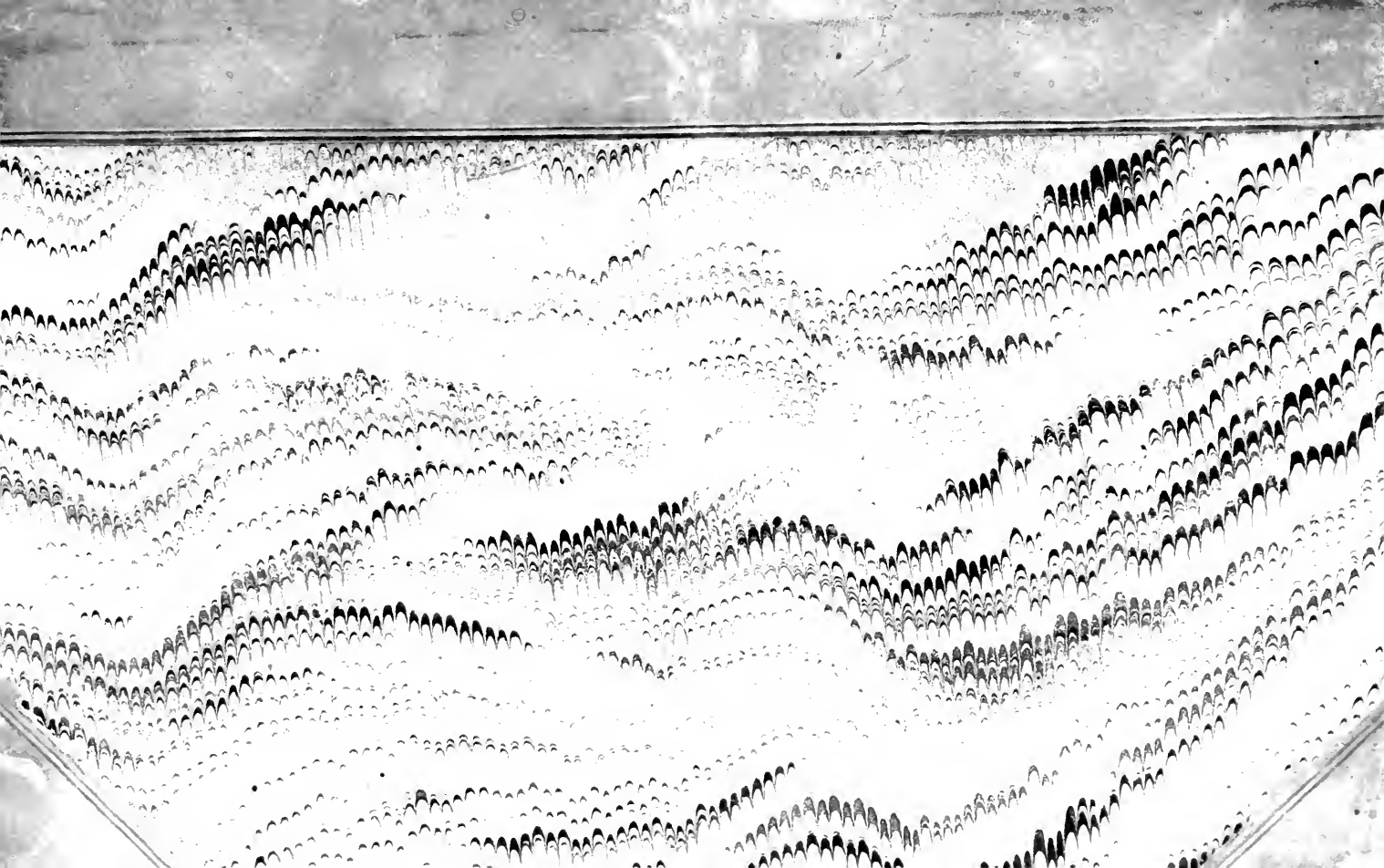

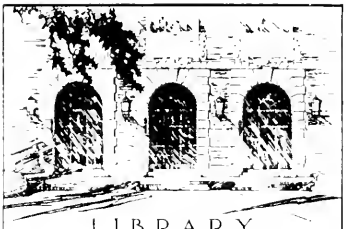

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SERMON,

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SERMON,

PREACHED AT

CHRIST CHURCH, ST. GILES,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF

THE TITHE REDEMPTION TRUST,

JUNE 27, 1854,

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE BISHOP OF NEW ZEALAND.

