

*THE HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP.*

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20.

ST. PAUL wrote this letter from Rome. Writing at Rome, he addressed himself to the Church of a Roman colony. It was natural, therefore, that he should use metaphors and illustrations drawn from civic rights and duties. Both in Rome and in its colonies the privileges of citizenship were great, and greatly prized. Rome was the centre and mistress of the civilized world. The Roman citizen was not only safe wherever he went, but honoured and admired. He held himself to be the equal of tributary princes and kings, if not their superior. He was eligible to the highest offices of the State. He had a voice in the election of the ministers and rulers of the Commonwealth, even up to the godlike Emperor himself. He was exempted from many burdens, taxes, benevolences, exactions, imposed on the subject races. He could neither be scourged uncondemned, nor examined by torture. Even if found guilty of the foulest crime, he could no more be crucified than an Englishman could be impaled; while, if he were cast in any civil suit, he had a right of appeal to Cæsar. If he were a man of any energy and intelligence, he had boundless opportunities of acquiring wealth; if he were poor and indolent, bread and games were provided for him at the public expense, baths were built for him, and theatres; the public gardens and walks were open to him; he might enroll himself among the clients, and so secure the protection, of some wealthy and powerful noble; he could take his share in the imperial doles and largesses, which were of constant recurrence. All this he might do and claim, not as a favour, but as a right, simply because he was a citizen. And though, on the one hand, these rights and privileges did much to foster indolence, the spirit of faction, and the

love of pleasure, on their nobler side they did much to quicken and encourage public spirit, to give the Roman a simple and dignified bearing, a haughty and indomitable courage, a capacity for handling public affairs and for carrying on the public service. To be adopted into the ruling and imperial race was, therefore, a natural object of ambition to the abler, wealthier, and more high-spirited subjects of that vast empire.

And this ambition might be attained even by those who were not born in Italy. The Roman empire, as subsequently the Roman Church, aimed at absorbing all its more capable vassals, and opened the highest careers to all who were competent to pursue them. Any man who had distinguished himself, nay, at last any man who cared to expend "a large sum," and any city or state which had rendered a great public service, or had displayed a conspicuous fidelity to the Republic, or had espoused the cause of a triumphant faction, might hope to be admitted to the Roman citizenship, and even to all the rights and immunities inherited by the Italian stock. Many of the cities visited by St. Paul, both in Asia, and in Europe, possessed this *jus Italicum* as it was called, *i.e.*, they were accorded an equality of political rights and functions with the free-born citizens of Rome. Like them, they could vote in public elections, aspire to public office, claim exemption from exactions and shameful punishments, and were protected wherever they went by the same world-wide authority.

Philippi was one of these Roman colonies; and hence it was called "*Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis*." It was the seat of government for the province, the market and centre of commerce. It had its public baths, theatres, and gardens, its doles and largesses, its suffrages and exemptions. And as all colonies are apt to take an exaggerated pride in the glory of the mother City or State, to ape its manners

and customs, to carry its honours with a boastful difference, so in Philippi, that lesser and provincial Rome, Rome herself was out-Romed. The sixteenth chapter of Acts, which records St. Paul's visit to Philippi, is full of this colonial spirit. The duumvirs, prætors, and lictors swell and fret across the page. The heedless insolence with which Paul and Silas are treated so long as they are taken to be mere travelling Asiatics, their appeal from mob law to the tribunal of the public magistrate, the ring of pride in the very charge alleged against them: "These men, mere Jews, do teach customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, *we being Romans*;" the high Roman spirit of the jailer who cannot endure to live when he seems to have failed in his duty to the State; St. Paul's indignant assertion of his violated citizenship, and the affright of the magistrates when they learn that they have scourged Romans uncondemned: all these incidents remind us that we are in a Roman "colony," and call up its very form and pressure, its very life and spirit, before us.

