

THE COVENANTER.

DECEMBER, 1847.

LEVITICAL FUNCTIONS.

(BY JAS. R. WILLSON, D. D.)

THE Levites were ordained to administer, together with the Aaronic priesthood and elders, the whole temporalities of Christ's Church. "And the Lord said unto Moses, number all the first-born of the males among the children of Israel, from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names. And thou shalt take the Levites for me. (I am the Lord,) instead of all the first-born of the children of Israel." Num. iii. 40, 41. "Bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him, and they shall keep his charge and the charge of the whole congregation, before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle, and they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel to do the service of the tabernacle," ver. 6, 7, 8.

Under the patriarchal form of government, from Adam to Moses, the first-born in every household was endowed with the birthright, by which he was entitled to the exercise of authority to rule, after the death of his father, over the spiritual and temporal affairs, as a civil and ecclesiastical ruler, until his death. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, built altars and offered sacrifices, as God's priests. They also administered in the government of the family temporalities as civil magistrates. In the exercise of that patriarchal power, Jacob on his death-bed blessed his twelve sons, not with spiritual blessings only, but distributing among them the inheritance promised to Abraham—the whole land of Canaan. He also predicted a change of the patriarchal government to take place in the family of Abraham, in the election of an ecclesiastical and national civil government among his posterity. The sceptre of civil rule he gave to the tribe of Judah. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until the Shiloh come." Gen. xlix. 10. But the birthright was Joseph's as to property. "Blessings to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills." And he also obscurely intimated that the ecclesiastical government should be vested in the tribe of Levi. "I will divide them—Simeon and Levi—in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel," verse 7. Moses, in his blessing of the tribes, expounds Jacob's blessing with regard to Levi as embracing the ecclesiastical government in Israel. "And of Levi he said; Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with the Holy One." Deut. xxxiii. 8. That tribe was to be scattered in Israel, and dwell in the forty-eight Levitical cities. That change from the patriarchal to the ecclesiastical or national regimen was made in the wilderness. Then civil government, entirely distinct

from that of the church, was organized by divine appointment. The government of the Church was vested in the house of Aaron, one branch of the tribe of Levi. The males of all the other families of that tribe were ordained of God to administer the temporal affairs of the church, together with the elders and Aaronic priesthood. Their being taken in place of all the first-born in Israel plainly teaches the nature and extent of their functions.

1st. As the first-born had a right from God by their birth to rule over property in the household; so God transferred that authority to officers ordained of the tribe of Levi. 2d. That as the patriarch or first-born had the same right of government over the whole family connexion that a father now has over the possessions of the household, so, the Levites had authority to administer together with the other officers of the church the whole temporalities of the church.

But we are not left to inference however plain and certain as to the extent of their power in the performance of their functions, in the administration of the public property. It is expressly asserted in the enumeration of their powers:—"And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, in the charge of the children of Israel," the tabernacle itself, the altar, the outer court, and the whole furniture, all these they are commanded to keep. For the performance of all these important duties, they are ordained with the same kind of solemnity with which the Aaronic priesthood were consecrated to God. "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them to cleanse them; sprinkle water upon them to purify them, and let them shave all their flesh, and wash their clothes, and they shall be clean." Num. viii. 6, 7. And Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites, according to all that the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them. And the Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them as an offering before the Lord; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them. And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation, before Aaron and before his sons; as the Lord had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them." Num. viii. 20, 21, 22. The setting apart of the Levites with all the solemn forms of their consecration for the performance of their official duties, was appointed as a means of preserving the children of Israel from experiencing the tokens of God's wrath. It was "that there be no plague among the children of Israel when they come nigh unto the sanctuary."

When the authority to rule over the temporalities of the church was taken from the first-born it was not transferred to the people. Such a transfer would have been as preposterous as to take the sceptre from the hand of the head of the family and commit it to the hands of the children.

To show that the whole power of these rulers over temporal things, is not at all from the people, the Levites proper, as well as the Aaronic priesthood and the ruling elders, were not chosen by a popular vote, but elected of God as well as ordained to their holy office.