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SERMON,

&c.

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1 Corinthians vi. 19.

"Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price."

The mystery of the Redemption enters into every part of our moral nature. Every spiritual power, and every practical duty, has its origin in this deep fountain of the divine love. To judge rightly of any privilege, or any obligation, of our Christian character, we must take our stand upon the eternal purpose of God, by which the Lamb was foreordained to die before the foundation of the world. (1 Peter i. 19) We are redeemed, says St. Peter, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world. And in Rev. xiii. 8, we read, that there are names that have been written in the book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

We learn, then, that there never was a time when man could call anything his own, sin only excepted. Even Adam, in the holiness of his first nature, could not boast of those gifts which he had merely received. Even then, before his fall, he had been already redeemed by the sacrifice ordained throughout all eternity, of that Lamb who, by the eternal spirit, offered himself, without spot, to God. The words of the text, then, have always been true of all men, at all times:

"Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price."

Upon this great central mystery of the Redemption, hang all the practical duties of mankind. This is the foundation of the Sabbath first, and afterwards of the Lord's day; that one-seventh of our time should be given up to the service of God, as an acknowledgment, that we are not our own, but that we are his servants. In remembrance of this doctrine, Noah offered up the seventh part of the clean beasts and fowls, in sacrifice to God; and for the same reason, Abraham gave tithes of all to Melchizedec, the priest of the Most High God; and the sons of Levi, who received the office of the priesthood, were commanded to take tithes of the people, according to the law. It was not merely human law, which established the same duty in our own country, but the clear application of the one great doctrine of Redemption; that all mankind are bought with a price, and that they are not their own.

Persons as well as property, are included in this general obligation. For Redemption is altogether personal. When Jesus Christ died, it was not so much that he gave something that was his own, as that he gave Himself. And the effect of his sacrifice is not so much to save anything belonging to man, as to save man himself. This personal obligation was also typified in the law of Moses (in Exodus xiii. 15); by which all the first-born of children were required to be redeemed, in remembrance of the day when God brought Israel out of the house of bondage. Christian liberty is the exchanging the slavery of Satan for the service of Christ, as it is well explained in 1 Corinthians vii. 22: "He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's free man; likewise, also, he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price."

If, then, this be a certain truth, that neither our persons nor our property are our own, how can we account for the constant misapplication, which we hear on every side, of that text, rightly used in Scripture, by the only Being who can use it with truth: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?"—"There's the mistake," said John Wesley, "it is not your own." Most of the present evils of the world may be traced to this fatal mistake—the forgetfulness of the great practical duty flowing out of the doctrine of Redemption, that we are not our own, but that we are bought with a price.

We have seen that this is an eternal doctrine; and this thought saves a world of argument. If you speak to men now-a-days of Tithe, they tell you, that the Jewish law was abrogated at the coming of Jesus Christ. The obligation to keep the Lord's day holy, is supposed to rest only upon the Jewish Decalogue. The community of goods in the Apostolic Church, it is argued, however suitable to that age, was never intended to be made a permanent institution. And upon such grounds as these, men claim the right of using their time, their abilities and their property, as they please. The one answer to all these sophisms is in the assertion of the truth: that Redemption is an eternal purpose of God; that it took effect upon man from the first hour of the fall, and will continue to affect him even to the end of the world. He is bought with a price; and therefore time, money, talents—all are God's.

