

July
26 Aug. 1935
The American Baptist Historical Society,
Inmate Company No. 108.

PAM 4204

THE

CHRISTIAN'S STEWARDSHIP.

BY R. W. CUSHMAN, A. M.

It is necessary that Christians begin to use their property as stewards. The principles of the Gospel must be carried into the business of our every day expenditure. We must sacrifice to Christ our love of pleasure, of ostentation, of accumulation,—or we cease to pray “Thy kingdom come.”

WAYLAND.

PHILADELPHIA :

PUBLISHED BY THE BAPTIST GENERAL TRACT SOCIETY,

NO. 36, NORTH FIFTH STREET.

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“If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I should have denied the God that is above.”
(Job xxxi. 24—28.)

What is worthy of remark in this passage is, that a certain affection known only among the votaries of Paganism, should be classed under the same character, and have the same condemnation with an affection, not only known, but allowed, nay, cherished into habitual supremacy, all over Christendom. How universal it is among those who are in *pursuit* of wealth, to make gold their hope; and those who are in *possession* of wealth, to make fine gold their confidence! Yet we are here told that this is virtually as complete a renunciation of God as to practise some of the worst charms of idolatry. If the love of money be in the heart, the love of God is not there. If a man be trusting in uncertain riches, he is not trusting in the living God. If his heart be set upon covetousness, it is set upon an object of idolatry. The true divinity is moved away from his place, and worse than atheism, which would only leave it empty, the love of wealth has raised another divinity upon his throne. So that covetousness offers a more daring aggression on the right and territory of the Godhead, than even infidelity. The latter would only desolate the sanctuary of Heaven, the former would set up an abomination in the midst of it.

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Two facts are observable, in the walks of life, which strikingly correspond to declarations in the Bible, concerning two descriptions of character. The first is, that those, whether rich or poor, who have a conscientious respect to the temporal and spiritual necessities of their fellow-men, and to the will of their Creator in the use and disposal of their possessions, have the purest and most lively enjoyment of the blessings of this life; and drink most abundantly of the pure stream of consolation which flows from the throne of God. The scripture that corresponds with this fact is, "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

He, on the contrary, whether unregenerate or christian, who, turning his attention from the Divine will, determines the manner of using and disposing of his property by his own desires and partialities, and consigns to the control of his pride and ambition that portion which humility and confidence in God would relinquish to the relief of the needy; knows least of the enjoyments which flow from earth or heaven.— And this fact corresponds with the declaration, "There is that withholdeth more than is meet; but it tendeth to poverty."

The first character is that most frequently witnessed, when the powers of the soul are first rectified by the renewing of the Holy Spirit:—when the heart is first elevated to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." The latter is an instance of degeneracy, produced by the maxims of a world which, amid all the demonstrations of an overruling providence that surround us, knows not God. The former receives the blessings of Heaven as a gift; and enjoys them with all the zest which a lively

gratitude can impart: while the latter receives them as a matter of course, and a matter of right, and discovers not, or heeds not, the kind hand which bestows them. How greatly is it to be deplored that the last description of character is so prevalent as it is, among those who have been redeemed, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ! For, what might not the energies of the Christian host effect, with the promised blessing of God, were but those energies all aroused and properly directed!

This degeneracy is a consequence of inattention to the origin of our mercies, and forgetfulness of our absolute dependence on God, even for the most ordinary and constant streams of prosperity with which our lives are refreshed.

There is a fondness in the heart for whatsoever presents itself in the shape of an antidote to the ills of life, and as a means of promoting our happiness; and consequently a proneness to suffer the attention to be engrossed with the *gift*, while the Giver, because unseen, is forgotten. Hence it comes to pass, that we look on what we possess as *our own*: to be held by us, our heirs, and assigns, forever; in fee simple of man, and quit claim of God: and whenever the idea of obligation is brought before the mind, we are apt to ask, as if neither man nor God had a right to negative the question: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?—to save or destroy; to give or withhold?" From this source has arisen a ruinous mistake in the calculations of many, concerning the *extent of our accountability*. While it is admitted that we must give an account of the *deeds* done in the body, according to their moral character; it is forgotten that this accountability is, in any manner, regulated by the circumstances of temporal blessings in which the providence of God has placed us: that we are *stewards* of his goods, and have to give an account of our stewardship. Hence, while the rightful claim of Heaven to that obedience, the capacity of rendering which lies equally in the breasts of all, is admitted; the relinquishment of any portion of property for the promotion of the cause of truth, or for the relief of distress, is con-

sidered as a free gift, which entitles the giver not only to the gratitude of the object aided, but to a score of credit in the book of his account with God.

