

suggested by those of other seers recorded in the O.T. If so, we may believe that it is not without cause that these passages, and such parentheses as xvi. 15, etc., come in where they do; but in interpreting the book as a whole we may set them aside. They bear each their own meaning, which is usually plain enough; but they do not advance the story, or elucidate the meaning of the rest.

W. H. SIMCOX.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON.

III.

“Wherefore, though I have all boldness in Christ to enjoin thee that which is befitting, yet for love’s sake I rather beseech, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now a prisoner also of Christ Jesus: I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus, who was aforetime unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me.”—PHILEM. 8-11 (Rev. Ver.).

AFTER honest and affectionate praise of Philemon, the Apostle now approaches the main purpose of his letter. But even now he does not blurt it out at once. He probably anticipated that his friend was justly angry with his runaway slave, and therefore, in these verses, he touches a kind of prelude to his request with what we should call the finest tact, if it were not so manifestly the unconscious product of simple good feeling. Even by the end of them he has not ventured to say what he wishes done, though he has ventured to introduce the obnoxious name. So much persuading and sanctified ingenuity does it sometimes take to induce good men to do plain duties which may be unwelcome.

These verses not only present a model for efforts to lead men in right paths, but they unveil the very spirit of Christianity in their pleadings. Paul’s persuasives to Philemon are echoes of Christ’s persuasives to Paul. He had learned his method from his Master, and had himself experienced

that gentle love was more than commandments. Therefore he softens his voice to speak to Philemon, as Christ had softened His to speak to Paul. We do not arbitrarily "spiritualize" the words, but simply recognise that the Apostle moulded his conduct after Christ's pattern, when we see here a mirror reflecting some of the highest truths of Christian ethics.

I. Here is seen love which beseeches where it might command. The first word, "wherefore," leads back to the preceding sentence, and makes Philemon's past kindness to the saints the reason for his being asked to be kind now. The Apostle's confidence in his character, and in his being amenable to the appeal of love, made Paul waive his apostolic authority, and sue instead of commanding. There are people, like the horse and the mule, who understand only rough imperatives, backed by force; but they are fewer than we are apt to think, and perhaps gentleness is never wholly thrown away. No doubt, there must be adaptation of method to different characters, but we should try gentleness before we make up our minds that to try it is to throw pearls before swine.

The careful limits put to apostolic authority here deserve notice. "I might be much bold in Christ to command." He has no authority in himself, but he has in Christ. His own personality gives him none, but his relation to his Master does. It is a distinct assertion of right to command, and an equally distinct repudiation of any such right, except as derived from his union with Jesus.

He still further limits his authority by that noteworthy clause, "that which is befitting." His authority does not stretch so far as to create new obligations, or to repeal plain laws of duty. There was a standard by which his commands were to be tried. He appeals to Philemon's own sense of moral fitness, to his natural conscience, enlightened by communion with Christ.

Then comes the great motive which he will urge, "for love's sake"—not merely his to Philemon, nor Philemon's to him, but the bond which unites all Christian souls together, and binds them all to Christ. "That grand, sacred principle," says Paul, "bids me put away authority, and speak in entreaty." Love naturally beseeches, and does not command. The harsh voice of command is simply the imposition of another's will, and it belongs to relationships in which the heart has no share. But wherever love is the bond, grace is poured into the lips, and "I order" becomes "I pray." So that even where the outward form of authority is still kept, as in a parent to young children, there will ever be some endearing word to swathe the harsh imperative in tenderness, like a sword blade wrapped about with wool, lest it should wound. Love tends to obliterate the hard distinction of superior and inferior, which finds its expression in laconic orders and silent obedience. It seeks not for mere compliance with commands, but for oneness of will. Its entreaties are more powerful than imperatives. The lightest wish breathed by loved lips is stronger than all stern injunctions, often, alas! than all laws of duty. The heart is so tuned as only to vibrate to that one tone. The rocking stones, which all the storms of winter may howl round and not move, can be set swinging by a light touch. Una leads the lion in a silken leash. Love controls the wildest nature. The demoniac, whom no chains can bind, is found sitting at the feet of incarnate gentleness; so the wish of love is all-powerful with loving hearts, and its faintest whisper louder and more imperative than all the trumpets of Sinai.

