

**THE DUTY OF GIVING  
AWAY A  
STATED PROPORTION OF  
OUR INCOME**

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The Duty of Giving Away a Stated Proportion of Our Income by William Arthur

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BY WILLIAM ARTHUR, A. M.



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## DUTY OF GIVING AWAY

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I propose to submit a few observations *on the duty of giving away a stated proportion of our income*. For the practical handling of the subject, I know not that I can do better than attempt to

Explain the duty,

State the grounds whereon it rests, and

Plead for practical attention to it.

When we speak of the duty of giving away a stated proportion of our income, we do not mean *that all persons having equal incomes are bound to give away equal sums, however their other circumstances may vary*. Power to give away may be modified by three circumstances,—family, locality, and station. Of two persons, each receiving a thousand dollars a year, one has seven children, the other is a bachelor. It would be strange if the single man might justly spend upon himself as much as the other must spend on his family, and might inno-

cently give away only as much as he contrives to give. This is a difference of family.

Of two persons having the same family and the same income, one lives in a large city, where rent, taxes, and provisions are high; the other in an agricultural village, where these are all cheap. Is the latter to take the full advantage of his easier circumstances for his private purse, and give none of it to benevolence? This is the difference of locality.

Again, two persons have each five thousand a year. One from small beginnings has reached that point by industry and saving. Without hereditary claims, without public expectations, and with invaluable habits of economy, he is royally rich on his five thousand a year. The other has inherited the same income from a father who was in the habit of spending fifty thousand a year. A number of servants, retainers, and tradespeople have what amounts to a vested interest in his revenue; the public have expectations; and, worst of all, his habits are formed on a costly model, so that he is not only perplexed, but really poor, with his five thousand a year. This is the difference of station.

Each of these three branches of modification has innumerable offshoots, going to show, that to require all who have equal incomes to give away equal sums, would be neither just nor generous.

*Nor do we mean that all persons are to give away the same proportion of their income, however its gross amount may vary. Two brothers live in the same town, and have the same family. In this case*

station, locality and family are equal. The elder is just able to provide his children with a small house, frugal fare, homely clothing, and a passable education. He is quite unable to lay up anything which would help to open their way in life, when the critical period of settlement shall come. Yet, knowing to whom he and his owe their daily bread, he gratefully devotes a tenth of his income to the service of God.

His younger brother has been otherwise prospered. His children sleep in spacious rooms, and play among their own flower-beds; their clothing is rich, their board generous, and their education costly. For each of them he is able to lay up in store, and knows that, if they do not pass through life with comfort and respect, it will be their own fault. And is this man, for whom Providence has done so much more than for his brother, to content himself with rendering the same proportionate acknowledgment as he? For the latter to give a tenth of all is an effort; an effort which he feels, and his children feel, in "their coats, their hosen, and their hats." For the other to give a tenth would be no effort whatever; it would never affect his comforts, nor even his luxuries, no, not the crumbs that fall from his table. It would affect nothing but his hoarded money. If we hold that his brother should give a tenth, and he should give no more, then we hold that the lesser mercies demand the more touching acknowledgment, and that God's superior bounties may sit more lightly on our hearts.

Take another case: You visit a friend when he is



twenty-five years of age, spending little on his establishment, and giving away a tenth to Him who gives him all. You return to his house when he is fifty. Now he is spending on his establishment ten times as much as before. Why? Because the Lord "hath blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." The same labour which, twenty-five years ago, yielded him a modest income, now brings a twentyfold return. When Providence has thus multiplied the proportionate productiveness of his soil, is he to confine his acknowledgments to the same proportion which he rendered when his efforts were far less fruitful? If he does, gratitude diminishes as bounties enlarge. We would, therefore, strongly contend that when Providence greatly increases the return of labour, or throws abundance into our lap without labour, we are bound to acknowledge such mercy—mercy which distinguishes us above the ordinary lot of men—not by thank-offerings adjusted to the scale of those whose blessing is less than ours, but by aiming to keep pace with the peculiar bounty which, while some pine and others struggle, gives us "all things richly to enjoy." One man's tenth is more than another man's third. I know one venerable man—one of the men whom my soul loveth—who, at the outset of life, adopted the vow of Jacob, "Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth to Thee;" but so far from confining himself to this, I know that some years ago, he was for that year giving away not a tenth, but four tenths. How Providence has dealt with him you may judge from the simple fact, that on

one day he might be seen in the morning giving away a thousand dollars to one religious society, and in the evening five hundred to another.

*On the other hand, we do not mean that persons are bound to give away all their income, so as to admit of no increase of capital, or extension of property.* There is a large class of promises which attach temporal advancement to humble and godly industry, as a reward from Providence. "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life." (Prov. xxii. 4.) "Such as are blessed of Him shall inherit the earth." (Psalm xxxvii. 22.) "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in His commandments. Wealth and riches shall be in his house." (Psalm cxii. 1, 3.) Liberality itself, the very virtue for which we are pleading, is encouraged by the prospect of abundance. "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.) One of the punishments threatened against improperly gotten wealth is its decrease, while lawful labour is stimulated by the hope of plenty. "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished, but he that gathereth by labour shall increase."

This passage not only offers to industry the prize of increase, but states the true relation of labour and capital. "He that gathereth by labour shall increase." Labour creates capital; capital rewards labour. Where there is no labour, capital is lumber; where there is no capital, labour is beating the air.

The effect of well-directed labour is to increase capital; the effect of increasing capital is to lighten the burden and raise the pay of labour. These effects depend not on the will of men or masters, but are wrought deeper than either can permanently reach, into the groundwork of human relations, by the Builder of all. That accumulation of capital which results from the blessing of Providence on lawful industry, so far from contravening the purposes of benevolence, directly and most efficiently serves them. Two brothers enter this city, each with a capital of \$100,000. The one seeks out twenty thousand poor families in the city and country, and gives away all his capital among them, five dollars to each. The other invests his hundred thousand in a factory. Return in five years, and mark the effect of the two sums upon the people. Of the first hundred, the only trace you can find is here a decayed bonnet, there a worn-out cloak, and in some humble homes a very grateful recollection; but no permanent public benefit, no sensible improvement in the condition of the labouring poor. As to the other, it fed and clothed many families from the first day; to-day it is feeding and clothing many families, and it is promising to do so in perpetuity. At the same time, the profits which are known to have accrued to its owner, are attracting other capital to a like investment, so as further to improve the prospects of all the labouring population of the neighbourhood.

It is possible, and more than possible, that in this case the one who gave away his all, did it from the