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A Gift from
↔ Miss Mary Sharp ↔
Fulton, Ky.

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THE PEW TO THE PULPIT.

REV. AND DEAR SIR:—

This is not a "lecture," so please do not throw it into the waste basket, at least until you have read it, unless you are satisfied with the gifts of your people to Church work and objects of benevolence.

By way of excuse for thus addressing you, I will briefly state some circumstances in my own experience.

I commenced giving, or rather paying, one-tenth of my income to religious, benevolent and charitable objects, I think, in 1870. Had not before that time been very prosperous in business. Within a year or two I noticed a decided change in my business success, and this continued until 1876. I could not but see a very marked connection between my gifts and my business prosperity. True, my capital was small, and I did not give more than one-tenth, and indeed, did not exceed that proportion for more than ten years.

About 1875 I commenced making personal inquiries regarding the comparative temporal prosperity of others who practiced this rule, and the testimony was so uniform that in 1876 I decided to publish a little tract on the subject, embodying my views. With this tract I sent out a circular to ministers asking for information, and especially requesting that if any exceptions were known to the rule that temporal prosperity always follows the consecration of a definite proportion of income to God, that the exceptions might be noted and the facts fully given. This circular and tract went to the ministers of four or five of the largest evangelical denominations in the country. Thousands of replies were received but no exceptions worthy the name.

Since 1876 I have received, I have little idea how many, but certainly thousands of letters giving cheerful, and in many cases enthusiastic testimony to the literalness of God's promise: "Honor the Lord with thy substance, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty." I have published a limited number of these, and had I kept them could have easily filled a large volume. Indeed, scarcely a day has passed during the last ten years that I have not received more or less of such testimony. During that time I have sent out not less than three millions of tracts and pamphlets on this subject, chiefly Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (No. 1 is now out of print); a sample of No. 2 is sent herewith; No. 3 is a little story by Kate W. Hamilton, called "Thanksgiving Ann;" No. 4 is composed of some selections from "The Divine Plan of Church Finance," by the Rev. Francis Granger; No. 5 is a talk to ministers, similar to this; No. 6 is a prize essay, by Rev. C. R. Bonnell; No. 7 "Auntie Parsons Story," by S. N. Campbell; No. 8 is excellent to set people to thinking, but by far the greatest good has been accomplished by No. 2, chiefly, I think, because in it I try to teach *how* to give proportionately.

Now, that this rather lengthly introduction is over I come to what I wish to say to you as a minister, and first, it is due to you to say that if we laymen did our duty in the matter of giving as faithfully as do the ministry, there would be no need of any special work in this line. Many of you give too much, more than you ought to, while the great majority of us give far too little. I do not mean that you do too much work, as that is in the line of your duty and the means by which you support your families, but I mean in money, either given direct or in payment of expenses which should be borne by others.

On the other hand, we laymen do not mean to be as wanting in benevolence as you no doubt often think we are. Our hearts are often nearer right than our heads and hands. We do love our common Master and do desire the spread of His kingdom much more than our actions, and more particularly our gifts would often indicate, but are we wholly to blame? Have you done your whole duty to us and by us? Naturally and rightly we look upon you as our teachers and depend upon you for needed instruction. Candidly is your teaching always plain, to the point, and within our comprehension?

You tell us that we "owe everything to the Lord." We admit it,

but do you intelligently instruct us as to the times, amounts and methods of payment?

You tell us that when we made a profession of faith in Christ we agreed to "consecrate our time, our talents and our property to his service," but you also tell us that "He that careth not for his own household is worse than an infidel." Now, with most of us it takes very much the largest part of our time, talents and income to support our families and those naturally dependent upon us.

You exhort us to "give until we feel it" when, as you know, many of us "feel" the giving of a nickel as much as others, who have no more wealth, feel the giving of one dollar or five dollars.

You tell us to "bring all the tithes into the store house," but do not explain to us what tithing means; indeed, judging by the teaching of very many we might safely infer that you meant everything we have, and yet we know that this is not true.

You tell us to "lay by as God has prospered us," and yet give us no light or rule as to the proportion we should lay by.

You tell us that the whole Church gives less than, say \$5.00 per member to this or that or to all its benevolent enterprises. Some of us think that if we have given \$5.00 we have given more than our share. You talk about what a "penny a day" to this or that cause would do, and when we have the same argument applied to a dozen or two causes, which we know to be worthy, we naturally get bewildered and discouraged.

You tell us that the New Testament rule is to "lay by weekly as God has prospered us," when, as you know, those of us who are farmers during more than half the year have no regular weekly income from which we can lay by, and those of us who are merchants or manufacturers often know that we are losing money for from three to sometimes six months in the year.