There is a large lesson here for all human relationships. Fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, friends and companions, teachers and guides of all sorts, should set their conduct by this pattern, and let the law of love sit ever upon their lips. Authority is the weapon of a weak

man, who is afraid of his own power to get himself obeyed, or of a selfish one, who seeks for mechanical submission, rather than for the fealty of willing hearts. Love is the weapon of a strong man who can cast aside the trappings of superiority, and is never loftier than when he descends, nor more absolute than when he abjures authority, and appeals with love to love. Men are not to be dragooned into goodness. If mere outward acts are sought, it may be enough to impose another's will in orders as laconic as a drill sergeant's word of command; but if the joyful inclination of the heart to the good deed is to be secured, it can only be when law melts into love, and is thereby transformed to a more imperative obligation, written not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart.

There is a glimpse here into the very heart of Christ's rule over men. He too does not merely impose commands, but stoops to entreat, where He indeed might command. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends"; and though He does go on to say, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you," yet His commandment has in it so much tenderness, condescension, and pleading love, that it sounds far liker beseeching than enjoining. His yoke is easy, for this among other reasons, that it is, if one may so say, padded with love. His burden is light, because it is laid on His servant's shoulders by a loving hand; and so, as St. Bernard says, it is *onus quod portantem portat*, a burden which carries him who carries it.

II. There is in these verses the appeal which gives weight to the entreaties of love. The Apostle brings personal considerations to bear on the enforcement of impersonal duty, and therein follows the example of his Lord. He presents his own circumstances as adding power to his request, and, as it were, puts himself into the scale. He touches with singular pathos on two things which should sway his friend. "Such a one as Paul the aged." The alternative rendering

“ambassador,” while quite possible, has not congruity in its favour, and seems to be a recurrence to that very motive of official authority which he has just disclaimed. The other rendering is every way preferable. How old was he? Probably somewhere about sixty—not a very great age, but life was somewhat shorter then than now, and Paul was, no doubt, aged by work, by worry, and by the unresting spirit that “o’er-informed his tenement of clay.” Such temperaments as his are soon old. Perhaps Philemon was not much younger; but the prosperous Colossian gentleman had had a smoother life, and, no doubt, carried his years more lightly.

The requests of old age should have weight. In our days, what with the improvements in education, and the general loosening of the bonds of reverence, the old maxim that “the utmost respect is due to children,” receives a strange interpretation, and in many a household the Divine order is turned upside down, and the juniors regulate all things. Other still more sacred things will be likely to lose their due reverence when silver hairs no longer receive theirs.

But usually the aged who are “such” aged “as Paul” was will not fail of obtaining honour and deference. No more beautiful picture of the bright energy and freshness still possible to the old was ever painted than may be gathered from the Apostle’s unconscious sketch of himself. He delighted in having fresh young life about him—Timothy, Titus, Mark, and others, boys in comparison with himself, whom yet he admitted to close intimacy, as some old general might the youths of his staff, warming his age at the genial flame of their growing energies and unworn hopes. His was a joyful old age too, notwithstanding many burdens of anxiety and sorrow. We hear the clear song of his gladness ringing through the epistle of joy, that to the Philippians, which, like this, dates from his Roman captivity. A Christian old age should be joyful, and it only will be; for the

joys of the natural life burn low, when the fuel that fed them is nearly exhausted, and withered hands are held in vain over the dying embers. But Christ's joy "remains," and a Christian old age may be like the polar midsummer days, when the sun shines till midnight, and dips but for an imperceptible interval ere it rises for the unending day of heaven.

Paul the aged was full of interest in the things of the day, no mere "praiser of time gone by," but a strenuous worker, cherishing a quick sympathy and an eager interest which kept him young to the end. Witness that last chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy, where he is seen, in the immediate expectation of death, entering heartily into passing trifles, and thinking it worth while to give little pieces of information about the movements of his friends, and wishful to get his books and parchments, that he might do some more work while waiting for the headsman's sword. And over his cheery, sympathetic, busy old age there is thrown the light of a great hope, which kindles desire and onward looks in his dim eyes, and parts "such a one as Paul the aged" by a whole universe from the old whose future is dark, and their past dreary, whose hope is a phantom and their memory a pang.