Now this is an error which loudly demands correction: inasmuch as, in some, it is to be feared that it is the ground of a false confidence of their acceptance with God, by the preponderance of their charities against their transgressions: while in multitudes of those who have fled for refuge to a better hope, it subjects the heart to the pride of life, and consequently often shuts the hand, while the voice of duty, which bids bestow, is unheard. The most effectual method to correct these evils is, to consider attentively and habitually,

The character we sustain:

The source of our prosperity:

The nature of our tenure; and,

The responsibilities with which it is connected.

In contemplating our character, we should remember that we are but men: the wealthiest, the proudest, the mightiest of us, is but a man: a creature who, but yesterday, embarked on the sea of life with nothing but ignorance and helplessness; a common adventurer, among the thousands of his kind, amid the perils and uncertainties of the winds and the waves: and who, even in the day of his greatest strength and loftiest pride, can neither persuade nor terrify the minister of disease, nor resist the demands of death, nor beguile the worm of his prey. In all his glory, he is but dust and to the dust he must return.

Now if we brought nothing into the world, it behooves us to consider how we came into possession of that which he have. Under the influence of the error of which we have spoken, the FARMER will tell us that he has arisen to a comfortable independence by his own industry,—“by the sweat of his brow:” and, that the hard earned products of his labour he knows how to value, and he knows how to keep. But we would ask, of what avail is all his labour? Does it dissolve the

snows of winter, and break the chains in which the earth is held? Does it move forward the revolutions of the seasons from winter to seed-time, and from seed-time to harvest? Does it raise the vapours from the earth and ocean, and mould them into clouds? Does it bring down the rain, "the former and the latter rain?" Does it cause the sun to warm the bosom of the ground into which he casts his seed? Then why does he ever labour for nought, or spend his strength in vain?

We suppose it was while he was asleep that the blasting and mildew destroyed his hopes: and because he was ignorant of the mischief, that the fly took the blossom, and the worm, the root. Oh, no! He who gave light and joy to the land of Goshen, and darkness and pestilence and death to Egypt; HE it is who rolls on the seasons: who commands the wintry blast from his northern stores, or gives the glowing breath of summer skies.

At his command the morning ray
Smiles on the earth and leads the day;
He guides the sun's declining wheels
Over the tops of western hills.

Seasons and times obey His voice:—
The evening and the morn rejoice
To see the earth made soft with show'rs,
Laden with fruit, and dressed in flow'rs.

The MERCHANT, whose warehouses are filled with goods, is apt to feel no less freedom from obligation than the yeoman; and when interrogated, whence he received them, will be likely to tell us that he purchased them; that he imported them. But who, we would ask, prospered your industry with the means? Who gave to your canvass the favouring wind which wafted them to you: and, why did not He who blessed you with gentle gales, meet you with impoverishing whirlwinds and devouring tempests?

The prosperity of the MECHANIC, is the result of the industrious exercise of his muscular powers and of his skill. But we would ask him whence came these powers, and whence this skill? That they are not among the inseparable endowments of humanity you may

learn by a visit to the abode of the idiot ; the cell of the lunatic ; and the couch, where the victims of agues, consumptions, and fevers lie agonizing and helpless.

The PHYSICIAN advances in reputation, and in the confidence of the community, and consequently in wealth, by the happy exercise of his professional skill. But whence hath this man this wisdom? Omitting to say any thing of his accomplishments in the *theory* of physic, which, amid the ten thousand diversified forms and shades of character that disease assumes, is, of itself, of so little avail; how came he into the possession of that quick and nice discernment, by which he so successfully detects the lurking foe in the machinery of the human frame; ascertains his direction and his power; and by which he is enabled to apply the appropriate and timely remedy, to stay the work of destruction, and to repair the injury sustained?