While on this subject will you not now, or when you have finished this article, turn to and read 1st Cor. 16th chap., vs. 1 and 2, and also the 9th chap. of 2d Cor. Note the language, "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store as he may prosper," and then Paul gives the reason for making this request, "That no collections be made when I come." (I quote from the revised version). Now, ask yourself the question, can you believe that Paul meant, or that God meant, in thus giving some directions in regard to raising

money for a free-will offering from the Churches of Asia Minor for some poor people down at Jerusalem, to set aside and abrogate the rule which He had made thousands of years before, which Christ had sanctioned, and which was then in full force?

You tell us that "all we have belongs to God." that "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," "The Gold and the Silver are His," &c. To many of us the inference is that if it belongs to Him we ought to return it to Him, and yet we know you do not mean to teach us this.

You hold up to us the example of "the poor widow who cast in her two mites, all her living," and yet we do not believe you mean to teach us that we should literally do the same, no matter what our living or possessions or income may be. If she was a working woman, which is more than probable, she doubtless earned more than she cast into the treasury before many hours. Was not the object of the Master, in calling attention to that incident, more to rebuke ostentatious giving than as an example for all ages?

Now, I admit that these questions are not equally applicable to all ministers, but this pamphlet will probably be sent to all the ministers of several denominations in the United States, whose preaching and teachings are heard by millions of people in the aggregate. Neither am I speaking for many of your hearers, but I am speaking for a very large proportion of them, much larger than you imagine, and more especially of young christians.

Conversions, as you know, are usually among young people and if the pocket is not converted at the same time with the heart, or very soon after, the task grows harder each year until as middle life is approached, it is next to impossible. The consciences of young christians are tender, their impulses warm and generous. Get them started right in the matter of giving from principle, and in no other way can you do them so much good spiritually, or so effectually prevent that great sin of the age, coveteousness, from getting a lodgment in their minds and hearts.

Now, let me ask you a personal question. What part of your work as a minister is the hardest? What is it that you most shrink from, and at which you almost, and often do, rebel? Is it preaching? I need no answer. Is it pastoral visitation? I know it is not. Is it

visiting the sick? I know this is your pleasure. Is it not the raising of money? Don't you often feel that you lower the standard of your sacred office by having to go around from house to house and from man to man, selecting such times and places as you think will find them in the best humor, and even then, often almost begging them for money to carry on the Master's work? Now, suppose this work were stripped of all its unpleasant, and I had almost said degrading, features, what a joy your calling would be. With how much more confidence and eloquence you could urge and advise your own boy and the bright boy of your neighbor to enter the ministry. I believe it ought to be, can be, and will be done, but in only one way.

Suppose all your members, young and old, rich and poor, should adopt *Proportionate Giving* as a rule of life, how different and how easy it would be to raise money for any good object. You would need only to explain to them, either in person or publicly, the needs of any worthy object, and if it commended itself to their good judgment, they would cheerfully contribute what they could afford. There would be no appeals or "begging" about it. The Lord's share would be a trust fund from which each would pay as duty demanded. Every member of your church would willingly listen to your statements regarding the needs of the different branches of Church work and then gladly do what they could.

This is no fancy picture, it is literally true, and I know whereof I am speaking. It is true now of thousands and tens of thousands who have adopted this principle and practice; and the possibility of its realization and universal practice in the near future lies almost wholly with the ministry. True, you may not live to see it, but your successors will if you commence laying the foundation now in the hearts and minds and lives of young christians. Do not spend much time on us older ones. Most of us are past hope in this regard, unless the practice and example of our pastors and younger christians should shame us into better methods.

Now, if you are not already doing so, will you not at once commence to teach proportionate giving, or rather *paying*, to your people? If you are teaching it, will you not get down to the a, b, c part of it and stay there, at least until we all learn the alphabet. The fact is, very few of us have ever gotten further than that in this part of our christian education. Make it your business to teach us that God

means exactly and literally what he says in the promises "He that honoreth me I will honor," "Honor the Lord with thy substance, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty." Teach us that we should "Lay by as God has prospered us," *when* he prospers us. That if we are farmers this means when we sell the products of our farms, no matter when that may be, and that we are safe in commencing now on the basis of last year's prosperity, believing that the Lord of the Harvest will not fail us. Teach those of us who are merchants and manufacturers to give as we think God is prospering us this year, charging such gifts to benevolence account, and closing the account when we take our annual or semi-annual inventory, by crediting it with one-tenth of our year's income, if that is the proportion we have set aside (as it ought to be for such purposes). Teach those of us who work on a salary, yourself included, to lay aside one-tenth of our income for the Lord's work, as we receive it.