To this spirit, so rife in Philippi, to this ingrained pride of citizenship, St. Paul constantly appeals in his Epistle, thus making himself a Philippian to the Philippians, that he might the more effectually win them to the faith and service of Christ. That appeal is evident in the brief passage before us. What he virtually says to the Christian citizens of Philippi is: "You possess, and are proud to possess, the citizenship of Rome; but, remember, you have a still higher and nobler citizenship. Heaven is your true home, the kingdom of heaven your true commonwealth, the spirit of heaven your true spirit. You are members of that great spiritual and eternal kingdom of which *Christ* is Emperor and Lord. And this citizenship confers on you both rights and duties,—rights of access and appeal to the heavenly King, exemption not from base punishments alone, but also from base and degrading lusts. You are guarded from the

malice and violence of the principalities and powers of evil and of an evil world. You are fed and cherished by the bounty and grace of the King eternal, immortal, invisible. You owe Him allegiance therefore, and a constant heartfelt service. Take pride in Him, then, and in the ties that bind you to him. Fight for your privileges and immunities; play the man; prove yourself good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Assert and maintain your spiritual freedom. Subordinate your private interests to the public welfare. Labour to extend the borders of the Divine Kingdom. Let this heavenly citizenship be more and dearer to you than the civic rights and exemptions in which you are wont to boast."

So, again, in Chapter i. Verses 27-29, with an evident use of this same figure of citizenship, St. Paul exhorts them to stand fast in one spirit, to strive with one soul for the faith of the Gospel, that by their courage and fearlessness they may daunt their adversaries; nay, he exhorts them to welcome the very pains and privations they endure in the service of Christ; for, he argues, "Unto you it is *given*," *i.e.*,—Unto you it is *conceded* as a great and special honour,—"not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for his sake." Courage to do, to dare, and to endure on behalf of the heavenly State and Kingdom into which they had entered by faith, was the special virtue to which the holy Apostle called and urged them in the opening chapter of his Epistle.

And, in like manner, as we learn from our context, it was to this self-same virtue that he summoned them when he reminded them that their citizenship was in heaven. There were many around, if not among, them whose god was their belly, whose glory their shame, whose mind was bent on worldly ends; many who were imbued with the fleshly and self-pampering lusts which the indulgences granted to the Roman citizen did much to foster and

develop. How was this worldly, carnal, self-seeking spirit, which made men "enemies to the cross of Christ," and doomed them to "perdition," to be overcome and cast out? Only as the Church at Philippi breathed a higher spirit, even a heavenly. Only as they felt and shewed that they were citizens of a nobler empire, and were possessed of rights and immunities which transcended all that Rome, or the world, could confer.

In short, St. Paul knew that a strong spirit can only be bound and spoiled by a spirit stronger than itself. The spirit of Rome met the Philippians everywhere, in all the details of their daily life; in the baths, the market-place, the forum, in all their intercourse with their neighbours and with the world; and this spirit, at least in the Apostolic age, was a spirit of pride, of self-indulgence and self-sufficiency, of conquest and disregard for the claims of servile and subject races. It was a spirit, therefore, against which those who had the mind of Christ were bound to strive, which it was their plain duty to renounce and subdue. But *how* was this worldly spirit to be cast out save by the incoming of a higher and an *unworldly* spirit? how were men to be taught to think less of Rome except as they were induced to think more of that divine Kingdom, in which there is neither Roman nor Greek, neither barbarian nor Jew, neither bond nor free?

It was thus, as Macaulay points out, that Cromwell met and conquered the world of his day, as represented by the Stuart and his adherents. Arrayed against him stood the king and his court, nobles and prelates, cavaliers and clergy, poets and dramatists,—all that was stately, reverend, brilliant, fascinating in the England of the time. There was no possibility, as he soon saw, of his overcoming such an array by the aid of merely professional soldiers, of men who felt the charm of the world as keenly as those against whom they fought, of "mere tapsters and serving men,"

as he called them. Before he could hope to overcome the Cavaliers he must enlist against them men of a still stouter and higher spirit than their own. And he found them in the Puritans. For these were men who, with all their faults and defects, made it the chief end of their lives to know, serve, and enjoy God; men to whom England was dear, but the kingdom of heaven dearer still. "*They* recognized no title of superiority but the Divine favour; and, confident of that favour, they despised all the accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not found in the registers of heralds, they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with hands; their diadems crowns of glory which should never fade away. On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt; for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand." They, if ever men did, felt their citizenship, their true commonwealth, to be in heaven, and valued the English commonwealth only, or mainly, as it could be conformed to "the pattern on the Mount."