The COUNSELLOR and the STATESMAN are crowned with honour; and with a meet reward for their successful support of the rights and the interests with which they have been entrusted. But, from whom did they receive that retentiveness of memory which secures the fund of knowledge they have laboured for years to obtain? Who gave them that vigorous comprehension; that rapidity of conception; that liveliness of feeling; that promptitude; that grace; that force of communication; which at once enlighten the understanding, control the judgment, and captivate the heart? —All, all is the boon of Heaven: the Farmer, the Merchant, the Mechanic, the Physician, the Counsellor, the Statesman, all are endowed with whatsoever of prosperity, of favour they possess, by the “Father of lights from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift.”

It being then conceded, that for whatever of worldly blessings we possess, we are indebted to the bounty of God; let us consider,

The nature of the tenure by which we hold them.

Nothing can be more certain than this; that if we hold any thing by absolute right, it would be absolutely wrong for any man to wrest it from us. It is equally

certain, that if we hold our possessions by a right as perfect with respect to God, as we do with respect to man, Jehovah himself has no right to take them from us without our consent. If he *does* therefore take them, either the God of justice has become unjust; or, our right is, by our very adversities, proved imperfect.

But it is certain that riches *do* take to themselves wings and fly away: that the conflagration sometimes wraps them in ruin, and consigns their owners to wretchedness and sorrow. It is certain that the tempests and the floods, sometimes do sweep our floating treasures to "the dark unfathomed caves of ocean." It is certain that the scorching sun consumes the husbandman's hope; and that after all his labours of sowing and planting, and his watchful care—after he has done his utmost, the seed is sometimes "rotten under the clod; the garners are laid desolate; the barns are broken down, for the corn is withered; and the beasts groan, and the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture: and the flocks of sheep are made desolate and the beasts of the field cry unto God, for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness."

It is certain that the insect tribes of the air, in alliance with the creeping inhabitants of the ground, which the God of judgment calls his great army, do march forth in dark and fearful array; and "that which the palmer-worm hath left, hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left, hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten." Yet the God of judgment—the God of the winds and of the waves, the fire and the tempest,—the leader of this desolating and irresistible army, is a "God of truth, without iniquity; just and right is he." And we have as little right to question his doings, as power to stay his hand: and, in the midst of all, we are bound to cherish the sentiment and the temper of a sufferer of ancient time: "the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Brethren, examine the character, and the sufferings, of the man whose words we have just quoted; and you

will learn that we are tenants at will. Now, that we are amenable to God for the use we make of his bounties, is a reasonable and necessary consequence of the tenure by which we hold them. The truth is, they are, strictly speaking, *His*: and are committed to our *trust*, to be used and disposed of, by us, in accordance with his revealed will.

That they are not bestowed to be employed as our own predilections and our often erroneous judgments of our interests shall prompt, is evident.

The very idea of prosperity is connected with the promotion of happiness: and as all real prosperity comes from God, the bestowment of wealth, which preserves from many of the ills incident to life, and which ministers to our innocent enjoyments, is a clear indication of his benevolence, and of his design in giving them for our use.

No one can doubt that the Almighty clothes the earth with verdure, and covers the fields with waving plenty, for the promotion of the *happiness* of his creatures.

But the good which the husbandman possesses is only a single variety of that wealth, all the varieties of which spring from the same source, and are all imparted for the same end.

He who is prospered with more than is requisite for the attainment of his own happiness, has received the surplus for the same general end for which the rest was given: he is therefore entrusted with the means of happiness to others. Consequently, he is not at liberty to cast it into the fire, to bury it in the earth, or to merge it in the flood: nor, least of all, is he at liberty to make it subservient to the violation of the laws of God the giver, in licentious prodigality.

Perhaps there is no disposition more prevalent among those who are under the influence of moral principles at all, than that which prompts them to accumulate wealth for their posterity. Now, if this disposition, to the extent to which it is generally indulged, received the Divine approbation; the indulgence of it would tend to the *promotion of happiness*—the happiness of the parents, as following out the direction of God's plea-

sure: and the happiness of the children, as coming into the possession of an unperverted trust.