The Apostle adds yet another personal characteristic as a motive with Philemon to grant his request: "Now a prisoner also of Christ Jesus." He has already spoken of himself in these terms in *v. 1*. His sufferings were imposed by and endured for Christ. He holds up his fettered wrist, and in effect says, "Surely you will not refuse anything that you can do to wrap a silken softness round the cold, hard iron, especially when you remember for whose sake and by whose will I am bound with this chain." He thus brings personal motives to reinforce duty which is binding from other and higher considerations. He does not merely tell Philemon that he ought to take back Onesimus, as a

piece of self-sacrificing Christian duty. He does imply that highest motive throughout his pleadings, and urges that such action is "fitting" or in consonance with the position and obligations of a Christian man. But he backs up this highest reason with these others: "If you hesitate to take him back because you ought, will you do it because I ask you? and, before you answer that question, will you remember my age, and what I am bearing for the Master?" If he can get his friend to do the right thing by the help of these subsidiary motives, still, it is the right thing; and the appeal to these motives will do Philemon no harm, and, if successful, will do both him and Onesimus a great deal of good.

Does not this action of Paul remind us of the highest example of a similar use of motives of personal attachment as aids to duty? Christ does thus with His servants. He does not simply hold up before us a cold law of duty, but warms it by introducing our personal relation to Him as the main motive for keeping it. Apart from Him, morality can only point to the tables of stone, and say: "There! that is what you ought to do. Do it, or face the consequences." But Christ says: "I have given Myself for you. My will is your law. Will you do it for My sake?" Instead of the chilling, statuesque ideal, as pure as marble and as cold, a Brother stands before us with a heart that beats, a smile on His face, a hand outstretched to help; and His word is, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." The specific difference of Christian morality lies not in its precepts, but in its motive, and in its gift of power to obey. Paul could only urge regard to him as a subsidiary inducement. Christ puts it as the chief, nay, as the sole motive for obedience.

III. The last point suggested by these verses is the gradual opening up of the main subject matter of the Apostle's request. Very noteworthy is the tenderness of

the description of the fugitive as "my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds." Paul does not venture to name him at once, but prepares the way by the warmth of this affectionate reference. The position of the name in the sentence is most unusual, and suggests a kind of hesitation to take the plunge, while the hurried passing on to meet the objection which he knew would spring immediately to Philemon's mind is almost as if Paul laid his hand on his friend's lips to stop his words, "Onesimus then is it? that good-for-nothing!" Paul admits the indictment, will say no word to mitigate the condemnation due to his past worthlessness, but, with a playful allusion to the slave's name, which conceals his deep earnestness, assures Philemon that he will find the formerly inappropriate name, Onesimus—*i. e.* profitable—true yet, for all that is past. He is sure of this, because he, Paul, has proved his value. Surely never were the natural feelings of indignation and suspicion more skilfully soothed, and never did repentant good-for-nothing get sent back to regain the confidence which he had forfeited with such a certificate of character in his hand!

But there is something of more importance than Paul's inborn delicacy and tact, to notice here. Onesimus had been a bad specimen of a bad class. Slavery must needs corrupt both the owner and the chattel; and, as a matter of fact, we have classical allusions enough to show that the slaves of Paul's period were deeply tainted with the characteristic vices of their condition. Liars, thieves, idle, treacherous, nourishing a hatred of their masters all the more deadly that it was smothered, but ready to flame out if opportunity served in blood-curdling cruelties—they constituted an ever-present danger, and needed an ever-wakeful watchfulness. Onesimus had been known to Philemon only as one of the idlers who were more of a nuisance than a benefit, and cost more than they earned; and he apparently

ended his career by theft. And this degraded creature, with the scars on his soul deeper and worse than the marks of fetters on the limbs, had somehow found his way to the great jungle of a city, where all foul vermin could crawl and hiss and sting with comparative safety. There he had somehow come across the Apostle, and had received into his heart, filled with ugly desires and lusts, the message of Christ's love, which had swept it clean, and made him over again. The Apostle has had but short experience of his convert, but he is quite sure that he is a Christian; and, that being the case, he is as sure that all the bad black past is buried, and that the new leaf now turned over will be covered with fair writing not in the least like the blots that were on the former page, and have now been dissolved from off it, by the touch of Christ's blood.

