

# The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.

GENERAL EDITOR:—J. J. S. PEROWNE, D.D.  
BISHOP OF WORCESTER.

---

THE EPISTLES TO THE  
COLOSSIANS  
AND TO  
PHILEMON

*WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES*

BY

THE REV. H. C. G. MOULE, B.D.

PRINCIPAL OF RIDLEY HALL, AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE,  
CAMBRIDGE.

STEREOTYPED EDITION.

CAMBRIDGE:  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

1898

[All Rights reserved.]

*First Edition 1893.*  
*Reprinted 1894, 1898.*

BS  
491  
.C3  
v. 43  
1898

PREFACE  
BY THE GENERAL EDITOR.

THE General Editor of *The Cambridge Bible for Schools* thinks it right to say that he does not hold himself responsible either for the interpretation of particular passages which the Editors of the several Books have adopted, or for any opinion on points of doctrine that they may have expressed. In the New Testament more especially questions arise of the deepest theological import, on which the ablest and most conscientious interpreters have differed and always will differ. His aim has been in all such cases to leave each Contributor to the unfettered exercise of his own judgment, only taking care that mere controversy should as far as possible be avoided. He has contented himself chiefly with a careful revision of the notes, with pointing out omissions, with

suggesting occasionally a reconsideration of some question, or a fuller treatment of difficult passages, and the like.

Beyond this he has not attempted to interfere, feeling it better that each Commentary should have its own individual character, and being convinced that freshness and variety of treatment are more than a compensation for any lack of uniformity in the Series.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

THE Editor takes occasion to express his thanks for valuable assistance given him in the course of his work; particularly to Dr E. C. Clark, Regius Professor of Laws in the University of Cambridge, to the Rev. Dr Sinker, Librarian of Trinity College, and to the Rev. G. A. Schneider, M.A., Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall.

Prof. W. M. Ramsay's *Church in the Roman Empire* was published only when the revised proofs were in the press; the Editor regrets that he was unable to use these Lectures sooner. Prof. Ramsay speaks with the authority of a special student and a geographical explorer on the early history of Christianity in Asia Minor.

As a devotional Commentary, the work of the Jansenist Father, Pasquier Quesnel (*Le N. T. en François, avec des Reflexions etc.*, Paris, 1705), is often quoted in this book. Its short notes are everywhere rich in spiritual suggestion.

One critical Exposition has been always before the Editor; Bishop Lightfoot's *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Here and there the Editor has ventured to express a doubt, or difference of opinion, regarding some

detail of the Bishop's work. But every hour's use of the Commentary has deepened his sense of the great Commentator's infinite diligence, vastness of knowledge, wisdom in its application, luminous clearness of thought and expression, and devout reverence of Christian faith. For the Editor this is no impression left only by the book; for thirty years he knew the admirable man, since the first days of student-life at Cambridge, when in Mr Lightfoot's lecture-room, or in his private study, he listened to consummate explanations of Herodotus or Æschylus, and enjoyed the benefit of such a College Tutor's counsels on life and reading. Debts such as these are impossible to calculate, but they must be lovingly and reverently acknowledged,

*τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανάτων.*

CAMBRIDGE,

*May 1893.*

---

\*.\* The page-references to Bishop Lightfoot's Commentary are adjusted to the First Edition, 1875.

# CONTENTS.

---

	PAGES
I. INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.	
<i>Chapter I.</i> Colossæ and its Neighbouring Churches	11—22
<i>Chapter II.</i> Date and Occasion of the Epistle .....	22—30
<i>Chapter III.</i> Alien Teaching at Colossæ.....	30—37
<i>Chapter IV.</i> Authenticity of the Epistle.....	37—41
<i>Chapter V.</i> The Ephesian Epistle and the Epistle from Laodicea.....	41—47
<i>Chapter VI.</i> Parallels and other relations between the Colossian and Ephesian Epistles	47—52
<i>Chapter VII.</i> Argument of the Epistle.....	53—61
II. TEXT AND NOTES.	63—145
III. INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON.	
<i>Chapter I.</i> Authenticity of the Epistle.....	147—148
<i>Chapter II.</i> Testimonies to the Epistle .....	148—152
<i>Chapter III.</i> The Chief Persons of the Epistle .....	152—154
<i>Chapter IV.</i> Slavery, and the Attitude of Chris- tianity towards it .....	154—164
<i>Chapter V.</i> Argument of the Epistle .....	164—165
IV. TEXT AND NOTES .....	167—178
V. APPENDICES .....	179—192
VI. INDEX .....	193—195

JESUS CHRIST is the true God of men, that is to say, of beings miserable and sinful. He is the Centre of everything and the Object of everything; and he who does not know Him knows nothing of the order of the world, and nothing of himself. For not only do we not know God otherwise than by Jesus Christ; we do not know ourselves otherwise than by Jesus Christ...In Him is all our virtue and all our felicity; apart from Him there is nothing but vice, misery, errors, clouds, despair, and we see only obscurity and confusion in the nature of God and in our own.