The whole practice of the Church, from the institution and consecration of the Levites in the wilderness to the death of Christ, illustrates and confirms our doctrine of the Levitical functions. In all the journeyings of the children of Israel they carried the tabernacle and all its utensils,

and were present with the priests at the taking down and the setting up of the tabernacle. They were present with them also at the altar, to bring forward the victims, slay the sacrifices, and wash them. Not only on the great day of atonement and the other annual solemnities, and new moons, but at the offering up of every morning and evening daily sacrifice. In all these matters they officiated in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with their brethren the other functionaries waiting upon the Lord and doing his work in all temporal things. At all these stated times the officers of Christ's house met together and co-operated jointly for the well ordering of these affairs in the Lord's house. Our doctrine is further illustrated and established, by the charge which David gave to his son Solomon for building the temple. "Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat. And the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of the Lord, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things. Also for the courses of the Priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the Lord. He gave of gold by weight for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service; silver also for all instruments of silver by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service." 1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 14. The temple of Solomon was an enlargement of the plan of the tabernacle, came in its room, was substantially subject to all its regulations, and, like it, was a most significant type of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true tabernacle erected of God and not of man. In this temple there were rooms appropriated as repositories for the safe keeping of the church's property, called the treasury of the Lord. Like the government of the utensils of the tabernacle, the whole building with all its furniture and appurtenances was put under the official care of the Levites. For the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and for all the vessels of the house of the Lord, were committed to their management. All this was done on one principle, that the temple and all the other property of the church belong to the Lord Jesus Christ as his, being consecrated to him for his service by his saints. He is the minister of the sanctuary, the deacon, as it is in the original (*διακονος*), and so must all be administered by his own officers whom he appoints for that purpose. All the property dedicated by David and Solomon was under the hand of Jehiel the Levite.

All that David did by the Spirit of the Lord in these as well as other things was performed by Solomon at the dedication of the temple. "And all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark. And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up." 2 Chron. viii. 4, 5. "And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place, (for all the priests that were present were sanctified,) and did not wait by courses, also the Levites which were the singers, all of them, of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthan, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests, sounding with trumpets."

At this dedication there were assembled, elders, and priests and Levites, all in the performance of their appropriate official functions. The singers were Levites in the restricted sense of the word, all the priests of the house of Aaron are frequently called by the name Levites, as they all belonged to that tribe. In this sense it is employed. "But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. For the Lord had spoken unto Moses, saying, Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel. But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it; they shall bear the tabernacle and all the vessels thereof, and they shall minister unto it and encamp round about the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle setteth forward the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony; that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony." Num. i. 47-53. For want of attending to this use of the term Levite, and not remembering that the Aaronic priests are often called Levites, some texts in the Old Testament have been sadly misinterpreted; as when it is said the Levites taught the people, it has been inferred that those Levitical officers, not of the house of Aaron, were invested with authority to preach the gospel. The object of this erroneous inference has been to set aside the argument drawn from the Old Testament Levite, to prove the power of the New Testament deacon over all the public property of Christ's Church.

(To be continued.)

INDIANS OF BRITISH GUIANA.

Our readers will find the following narrative to be one of far more than ordinary interest; it is indeed a most striking testimony to the value of missionary labour amongst the most degraded people. It is taken from an address made at a missionary anniversary in London in May 1846, by the Rev. J. H. Bernau, of the Church Missionary Society, who was then on a visit to England for his health.—(Ed. Cov.)

These poor Indians, although once mighty tribes, are now but a remnant, wandering about in the vast forests of that continent. They live in a perfect state of nudity. They are complete savages. They have no desire but to eat and drink. They are not idolaters: they believe in the Great Spirit who made heaven and earth, and from whom they receive nothing but good; but they do not trouble themselves about Him, because He does not trouble them. As long as they are well, they are the most proud and independent people that can be met with; but when sickness overtakes them, their troubles commence; and instead of going to the Creator they turn to the devil, and make propitiations to him.

The Mission was established in the year 1827 by the Society sending a catechist to Demarara. Eventually a settlement was formed at Bartica Point; but on my arrival there, in 1837, I did not find a single Indian. The catechist informed me that seventy persons had died of the measles, and that the rest had fled to the woods. My heart would