

*ST. PAUL AS A MAN OF BUSINESS.*

I. WE are all familiar with St. Paul's self-imposed law of being "chargeable to no man." He who might have claimed a maintenance at the hands of those to whom he ministered, preferred, with a noble independence, to labour with his own hands, and so provided not only for his own necessities but for those that were with him (Acts xx. 34; 1 Cor. ix. 18). He had thus taught men, by example as well as by precept, that so labouring they ought to support the weak, that it was in very deed "more blessed to give than to receive." We connect this power to earn his livelihood with that new sense of the dignity of mechanic labour which entered into the life of the Hebrew race, and yet more into that of the Church of Christ, and taught men to think of it, not as belonging to the bondage of the slave, but as part of the freedom of the free. We call to mind the Rabbinic saying, that he who does not teach his son a trade teaches him to be a thief; the Rabbinic example of Hillel, who worked as a carpenter; the yet higher pattern of that Divine life in the workshop at Nazareth. But for the most part, if I mistake not, we think of the Apostle as taking his place simply among the *ouvrier* class, receiving his day's wages for his day's work, abandoning altogether any advantages of position which he had gained by inheritance or by his own exertions. I wish to call attention to some passages which, rightly understood, seem to me to suggest a different conclusion, and to bring out a comparatively new aspect of the

Apostle's life and character. The leading text on the subject is, of course, that which records of him that "he came unto Aquila and Priscilla, and, because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and wrought; for by their occupation they were tent-makers" (Acts xviii. 3). It is from this perhaps that our common notion has been mainly derived. But the tone of the passage surely implies that he did not work under them as a labourer, but with them as a partner. To make and fashion, for tents and other like uses, the rough sailcloth of goats' hair, which was the staple manufacture of Cilicia, and perpetuated the memory of its origin in the Latin *Cilicium* (sack-cloth), was naturally the occupation of St. Paul, and Aquila came from a country which presented like conditions with Cilicia, and was therefore probably conspicuous for the same industry. But Aquila and Priscilla appear as holding a position and possessing a culture above that of the class of craftsmen. Apollos, the eloquent Jew of Alexandria, submits himself to their teaching (Acts xviii. 20). All the Churches of the Gentiles owed them thanks (Rom. xvi. 4). They had a Church in their house at Rome, *i. e.*, either they were wealthy enough to have a house which served as the meeting-place for the Christians in their neighbourhood, or those whom they employed were numerous enough to form a congregation. With such as these St. Paul worked on a footing of equality, contributing, we may well believe, in some small measure at least, capital as well as labour. In other towns, where no such special opportunities presented themselves as at Corinth,

we may think of him as practising the same occupation by himself, taking a shop, as at Rome he for two years occupied a hired house with his companions, working with his own hands and exposing his wares for sale there or in the public market-place. This seems a far more probable picture of his life than that he should voluntarily have taken his place among the workmen, slaves or others, of a Heathen master or of any unbelieving Jew. His habit of fixing his quarters for many months in the same city, as at Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, made this, of course, a perfectly feasible arrangement. But where it was possible, companionship with others who were like-minded with himself had, of course, many advantages, and we see in the case of Aquila and Priscilla that the Apostle gladly profited by it. I venture to think that we find traces of yet another partnership of like kind in the Epistle to Philemon.

II. Into the main argument of that Epistle I need not enter. The mention of Epaphras, Marcus, Demas, Lucas, Archippus, in it and in the Epistle to the Colossians, points to that 'as the Church to which Philemon and Onesimus, "one of you," belonged (Col. iv. 9-17; Philemon 23-25); and yet it is at least doubtful whether Colosse had ever seen the countenance of the Apostle in the flesh (Col. ii. 1). How, then, had St. Paul and Philemon met? In what way had their intimacy become so close and dear that the heart of the Apostle at once overflows with tenderness and seeks relief from that emotion in genial playfulness and *jeux de mots*? What led Onesimus, finding himself as a runaway

slave in the great labyrinth of Rome, to make his way to the hired house near the Prætorian barracks in which the Apostle dwelt ?

I find an answer to these questions in words the full significance of which seems hitherto, so far as I am aware, not to have been recognized: "*If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on my account. I Paul write it* (ἔγραψα, as the epistolary aorist, past for present) *with mine own hand; I will repay it*" (Philemon 18, 19).

Commonly the word "partner" has been referred by commentators to the share which the Apostle and Philemon alike had in the inheritance of the Divine kingdom, and their communion in all the graces and blessings that flowed out of it. St. Paul makes his appeal to his disciple, on this view, on the grounds of Christian brotherhood. "If you recognize me as a brother, recognize the slave whom I have made my son as a brother also." I venture to think that a more definite sense coheres far better with the context, and throws light upon all the circumstances of the history. As the sons of Zebedee were "partners" on the Sea of Galilee with the sons of Jona, so (the self-same word being used here as in Luke v. 10) may Paul and Philemon have been in some period of St. Paul's work in Asia, at Ephesus or elsewhere. Assume that the relation between the two was that of partnership—that Philemon or Archippus took the place in the tent-making firm which had been occupied by Aquila and Priscilla, and all explains itself. Thus their house, with its congrega-