PASCAL, *Pensées sur la Religion.*

ALLIED to Thee our vital Head  
We act, and grow, and thrive;  
From Thee divided each is dead  
When most he seems alive.

DODDRIDGE, *Hymns founded on  
Texts in the Holy Scriptures.*



IN philanthropy as in science there are three stages—the prelude, the epoch, and the sequel. The prelude is a period of aspiration, and half-blind guesses. The epoch brings the expression of the truth to its highest point. In the sequel, the principle, once fixed in words, is extended and developed in practice. It would be no difficult task to apply the analogy to the influence of Christianity on slavery. As far as the Epistle to Philemon is concerned, the epoch has come.

Bp ALEXANDER, in *The Speaker's Commentary*.

WE are all the Lord's Onesimi.

LUTHER.

# THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON.

## INTRODUCTION.

### CHAPTER I.

#### AUTHENTICITY OF THE EPISTLE.

THE external evidence is ample, from the time of Tertullian onward. From him we gather (*Contra Marcion.*, v. 21) that even Marcion's *Apostolicon*<sup>1</sup> contained *Philemon*: "The shortness of this Epistle has favoured its escape from the tampering hands (*falsarias manus*) of Marcion;" that is to say (so Jerome, Preface to *Philemon*, explains), Marcion had more or less altered every other Epistle which he had admitted, but not this. Origen (*Homily xix. on Jeremiah*) quotes Philem. 14 almost verbatim, as what "Paul said, in the Epistle to Philemon, to Philemon about Onesimus." He quotes ver. 7 in his Commentary on St Matthew, tractate 34: "As Paul says to Philemon;" and again, ver. 9: "By Paul it is said to Philemon, *But now as Paul the aged (senex).*" In the Ignatian Epistles there are some apparent allusions to the Epistle. The writer several times (*To the Ephesians*, ii.; *To the Magnesians*, xii.; *To Polycarp*, i., vi.) uses the Greek phrase rendered in the A.V. of Philem. 20, "*Let me have joy of thee.*"

In the fourth century the authenticity was sometimes denied, and more often the Epistle was attacked<sup>2</sup> as unworthy to be reckoned Scripture. This is inferred from defences of the Epistle made incidentally by e.g. Chrysostom and Jerome, in

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 38, *note*.

<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot speaks of the "fierce" opposition to the Epistle. Is not this word too strong?

the Prefaces to their Expositions. Jerome says that "some will have it that it is not Paul's, others that it has nothing in it for our edification;" "some will not receive it among Paul's Epistles, and say that Paul did not always speak as the organ of Christ's voice in him." Chrysostom says that they are "worthy of countless accusations" who reject this Epistle, as "concerned about so small a matter, and on behalf of an individual only."<sup>1</sup> "The spirit of the age," says Lightfoot, "had no sympathy with either the subject or the handling...Its maxim seemed to be, *De minimis non curat evangelium*," trifles are beneath the notice of the Gospel. Evidently the objections noticed by Chrysostom and Jerome have not only no moral but no critical value.

Baur, with an unhappy consistency, rejecting *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, rejected *Philemon* also, though with an almost apology, admitting that "this little letter" is penetrated "with the noblest Christian spirit," and that his criticism may seem over-sceptical. On his curiously trivial objections (e.g. the frequent use of the word rendered "bowels" in the A.V., a word admittedly Pauline) Alford<sup>2</sup> remarks: "I am persuaded that if his section on the Epistle to Philemon had been published separately and without the author's name, the world might well have supposed it written by some defender of the Epistle, as a caricature on Baur's general line of argument."