Teach those of us who are lawyers and physicians to lay aside our proportion of income as our bills are paid. In short, teach us all to lay aside *proportionately* "in store as God has prospered us," *when and where we know what the measure of prosperity is*, and then give from that store, weekly, or daily, as God sends the calls.

Teach us that if we all did this the Lord's treasury would always be full. That at least five times and probably ten times as many missionaries could be sent to destitute home and foreign fields as now are, and that the world could and would soon be led to a belief in, and the acceptance of Christ as the Savior of all.

Teach us that this is true stewardship; teach us that in this way we practically take our Heavenly Father into partnership with us in our labor and business enterprises.

Teach us that all of us are creditors or stewards of the Almighty, and as a practical recognition of his ownership of us and all that we possess, he asks of us a definite proportion of our income which we are to spend for him and in his service.

Teach us that the obligation rests upon rich and poor alike. Do not waste your time on side issues, teaching that the rich ought to pay more than the poor. Your converts will be almost wholly among those who are starting in life, and by-and-by, when God makes them stewards for larger amounts you can talk to them about the duty and pleasure of making free-will offerings.

Teach those of us who are poor or in debt and think we cannot afford it, that in reality *we cannot afford not to do it*, that the experience as given by the many thousands who have tried it is uniformly that *the nine-tenths goes further than the whole*, and that the conscientious adoption of this practice, from proper motives, almost invariably marks a new era in temporal prosperity.

Teach us definitely what proportion we should lay aside. Study the subject yourself in its details and be able intelligently to answer questions from those in different occupations who cannot at first understand all the details. Encourage questions and the spread of practical information on the subject. Teach us that in this way we do practical work for the Master as we can do in no other way.

Teach us that from the day we resolve to devote one-tenth of our income to the Lord's work we are working directly and practically for Him. One-tenth of every day, one-tenth of every hour, ten cents of every dollar, one dollar of every ten, ten dollars of every hundred we earn, is his in a special sense.

Teach us that going to church or prayer-meeting or even praying in public is not working for the Master. That while teaching in Sunday School is work for him, yet that is only for one or two hours out of one hundred and sixty-eight in a week.

Teach us that we can do good work for Christ and probably our very best work by proxy. That you are better preachers than most of us would be, that foreign and home missionaries now in the field and trained for their work are doubtless doing better work than we could in their place.

Teach us that we just as truly help to build churches in destitute places if we help pay for the buildings as if we personally laid the bricks and drove the nails. Make it plain to us that if we support you, you will do our home preaching for us, and that if we support home and foreign missionaries they will do that work for us better than we could do it ourselves. Explain to us also that hundreds and thousands of consecrated, highly gifted and qualified men and women are ready and eager to go out into this and other lands to preach the Gospel, if we will only guarantee them and their families a very modest support.

Teach us that in this way we have a personal interest in the salvation of every soul brought to Christ through your efforts or the

preaching and teaching of missionaries in any and every land where we contribute to their support, and that by this method we, in a practical way, every day and every hour, stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with you and every other special worker for the Master all over the earth.

Teach us that we cannot do this in any other possible manner, that our prayers for the spread of the Master's Kingdom are not worth the breath spent in uttering them, unless accompanied, preceded, or followed by all we can *do* to build up His Kingdom, and that what we can *do* is practically confined to what we contribute to others for doing that work for us.

Teach us that our consecration is not measured by our prayers, nor by our talents, nor by the amount of our gifts, but by our *willingness to help*. We would probably make poor preachers and poor missionaries, but if we are faithful farmers, clerks, merchants or laborers of any kind, and are diligent in our occupation, no matter what it may be, we can help to procure and pay for the services of the very best preachers and missionaries, to whom God has furnished special talents for this work, and can have a practical share in their success in winning souls for Christ.

Now, a final word. People will not all admit it, but about nine-tenths of the objections we laymen have to laying aside one-tenth of our income for the Lord's work, are comprised in a single sentence—we *think* we cannot afford it.

Teach us very plainly and confidently that we *can*, and I mean in dollars and cents. Overcome this one objection and get us started from conscientious motives in the line of our duty and the backsliders will be few indeed. Giving will be a real pleasure to us, and we will, as never before, feel the joy and dignity of stewardship, and of the handling, bestowing and doing good with trust funds. We will realize, and it will be a wonderful pleasure, that we are literally, every day and every hour, working with and for the Master.

Yours very truly.

THOMAS KANE.

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