It is a typical instance of the miracles which the gospel wrought as every-day events in its transforming career. Christianity knows nothing of hopeless cases. It professes its ability to take the most crooked stick and bring it straight, to flash a new power into the blackest carbon, which will turn it into a diamond. Every duty will be done better by a man if he have the love and grace of Jesus Christ in his heart. New motives are brought into play, new powers are given, new standards of duty are set up. The small tasks become great, and the unwelcome sweet, and the difficult easy, when done for and by Christ. Old vices are crushed in their deepest source; old habits driven out by the force of a new affection, as the young leaf-buds push the withered foliage from the tree. Christ can make any man over again, and does so recreate every heart that trusts to him. The miracles of transformation are wrought to-day as truly as of old. Many professing Christians experience little of that quickening and revolutionising energy; many observers see little of it, and some begin to croak, as if the old might have ebbed away. But wherever men give

the gospel fair play in their lives, and open their spirits, in truth and not merely in profession, to its influence, it vindicates its undiminished possession of all its former power; and if ever it seems to fail, it is not the medicine that is weak, but the sick man that has not really taken it. The low tone of much modern Christianity and its dim exhibition of the transforming power of the gospel is easily and sadly enough accounted for without charging decrepitude on that which was once so mighty, by the patent fact that much modern Christianity is little better than lip acknowledgment, and that much more of it is woefully unfamiliar with the truth it in some fashion believes, and sinfully negligent of the spiritual gifts which it professes to treasure. If a Christian man does not show his religion changing him into the fair likeness of his Master, and fitting him for all relations of life, the reason is simply that he has so little of it, and that little so mechanical and tepid.

Paul pleads with Philemon to take back his worthless servant, and assures him that he will find Onesimus helpful now. Christ does not need to be besought to welcome His runaway good-for-nothings, however unprofitable they have been. That Divine charity of His forgives all things, and "hopes all things" of the worst, and can fulfil its own hope in the most degraded. With bright, unfaltering confidence in His own power He fronts the most evil, sure that He can cleanse; and that no matter what the past has been, His power can overcome all defects of character, education, or surroundings, can set free from all moral disadvantages adhering to men's station, class, or calling, can break the entail of sin. The worst needs no intercessor to sway that tender heart of our great Master, whom we may dimly see shadowed in the very name of "Philemon," which means one who is loving or kindly. Whoever confesses to Him that he has "been an unprofitable servant" will be welcomed to His heart, made pure and good by the Divine

Spirit breathing new life into him, will be trained by Christ for all joyful toil as His slave, and yet His freedman and friend; and at last each once fugitive and unprofitable Onesimus will hear the "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

ALEXANDER MACLAREN,

SOME LESSONS OF THE REVISED VERSION OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT.

III. UNIFORMITIES OF LANGUAGE RESTORED.

1. THE Revisers of the New Testament of 1881 aimed, as we have seen, at the most scrupulous faithfulness. They endeavoured to enable the English reader to follow the correspondences of the original with the closest exactness, to catch the solemn repetition of words and phrases, to mark subtleties of expression, to feel even the strangeness of unusual forms of speech. The Revisers of 1611 adopted and defended a very different mode of procedure. "Another thing," they say in their preface, "we think good to admonish thee of, gentle Reader, that we have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words, as some peradventure would wish that we had done. . . . Truly that we might not vary from the sense of that which we had translated before . . . we were especially careful. . . . But that we should express the same notion in the same particular word; as, for example, if we translate the *Hebrew* or *Greek* word once by *purpose*, never to call it *intent*; . . . if one where *joy*, never *gladness*, etc., thus to mince the matter, we thought to savour more of curiosity than wisdom, and that rather it would