## CHAPTER II.

### TESTIMONIES TO THE EPISTLE.

ST CHRYSOSTOM, in his *Hypothesis*, or Account of the Contents, introductory to his expository Sermons on *Philemon*, speaks of its value with eloquent simplicity. Not only, he says, ought Epistles to have been written about such small and homely matters, but we could long that some biographer had recorded for us the minutest details of the lives of the Apostles; what they

<sup>1</sup> See the quotations, Lightfoot, p. 383, notes.

<sup>2</sup> *Greek Testament*, iii. 113.

ate, what their daily doings were, what their manner and their utterance. As to this Epistle, think of its many profitable lessons. We learn to neglect nothing, when a Paul can take such pains about a runaway thieving slave. We learn not to think the slave-kind below the reach of good, when this same slave and thief became so virtuous (*ἐνάπερος*) that Paul would fain have him for his companion and attendant. We learn that slaves ought not to be taken from their masters, when we see Paul refuse to keep Onesimus at his side. If a slave is of high character (*θαυμαστός*) he ought to remain as he is, to be an influence for good in the household. Say not that servile duties must hinder his devotion to higher things; Paul himself says, *If thou mayest be made free, use it rather*; that is, stay as you are, and glorify God<sup>1</sup>. Do not tempt the heathen to blaspheme, saying that Christianity (*Χριστιανισμός*) tends to the subversion of human relations. One more lesson from the Epistle; we ought not to be ashamed of our slaves when they are good, if this greatest of men could say such noble things about a slave. Now, will any one venture to call this Epistle superfluous?

Luther writes of the Epistle to Philemon with characteristic human tenderness and Christian insight: "This Epistle sheweth a right noble lovely example (*ein meisterlich lieblich Exempel*) of Christian love. Here we see how St Paul layeth himself out (*sich annimmt*) for poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his cause with his master; and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Yet this he doth not with force nor constraint, as if he had full right. Nay, he putteth himself out of his rights; whereby he constraineth Philemon (to perceive) that he also must strip himself of his rights. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth St Paul for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ also hath put Himself out of His rights, and with love and humbleness hath prevailed with His Father that He should lay aside His wrath and His rights, and receive us to grace, for Christ's sake, who so earnestly intercedeth for us,

<sup>1</sup> We give without comment this explanation of a difficult text.

and layeth Himself out so tenderly for us. For we are all His Onesimi, if we believe it (*so wirs gleuben*)<sup>1</sup>.

Erasmus, in a note on ver. 20, says: "This Epistle, short as it is, shews us how eminently humane<sup>2</sup> Paul was...What could even a Tully have said, in such a matter, more charming (*festivus*) than what we have here? Some indeed, in name Christians, in spirit entirely hostile to Christ, count nothing learned, nothing elegant, which is not also pagan (*ethnium*). They think the bloom of style quite lost where any mention of Christ comes in, with any relish of His teaching; whereas the first requisite in eloquence is to suit style to subject. I can but wonder the more that any man should have doubted the authenticity of this Epistle; nothing could be more perfectly Pauline in method and manner of treatment."

Bengel thus begins his brief commentary: "This familiar letter, wonderfully elegant, about a purely private matter, is inserted in the New Testament for the benefit of Christians as a specimen of consummate wisdom in the treatment of things of this life on higher principles. Frankius" (Franke, the saintly professor of Halle, 1653—1727) "says: 'The Epistle to Philemon, taken alone, far surpasses (*longissime superat*) all the wisdom of the world'<sup>3</sup>."

Renan<sup>4</sup>, in words whose falsetto still leaves their praise significant, calls the Epistle, "A true little chef-d'œuvre of the art of letter-writing."

There is a letter of the younger Pliny's (a generation later

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in part by Lightfoot, p. 383. We have used his translation of his extracts almost verbatim, and completed the quotation. It forms Luther's *Vorrede auff die Epistel S. Pauli an Philemon*, in his German Bible (ed. Wittemberg, 1540). No one who knows Luther's theology will unduly press one sentence of the above passage as if he meant to say that the Eternal Father, the Giver of the Son, was reluctant to pardon. It is his pictorial way of putting the work of atonement and intercession in view of the claims of eternal holiness. He has a supreme example in our Lord's parables of the Friend at Midnight and the Judge and Widow.

<sup>2</sup> So I paraphrase *Paulum hominem singulari quadam præditum humanitate*.