Now it was this very Puritan spirit, strained however of its sourness and fanaticism, which St. Paul sought to quicken in the Philippians, in order that they might victoriously contend with the subtle and potent influences of the Roman world. And, therefore, he strove to impress upon them the conviction that they were citizens of a more august empire, were called to a nobler warfare, and might claim ampler and more enduring immunities and rights.

Instead of standing helpless and dismayed, and feeling that they, "a few poor men," were summoned to encounter the forces of an empire wide and various as the world, he wanted them to feel that they were citizens of a kingdom which embraced all the good and wise of all ages, past, present, and to come; that they were even in close and intimate alliance with the spirits of just men made perfect, and an innumerable company of angels, as well as with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn; and that therefore they were citizens of an empire which as far transcends that of Rome as the heavens are higher than the earth.

Nor has the need for this appeal to a generous public spirit, for this high motive to courage and endurance, passed away. The world, the spirit of the world, is still with us. In modern England, as in ancient Rome, it meets us at every step, now with its charms, and now with its terrors. It is as subtle, as penetrating, as ubiquitous and multiform, as of old. It claims a home, or at least a right of way, in every heart. It often looks out upon us from the faces we love best and speaks to us through their lips, persuading us to prefer ease to duty, gain to principle, the praise of men to the approval of God. It takes a thousand forms in the streets through which we pass, in the transaction of business, in the public duties we discharge, in our private pleasures and amusements, in the books we read, and the friends with whom we converse. It travels with us wherever we go. It lurks in the very air we breathe, and in the whole round of our personal and social conditions. It is *not* to be evaded; it must be faced, subdued, conquered. And in this incessant conflict with the law and spirit of the world, in which our own hearts often play us false, we need the aid of every motive and inducement open to us. St. Paul suggests many such motives and incentives, and among others, this: he would have us habitually

cherish a noble pride in the fact that, if we are Christ's men, if we believe in the truths He taught and are trying to follow in his steps, we are the happy citizens of a vast empire the seat and centre of which is in heaven; we have been admitted to a goodly spiritual fellowship, to a select and imperial strain, which embraces all the wise and righteous men who have served their kind since first recorded time began. He would have us remember that, from the first, God has been gathering together his elect, —not Abraham, and Moses, and David alone, with the Hebrew prophets and saints, but also Melchizedek, Job, Jethro, Confucius, Sakya Mouni, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, with all the heathen sages and moralists, statesmen and poets, who have taught truth and wrought righteousness, who have toiled and suffered for the good of the human race and helped to draw earth nearer heaven: and that God has been thus gathering them together and making them citizens of one high kingdom not for their own sakes alone, but that through them the whole world may be redeemed into the love and service of righteousness.

And is not his advice good and sound advice? *Is it not a most animating thought that we are not called to encounter the subtle and potent spirit of the world, which meets us at every step, unfriended and alone; that we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses who have won the battle which we are fighting now, and by a noble army who share the conflict with us and urge us by voice and example to play the man? The consciousness that he was one of the ruling race gave pride and dignity to the port of the Roman, sustained him amid a thousand perils and toils, and enabled him to face death itself without a thought of fear. And we Englishmen are surely not destitute of the pride of race. It is that pride, it is the thought "I too am an Englishman," or "What will they say in England?" which has carried us through innumerable enterprises, adventures,*