tion of male and female artisans, would be as a Church in itself. Thus St. Paul would know how the wealth gained by labour had refreshed the "bowels of the saints," and to what extent the labour of the idle and dishonest slave had before been unprofitable. Thus, too, we can understand how it was that when the runaway found himself at Rome, he made his way to the hired house where the Apostle dwelt, as trusting in his kindness and forbearance, that trust resting on his memory of past experience. It is, however, on the words which immediately follow that this hypothesis throws most light. What more natural in such a case, with partnership accounts yet unbalanced, with the knowledge that his partner had suffered either through actual theft or through loss of his slave's labour, than that the Apostle should, in clear straightforward business terms, say to his friend: "If you look on me as your partner, receive him whom I send as my representative on the same footing. *Debit my account with the amount of the loss, if any, you have sustained through his default.*" If, as was in the nature of the case probable, we think of him as dictating the letter to Onesimus, who was to deliver it, we can picture to ourselves the impression which this generous offer would make on the amanuensis: how there would be a moment's pause, how the Apostle would seize the reed pen, which had been before in the hand of the scribe, and, in the large ungainly characters by which his signature was identified, add his autograph promise, and so turn the letter into a bond: "I PAUL WRITE IT WITH MINE OWN HAND; I WILL REPAY." No

sooner is this done than, with delicate tact and warm emotion, he reminds Philemon of the greater debt which might well alter the character of the balance-sheet. Philemon owed his own self, his true life, to the Apostle. His friend asks in return (still playing on the name<sup>1</sup> of the slave, who is now a brother) that he may have, not "joy," as in the A. V., but "profit," or "interest," on that greater debt.

III. A yet more conspicuous instance of practical sagacity in administration is seen in St. Paul's management of the fund raised in all the Churches that he founded, for the impoverished disciples of Jerusalem. Here the Acts and the Epistles coincide with and supplement each other. As far as the Acts are concerned, we are at a loss to understand the special reason that led so large a company as that mentioned in xx. 4 to join him in his last journey to Jerusalem, and it is only incidentally, from a sentence in his speech before Felix (Acts xxiv. 17), that we learn that he came "after many years" of absence with "alms for his nation and offerings." From the Epistles to the Corinthians, however, we are able to ascertain the plan and purpose of that journey, and to estimate the admirable organization of that work of charity. (1) The rule laid down for each individual disciple was that on the first day of the week each should lay by him in store whatever he had been prospered in out of the earnings of the previous week (1 Cor. xvi. 2). I cannot contend, strongly as I approve the principle of what is called

<sup>1</sup> *Ναὶ ἀδελφε, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην.* The play upon the name Onesimus is, indeed, more direct than in the *εὐχρηστός* of v. 11.

a weekly offertory, that the practice derives any direct support from this injunction. The words *παρ' εαυτῷ τιθέτω* cannot possibly mean "let him on that day contribute to the alms-box or common fund of the Church," and admit of no other explanation than that, week by week, the man should put by at home what would then be ready without trouble and delay when the Apostle came. This would avoid the necessity of an urgent hurried "collection," with all its attendant inconveniences. But the position of being treasurer and trustee for so large a fund was obviously one which exposed him who filled it to the suspicion of lower natures, who judged of others by themselves, and brought with it a natural anxiety "that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us" (2 Cor. viii. 20). Thus he sought to provide for honest things, not only "in the sight of the Lord," to whom in his inmost conscience he appealed as the witness of his integrity, but also "in the sight of men," who were looking on with jealousy. For this purpose, in plain, practical, business phrase, he meant to *have his accounts audited*. And so one brother, whose praise was in the Gospel (I do not care now to inquire whether it were St. Luke or another, though I hold to the traditional view, and think that it has been too hastily abandoned by most recent commentators), was chosen of the Churches (obviously the Churches of Macedonia, of which Philippi was the most prominent), to travel with him and the treasure of which he was the bearer. Compare this with the list of names in Acts xx. 4, and it is, I think, an almost irresistible inference that each Church of those who joined in the contribution

nominated its own representatives, one or more, who were to go up to Jerusalem with the Apostle, ready to verify the amounts which in their name he was about to pay into the common treasury, which was under the control either of the successors of the Committee of Seven, whom we commonly call Deacons, or of St. James and the elders of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

It is right to add that the suggestion that St. Paul's companions on his last journey to Jerusalem had "something to do" with the collection for the saints, is found in Conybeare and Howson's *Life of the Apostle*, but it remains unnoticed in popular commentaries like Alford's and Wordsworth's, and it is likely, therefore, if I mistake not, to be new to many of the readers of these pages. I have at any rate endeavoured to present it in a more definite and tangible form, and one which throws more light on the character and sagacity of the great Apostle.

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<sup>1</sup> It is, perhaps, worthy of note that the number of names given in Acts xx. 4 is seven, as though that number had come to be recognised as the proper standard of a finance committee. Singularly enough it fell in, not only with the precedent of Acts vi., but with the institution of the *Septemviri Epulones*, who managed such matters in the trade guilds of Rome, and probably also with that of the collectors and distributors of alms attached to every synagogue. I venture to think, in spite of Lightfoot's warning (*quare septem eligendi, dicat cui est audacia*), that there is nothing overbold in pointing to these coincidences as probably explaining the choice of the number in both the instances recorded in the Acts. It is true that St. Luke, if he were a delegate, would make the number eight; but it is possible that either he, or (more probably) Timotheus, went not in an official character, but as the personal friend of the Apostle.

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