But, that you may judge whether this object is attained by the spirit of accumulation which is abroad in society, we would have you take a tour of minute and careful observation through the different walks of life. Go, read the histories of families from the father to the son: and the history of the son from infancy to manhood. Trace the effects which meet your daily notice, up to their legitimate, but frequently, not obvious causes. Consider, on the one hand, the condition and the real enjoyments of those who, possessing a competency, exchange the redundance of their income, for the pleasure of doing good; either in the way of enlightening the ignorant, or in reclaiming the vicious, or in feeding the hungry, or in clothing the naked and succouring the distressed. Observe their early and well-formed habits of activity, which are so conducive to health—the basis of all sublunary enjoyment. Witness the flow of their spirits; and their contentment, which remains undisturbed amid all the enticements of the influence and honors of fortune. Mark well the sound constitutions and the industrious habits of their rising posterity; who expect, from their parents, no more than a frugal beginning in life, depending for their subsequent prosperity, on the faithful practice of those lessons of industry and virtue, with which their tender minds were imbued by parental piety.

Consider, we say, and compare this course of procedure and its attendant blessings, with that in which the cumbrous accumulation of wealth, and the aggrandizement of family by the privileges of fortune, are the objects of supreme regard: where the avarice of gain steels the heart against the voice of imploring woe, and locks up from its own enjoyment, the abundance already possessed:—where luxury pours its poisons into the cup of infancy, and is the companion of the nursery and the physician of childhood: where youth, unacquainted with the checks of that happy medium which is independence to virtue, but poverty to vice, is accustomed to every gratification which wealth abused

can bring: and, Oh! would to God ten thousand melancholy examples did not compel us to proceed—where deliverance from all concern about a livelihood, lifts the youthful mind above all feeling of dependence on man or God; raises the floodgate of every passion, and turns the whole mind and soul adrift in a sea of licentious pleasure, ending in poverty and pain, a constitution shattered and broken, and a soul in despair.

Compare the two descriptions, and we think it will be no difficult matter for a common discernment to determine in favour of which system of procedure the balance of substantial enjoyment turns. On that side rests the approbation of God, for it is that which accomplishes the end for which his bounties are conferred. And on the other falls his frown, for his goods have been perverted to forbidden purposes.

In the very miseries, therefore, consequent upon such a perversion, or, if you will, in the very constitution of nature, by which the blessings of Jehovah are, in their abuse, transformed into curses, we recognise both his right and his intention to call us to account for the manner in which we have used them.

It being then established, that we have received from him every good we possess, that so far from his relinquishing his right in the bounty, he has made us accountable for the use and disposal of the whole, and that the bestowment confers not only obligations of gratitude but of *service*; the question becomes, to every honest steward of the Creator's bounties, a matter of deeply interesting inquiry:—How much do I owe to my Lord? For, on whatever objects I expend that which he has entrusted to me, and whatever responsibilities these favours may impose *on them*; still I have to account to God for all I have received at his hand. A *portion* of what he has given me is undoubtedly to be "occupied" for the promotion of my own happiness, and the happiness of those whom he has entrusted to my care: but what proportion is best calculated for the attainment of this end, and what he has required to be expended for *Him*:—are questions which demand my most impartial and prayerful investigation.

Yes! they are questions the importance of which is

magnified by all the pleasure of doing good, and by all the peace of a conscience void of offence towards God; and by all the terrors of being weighed in the balance of his justice and found wanting:—questions, Brethren, which, thankfully remembering how great the disparity between what you *receive* at his hand, and what, as imperfect and sinful, you *merit*, you must determine by the light which the Bible throws on your responsibilities, and which the records of providence shed on the designs of your Benefactor in the dispensations of his gifts.

And having ascertained the extent of your obligations, suffer yourselves to be induced to the discharge of them. Oh, by all the considerations of gratitude, by all the motives of self-enjoyment, and by all the impulses of self-interest as well as of duty, suffer yourselves to be stimulated to a prompt discharge of those obligations, in promoting the temporal and spiritual welfare of your fellow-men.

We say, of self-enjoyment, because that undue anxiety for accumulation, which resists the demands of Charity and Religion, is destructive of the finest feelings, and the richest bliss of the soul: and if it does not deliver it to the lashes of conscience, it renders it an utter stranger to that pure and godlike pleasure which springs from doing good. And we have said, of self-interest, because the Christian who is growing rich, by withholding what the Lord demands, is absolutely growing poor, by confining the enjoyment of his wealth, to the short portion of his existence which he passes on earth: while it is in his power to export his possessions to the shores of eternity. Yes, Brethren, there is such a thing as almost literally laying up our treasures in heaven. "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."—I say unto you secure the friendship and gratitude of those who are poor in this world but rich in faith, by contributing from that which so many hoard and worship, to the relief of their temporal, and spiritual necessities: that when ye die, those whom you have blessed, and who have gone before

you may hail you with grateful joy, and bid you welcome to the mansions of everlasting rest. Here then, the bliss of the world above will be affected in a most interesting point by your works of charity below; and the pleasures which burn in the beneficent bosom on earth are to be re-kindled in the world to come.