<sup>3</sup> *Gnomon N. Testamenti, in loco*.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Lightfoot, p. 384.

than St Paul), the 21st in the ninth book of his Letters, written to his friend Sabinian, asking him to forgive an offending freedman<sup>1</sup>. Its subject is akin to that of our Epistle, and the two have often been compared. It reads as follows:

“Your freedman, who so greatly displeased you, as you told me, has come to me, fallen at my feet, and clung to them as if they were your own; he wept much, begged much, was much silent too, and in brief guaranteed to me his penitence. I think him really reformed, for he feels that he has sinned. You are angry, as I know; justly angry, as I also know; but clemency wins its highest praise when the reasons for anger are most just. You have loved the man, and I hope you will yet love him again; in the interval (*interim*) you are only asked to let yourself be brought to forgive. You will be quite free to be angry again if he deserves it; and this will have the more excuse if now you yield. Allow something for his youth, something for his tears, something for your own indulgence (of him); do not put him to torture, or you may torture yourself too. For tortured you are when you, kindest of men, are angry. I fear I may seem rather to insist than entreat, if I join my prayers to his. But I will join them, the more fully and without reserve as I chide him sharply and severely, adding a stern warning that I could never beg him off again. This for *him*, for I had to frighten him; but I take another tone with *you*! Perhaps I shall entreat again, and win again; so the case is one in which I may properly entreat, and you may properly bestow. Farewell.”

It is a graceful, kindly letter, written by a man whose character is the ideal of his age and class; the cultured and thoughtful Roman gentleman of the mildest period of the Empire. Yet the writer seems somewhat conscious of his own epistolary felicity, and his argument for the offender is much more condescending than sympathetic. His heart has not the depth of Paul's, nor are his motives those of the Gospel, which taught Paul to clasp Onesimus in his arms, and to commend him to Philemon's, as a friend in God for immortality. From the merely literary

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 156. Sabinian might conceivably get the *libertus* condemned to slavery again.

view-point, a perfect freedom of style, along with a delicate tact of manner, easily gives the letter to Philemon the palm over that to Sabinian<sup>1</sup>.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CHIEF PERSONS OF THE EPISTLE.

THE chief persons mentioned in the Epistle we know only from it and from *Colossians*. The chief (certain or probable) details of their lives and circumstances are given in our notes on the text.

PHILEMON appears as a well-to-do Colossian convert; the proof of his competency of means is not his possession of a slave, for he might have owned only one or two, but his power, well and widely used, to befriend his needing fellow-Christians. He thus appears as an illustration of the fact that primeval Christianity, while calling all Christians to a genuine surrender to Christ of both the self and the property, never condemned the right of property as between man and man, and left the individual perfectly free to ask whether or no his surrender of all to the Lord involved the surrender of his permanent stewardship for the Lord. APPHIA, probably Philemon's wife, is called "a deaconess" of the Colossian Church by M. Renan<sup>2</sup>, and by other writers, but without proof. In a letter dealing entirely with a domestic matter the mention of her name has no necessary or official significance. The mention of the name of ARCHIPPUS here with Apphia's makes it extremely likely that he was the son at home with his parents, whether or no his pastoral duties (Col. iv. 17) extended beyond Colossæ to the neighbouring Church or Churches. That he was in some sort of sacred office appears from Col. iv. 17; perhaps the solemnity of the message there was occasioned not, as usually suggested, by misgivings in St Paul's mind, but by some development of Archippus' duties consequent on Epaphras' absence in Italy<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> We find from a later letter (ix. 24) that Sabinian forgave the freedman. Pliny asks him to be ready in future to forgive *without an intercessor*.

<sup>2</sup> *Saint Paul*, p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsay (*The Church in the R. Empire*, p. 469) recites the legend

ONESIMUS, the runaway slave of this Christian household, stands almost visibly before us, as St Paul's allusions trace the sketch of his degradation, his spiritual regeneration, his grateful love, and his transfiguration into the resolute doer of right at a possible heavy cost. Dr F. W. Farrar, in his powerful historical story, *Darkness and Dawn*, has imagined a possible history of Onesimus which assists our realization of the time and conditions. The youth appears there as a Thyatiran, free-born, but sold to pay family debts; accompanies Philemon, "a gentleman of Colossæ," to Ephesus, on a visit which issues in the conversion of Philemon and his household through St Paul's preaching; returns to find "dull and sleepy Colossæ" unbearable after brilliant Ephesus; steals money of his master's that he may run away, first to Ephesus, and then to Rome; there is taken into the household of the Christian Pudens, and thence in time is transferred to Nero's; finds his way through many adventures to the gladiators' school, and to the arena; witnesses the massacre of the slaves of Pedanius; accompanies Octavia, Nero's rejected wife, a secret Christian, to her exile in the island of Pandataria; thence, after her death, finds his way, an awakened penitent, to St Paul; whom ultimately, after emancipation, he attends through his last labours, and to his death.

