, that you have been in the habit of contributing something to religious and benevolent objects. Did you do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and liberally, as to the manner in which God had blessed your store? And when the Lord went on to increase your store, did you forthwith proceed to "honour him with the first fruits of all your increase?" And did you at the same time continue to maintain the simplicity of your habits, the humility of your soul, and the fervour of

your piety? Did you feel no fondness for display or luxury? Was there no danger that your children, having the prospect of ease and fortune, without exertion, would grow up to be drones, and being full, would forget God? Assure yourselves, my hearers, that God will not suffer us to keep long what we withhold from him.—If you wish to secure a fortune, put it under the care of God,—get his blessing upon it;—to keep your treasures from being cankered, get them sanctified. *First*, “honour God” with what he righteously and graciously requires for his glory, and *then*, commit the residue to his gracious keeping, and you need fear no blasting or mildew. Whatever he hath promised he will make good: the great difficulty with men is, they are too unbelieving to trust him, and yet none have ever trusted in him in vain.

Finally—“Self-denial” is a test of discipleship, of which it may well be doubted whether the professed followers of Christ are sufficiently aware. And yet he has said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” This, I fear, is a practice Christians have not even *begun* so much as to think of. Of what have they denied themselves? What luxury or useless expense have they given up? To what inconvenience have they submitted for Christ’s sake? What marks of the dying of the Lord Jesus do they bear about with them? Christian, look at your Master! There he stands, identified with 600,000,000 of our race, who are without God and without hope in the world, and hear him: “I was rich in the glory which I had with the Father before all worlds—I made myself poor—I emp-

tyed myself—I became a servant—‘a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief’—I died under my Father’s wrath—and you stand there, enjoying the rich comforts of my providence, a child of grace, and an expectant of heaven—I have made you what you are, at this amazing expense; and all I ask of you is, that, in requital for my great love, you will see to it that my gospel shall be preached to them. Save them you can not—that is my prerogative; only use the means which I shall bestow upon you for that purpose.”—Is that asking too much of redeemed sinners?

And now, my dear hearers, our text either teaches a duty, or it does not. If it does, then you may use it for two purposes: 1st. For the purpose of self-examination—Have you used these gifts of God for his honour? You have been a steward for a long time, and the day of accounts is not far off.—Would it not be well to arrange your accounts with a wise reference to that day? 2nd. A portion of that trust still remains in your hands, and a perishing world is stretching out its hands to you for help, and your Saviour has committed it to your care, and what you do for it must be quickly done. Souls by millions hang upon the issue of your determination. And now, remember, that God has made you a steward, and that he holds you responsible for every talent he has committed to you, and among the rest for every dollar’s worth of property.—Should you not then be careful how you use it? May the Lord enable you so to use the bounties of his providence that they may help you on the way to heaven. AMEN.