This simple rule admits of no exception; age, sex, time, place, make no difference. It is as certain now, and as binding in its obligation, as it was in the days of Melchezidec. It is the great foundation of the law of tithe, the ground-work of every act of Christian charity; as certainly, as if when men went into Egypt in former days, and there found the people still paying the fifth-part to the king, they traced it to the time when the Egyptians became Pharaoh's servants, and sold their cattle and their land, and lastly their own persons, for bread; and acknowledged that it was thus that the law

became established over the land of Egypt, that Pharaoh should have fifth part; so still more evidently must it be seen, that every divine law and human obligation sums up into the general fact, that there was a time when God bought us all with the price of the body and blood of his Blessed Son; and that, therefore, we are not free to appropriate to our own use any more than that portion, whether of time or of money, which God, who is entitled to claim the whole, gives back again to us, to be at our own disposal.

How can the amount of what God reserves to Himself be ascertained? Is it a fifth, as in Egypt; or a tenth, as in Judea; or a seventh, as it is in the case of time? That question will be asked only by those who think more of the letter than of the principle of the law. Those who forget the ground of the claim, will murmur even at the smallest assessment. Those, on the contrary, who know the root of the matter, will never be contented with the bare letter of the law. Even the Jew, Zaccheus, gave a half of his goods, when the law required only a tenth. The same spirit of love which broke off from the Christian converts the yoke of the law, made Barnabas the son of consolation, and many others, like him, sell their land, and bring the money, and lay it at the Apostles' feet. The spirit of Christian charity would have said of tithe in those days, what Christ said of the one leper. 'Were there not ten parts; but where are the nine? Is this all that is brought back, to

give glory to God?' What! offer only a tenth to Him who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son—and then, with Him, also, freely gives us all things—to think of giving Him a part instead of the whole, seems to renew again the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.

What a mistake, then, it is, to think that Christianity repeals the Jewish law, and justifies the withholding from God the things that are God's. Rather say that Moses, because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of Israel, demanded of them no more than a tenth; but from the beginning it was not so. From the time of the promulgation of the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, the same power which broke off the yoke of Satan, laid upon us His own—an easy yoke, and a light burden—but easy in the opposite way to that which men suppose: not light and easy by asking of us half our hearts, or half our property, and leaving the other half still to tempt us to try to serve Mammon rather than God—but a yoke, made light and easy by the entire renunciation of everything worldly: a yoke like that proffered to the young man in the Gospel, whom Christ invited to sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and then to take up his cross, and follow Him. The great advantage of a principle is, that it adapts itself to all cases, even where the letter of the law is inapplicable. Now we have seen the principle of the law of tithe to be derived from

the great saving Doctrine of Redemption. There may be many alterations of the letter of the law, and of the amount required, and of the mode of collection; but the true Christian, resting upon his own unchangeable Priesthood, after the order of Melchezidec, is a law unto himself. He will show the work of the law written upon his heart; he will pay his tithe; his seventh, his fifth, his half, or his all, to the New High Priest, which ariseth after the similitude of Melchezidec, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

All questions of conscience may be solved by this rule. If one man finds himself possessed by inheritance of property once dedicated to the service of Almighty God, what ought he to do? The law of the land protects him in the possession. His fathers and forefathers were conscientious men, and they saw no harm in retaining it. It is true that it bears still the marks of dedication in its ruined chapel, now turned into a barn; its ancient font used as a trough for horses; its burial-ground furrowed by the plough; it is true, that in an age when all tithe is grudged, he may make it tenfold more hateful by rigid exaction, and by applying it to worldly uses: but all this is strictly legal; it has been so for three hundred years: and why should a second reformation now be needed, to undo what the first reformation did, so much to his advantage? I ask for no alteration of the law—I leave that to Cæsar—far

less would I sanction any agrarian spoliation, or any dreams of socialism; but I would awake that conscience which may slumber, but can never die: that inward judge of right and wrong, which tells us more plainly than the tongue of man can speak, that what was once God's is God's for ever. What does this Society mean, which calls itself the Tithe Redemption Trust? Is there a Tithe-owner in England that will take money for what never did and never can belong to him? What the law of man has given, conscience will constrain him to give back. But how, shall I threaten him with the terrors of future judgment? That is in the Lord's hand. Shall I tell him of the curse of sacrilege; of great old houses dwindling down till they become extinct; of blighted hopes, and ruined fortunes; and lay all this to the charge of the usurpation of the patrimony of God? Who art thou that judgest another? There were sinners upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell; and there were other sinners, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices; and there are other sinners, yea, our own selves, who, unless we repent, shall all likewise perish.