hazards at home and abroad, in the Arctic seas and on the sultry plains of Hindostan. And the similar but higher motive, "I too am a Christian"; "I belong to the wise and good of all races and all lands"; "Unworthy as I am, God has made me one with them, a citizen of the same great city," could not fail to animate us, to quicken us to courage and endeavour, did we but cherish it as we should. If we held our Christian calling to be our highest honour; if we deeply felt that to be a servant of Christ, a lover of truth and righteousness, was more and better than to attain any wealth, rank, distinction which the world can confer; if looking backward through the corridors of time and gazing on the effigies of the wisest and best of every age, we could say with a swelling heart, "I too am of them"—should we not be a higher manner of men than we are? When that chilling sense of loneliness and failure settles on us which paralyses the very nerves and sinews of action, and we are prompted to throw up the endeavour to do good and to become good, what new warmth and courage and hope would make a new summer in the soul did we but remember that we are members of a vast spiritual commonwealth to which we owe suit and service, and from which we may confidently expect sympathy and approval? When young men, away from home and its hallowed and restraining influences, strangers perhaps in a strange land, are tempted to do some great wickedness and sin against God, would it not help them to resist temptation, to be true to their Christian principles and convictions, were they habitually and vividly to realize the fact that they are members of a great and august community extending through all ages and all worlds, the honour of which is in some measure in their hands, and that, if they yield, they not only bring a stain on that honour, but lessen the sum of good influences which are at work for the redemption of the world? In fine, is there any conceivable set of circumstances, any post of danger,

any conspiracy of opportunity with desire, any occasion of honourable service, in which St. Paul appeals to the public spirit of his readers, in which his motive, "I too am a citizen of the heavenly kingdom," would not be at once an incentive and a safeguard?

If not, it becomes an urgent question, "How far do we cherish this generous public spirit, and make his motive our own?" So far as I have observed no citizen of this great country is ashamed of being an Englishman, or at all backward in avowing it. As a rule it is with a tone of some pride that most of us acknowledge when the question of nationality arises, "I am English." But are we equally ready with the avowal, "I am a *Christian*," and equally proud of it?

When men of business meet they do not blush to talk of money and investments, of how much this man is worth and how much that. Are we as ready to talk of Religion, or at least to shew that we love it as much as they love business and its gains? When Christian men join some group in the exchange, the club, or some public place in which questions of policy or finance are being discussed, if any unprincipled or corrupt device should be commended, or any filthy jest be broken, do they invariably enter a manly protest, or firmly decline to take part in any base scheme on the express ground that it *is* base, opposed to the Christian law and spirit, or leave the group in which such license is allowed? Do they not, at least sometimes, and in some cases, take part in the talk as though they too mistook money or success for the chief good, or feebly snigger at the jest they ought to have rebuked, or even cap it with another jest as broad? And are *these* the men to conquer and cast out the evil spirit of the world?

It will never be well with us, the kingdom of God will never come, until we give our whole heart to his love and service. We shall never bring unity and peace into our

own lives, and much less into the world at large, until we who are called after Christ are even prouder to bear his worthy Name than we are to bear that of Englishmen; until we prove that our "citizenship is in heaven" by the pure and heavenly spirit we carry into all the affairs of life. If we really believe, as we profess to believe, the Name of Christ to be above every name, it is simply impossible that we should ever blush to claim it. Rather, we shall count all else but loss that we may win Christ and be found in Him, and so prove ourselves not wholly unworthy of the Name we bear. We shall even count it all joy when to us also it is *conceded* that we should strive and suffer for his Name sake. We shall glory in Him as the very incarnation of all beauty and honour, all righteousness and love, and be willing, if need be, to lay down our very lives in his service.

EDITOR.

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### BRIEF NOTICES.

THE SPEAKER'S COMMENTARY. Edited by *Rev. Canon Cook, M.A.* (London: Murray). By the issue of Volume IV. of the New Testament series, this great work is at last completed. We offer the learned Editor our hearty congratulations on the happy and successful close of his anxious and laborious task, a task which has extended over eighteen years, and must, by the very nature of the case, have been attended by many difficulties and cares.

The final volume—which includes *Hebrews* by Dr. Kay, *James* by Dr. Scott, *1st Peter* by Canon Cook, *2nd Peter* and *Jude* by Dr. Lumby, the Epistles of *John* by the Bishop of Derry, and *Revelation* by Dr. Lee—is well up to the average standard attained in the previous volumes, the contributions of Dr. Scott and Dr. Alexander being most to our mind, and, in our judgment, most consonant, both in form and style, with the proposed aims of the work.

But it is not of this last volume so much as of the whole Com-