But above all things else, Brethren, be incited to a diligent and faithful discharge of the duties of your stewardship, by the consideration of that greatest gift to you, which Heaven ever gave to man. Consider that "he who was rich, *for your sakes*, became poor, that you through his poverty, might be made rich:" rich in everlasting habitations; rich in spotless robes of righteousness; rich in unfading diadems of glory; rich in a right to the tree of life, and the crystal waters that flow from the throne of God.

And in anticipation of your robe and crown, your habitation and rest, in that land where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal, where the flames cannot devour, nor the hand of time deface, rise to your duty: and what your hand findeth to do, do it with your might.

The cause of suffering humanity entreats your aid. Remember the poor whom ye have always with you; and to whom, *whensoever ye will*, ye may do good. Whensoever ye will, ye may deliver the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him: whensoever ye will, ye may cause the widow's heart to sing for joy, and the blessing of him that is ready to perish to come upon yourselves.

The period has been foretold when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. That period is at hand: and most animating must the reflection be to every friend of God. But it must not be forgotten, that it is through the instrumentality of the saints, that the Redeemer is to diffuse the knowledge of his grace among the nations, and bring the world into subjection, under the reign of his love. The age and circumstances then, in which we live, call for pre-eminent Christian activity, and a consecration of heart and life, of talents and wealth to Him, whose we are, and whom we serve.

Consider also the *misery* of this affection, as well as its sinfulness. He over whom it reigns feels a worthlessness in his present wealth after it is gotten: and when to this we add the restlessness of a yet unsated appetite lording it over all his convictions, and panting for more; when to the dulness of his actual satisfaction in all the riches that he has, we add his still unquenched, and indeed, unquenchable desire for the riches that he has not: when we reflect, that as in the pursuit of wealth, he widens the circle of his operations, so he lengthens out the line of his open and hazardous exposure, and multiplies along the extent of it those vulnerable points from which another and another dart of anxiety may enter his heart, when he feels himself as floating on an ocean of contingency on which perhaps he is only borne up by the breath of a credit that is fictitious, and which may leave him to sink under the weight of his overladen speculation: when suspended on the doubtful result of his bold and uncertain adventure, he dreads the tidings of disaster in every arrival, and lives in a continual agony of feeling, kept up by the crowd and turmoil of his manifold distractions, and so overspreading the whole compass of his thoughts, as to leave not one narrow space for the thought of eternity: will any beholder look at this man thus tossed and bewildered, and say that the bird of the air, which sends forth its unreflecting song, and lives on the daily bounty of Providence, is not higher in the scale of enjoyment than he? And how much more the quiet Christian, who with the possession of food and raiment, has also that *godliness*, which with contentment, is great gain.

It is an affecting sight to behold the workings of this world's infatuation among so many of our fellow-mor-

tals nearing and nearing every day to eternity, and yet instead of taking heed to that which is before them, mistaking their temporary vehicles for their abiding home, and spending all their time and all their thought upon its accommodations. It is indeed affecting to think how in despite of manifold experience—how in despite of gathering wrinkles, and all the growing infirmities of age—how, in despite of the ever-lessening distance between the feeble and asthmatic man, and his sepulchre, and of all the tokens of preparation for the onset of the last messenger, with which in the shape of weakness, and breathlessness, and dimness of eyes he is visited, he will still shake his silver locks in all the glee and transport of which he is capable, when he hears of his gainful adventures, and his new accumulations. Nor can we tell how near he must get to his grave, or how far on he must get in the process of dying, ere gain cease to delight, and the idol wealth cease to be dear to him.

But the idol and the worshipper must part, and woful, beyond expression woful, must his condition be, who, on leaving the world, leaves his god and his heaven behind him.

[*See Chalmers' Mercantile Discourses.*]



He who serves God hath the best master in the world.

Where God is, there is nothing wanting.

He is a good man who is good for himself; but he is good indeed who is so for others too.

Money is his servant who knows how to use it as he should; his master, who doth not.

So much only is mine as I either use myself, or give for God's sake.

To do good still make no delay,
For life and time slide fast away.