What is it that we are claiming back, and urging our brethren so vehemently to restore? It is the tithe which some pious Christian dedicated (ages back) to the service of Christ. Was it law, or was it conscience? Conscience gave, and law protected the gift. The law may have changed, and now protects the wrong person in the posses-

sion of the gift, but conscience remains unchanged. Conscience was not a privilege of the men of olden time; it is our own birthright—our own bosom's lord. If I would touch the conscience of another, I must first exercise my own. If I would see the cause of Tithe Redemption prosper, I must pay my own redemption tithe. We shall not touch men's consciences by going out at once into the field to search for some tenth sheaf of corn, or some tenth lamb, which is exacted for the use of some lay impropriator; but by carefully scrutinizing all our items of expenditure, most of them the growth of ages later than the establishment of tithe; every exotic fruit, exquisite fish, and pampered fowl; every costly flower and precious jewel, and goodly apparel; every servant and horse and carriage; every piece of plate and gorgeous furniture; every treasure of painting or of sculpture, even every rare book; and, above all, by looking closely into those sources of revenue which are of modern years, the rents of palaces standing where scarcely a cow fed a few years ago; money locked in the funds, and yielding annually its untithed interest; of all and every one of these items of expenditure, or of these sources of income, it is our bounden duty to ask the question—has it paid tribute to whom tribute is due? Has it paid its Redemption Tithe in thankful acknowledgment of the mercy of that Saviour who bought us with the price of his own body and blood? I am a

stranger here, and I speak therefore with less confidence; but my impression is, that the tithe of which I now speak has not been paid. The proof seems to be this, that misery, and want and spiritual destitution has gone on increasing, while the nation was every year advancing in wealth and luxury. I shall not quote your own frightful reports of the state of the English poor, or repeat the well-known details of the want of churches or of schools. It is not necessary to recur to the terrors of that 10th of April, when it was a bold man who could venture to predict in the morning in whose hands his property would be at night. You know these things better than I do; and you are well aware, that but a little more provoking of the divine long-suffering might have changed, as it did in other countries, the ownership of everything that we call our own; and God, defrauded of his tithe, might have resumed the trust in which we had been found unfaithful.

It was socialism that you then feared. And what is the cure for socialism? Surely it is the return to the true spirit of the apostolic age, of which socialism is a godless counterfeit. It is to take care that no child, no widow, no orphan, no emigrant, no heathen shall be neglected in the daily distribution of all things needful, both for soul and body. What this may cost, after so many years of neglect, it is as impossible to tell, as it is to calculate what portion of our income may be

required for the purposes of the righteous war in which we are now engaged. All that we can call our own, is what neither our God nor our country demands. Yea, let Him take all, who gave all; not only all these earthly things, but his own Son, the brightness of His own glory, and the express image of His person.

I observe, in the Report of this Society, that but little has been done for the Redemption of Tithes during the past year. But much may have been done in establishing the principle which I have endeavoured to illustrate, of giving a definite portion of our income, and of cutting off all superfluous expenditure. My own Newzealanders have not been backward. In one of our native villages, 120 adult men signed an agreement last year to give a tithe of their produce to the maintenance of a minister. Many laymen, within my own acquaintance, have long acted upon this rule, some giving a tenth, and some even a fifth. I would commend this to your committee as a fruitful branch of your work, and one which, more than any other, will promote that restoration of the property of the Church which we all desire. I have called it, I believe, by its true name, a name not easily forgotten, Redemption Tithe, a thank offering to Almighty God, for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life: but above all, for His inestimable love, in the redemption of the world, by our Lord Jesus Christ

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