Historically, we know nothing, outside these Epistles, of the later life of Onesimus. That Philemon granted St Paul's requests, we may be sure; that he formally set free his slave, now his brother in Christ, we may be almost as sure. In *Colossians* (iv. 9), St Paul speaks of Onesimus in terms which would be impossible if he had felt any serious doubt of the reception Philemon would accord to the penitent. But beyond this point we lose all traces. In the Ignatian Epistles an Onesimus appears as bishop of Ephesus; but the date of these letters falls at earliest after A.D. 105, and the name was common; it is

of "The Miracle of Khonai," in which St Michael protects a holy fountain from desecration by bidding the rocks cleave asunder and receive the waters which the pagans had dammed up to flood it. In this legend (probably of cent. 9, in its present form) the first guardian of the fountain is one *Archippos*, "born of pious parents at Hierapolis."



not very likely that we have our Onesimus there. He is otherwise variously said to have been bishop of Berea, in Macedonia, to have preached in Spain, to have been martyred at Rome, or at Puteoli. Lightfoot finds no shadow of historical evidence for any of these accounts.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SLAVERY, AND THE ATTITUDE OF CHRISTIANITY TOWARDS IT.

SLAVERY was universal among ancient nations, and is prominent in the picture of both Roman and Greek civilization. In the Greek cities of the fourth and fifth centuries before our Era the slave population was often relatively vast; at Athens, about 300 B.C., it is said that the slaves numbered 400,000, and the free citizens 21,000; but perhaps this means the total population of slaves as against the free adult males only. Even thus however the slaves would number four to one. In the later days of the Roman Republic, and under the Empire, the slaves of Roman masters were immensely numerous. It was not uncommon for one owner to possess some thousands; two hundred was a somewhat usual number; and to keep less than ten was hardly possible for a man who would pass muster in society.

Speaking generally, the slave of the Greek was in a better position than the slave of the Roman. Within limits, the law gave a certain protection to his person, and he could not be put to death without a legal sentence. If not a domestic proper, he was more commonly employed in handicrafts (in which he earned for the owner who fed and lodged him) than was the Roman slave, who was more commonly the mere tool of luxury, often of its most degraded kinds. The relation of Onesimus to Philemon, we may suppose, in quasi-Greek Colossæ, was practically governed by Greek law and usage, though this perhaps might be over-ridden for the worse, where the master was cruel, by the imperial law<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> But see further, Appendix M.

But the mitigations of Greek slavery did not go very far. To a great extent the slave was entirely in his owner's hands; he could always be severely punished corporally<sup>1</sup>; his word was never taken in court but under torture. In general he was regarded by the law as the personal property of his owner, saleable at any time in the market; just as a horse is now its owner's "thing," though the law may interfere with his treatment of it in extreme cases. "The rights of possession with regard to slaves differed in no respect from any other property"<sup>2</sup>.

And what the law enforced, philosophy supported. In the *Politics* of Aristotle, in the few opening chapters, in a discussion of the Family as the unit of society, several passages bearing on slavery occur. The great thinker regards the slave as the physical implement of the master's mind; as being to his owner what the ox is to the man too poor to keep a slave (ch. ii.); as distinguished from the master by a natural (*φύσει*) difference, not merely a legal; as a living tool, a living piece of property (chattel). Between master and slave there is no proper reciprocity; the master may be a hundred things besides the slave's master, the slave is absolutely nothing but the master's slave; all his actions and relations move within that fact; he is wholly his (*ὅλως ἐκείνου*). Defined exactly, he is a human being who naturally (*φύσει*) is another's, not his own (ch. iv.); whose function (*δύναμις*) is to be such, while yet he shares his master's reason so far as to perceive it, without precisely *having* it (ch. v.). Such natural slavery, as distinguished from that of captivity by war, is good for both parties, just as the body and the limb are both benefited by their relation; the slave is as it were a portion (*μέρος*) of the master, as it were a living, while separated, portion of his body (ch. vi.).

Such a theory strikes accidentally, so to speak, on some noble aspects of human relation, and wonderfully illustrates the relation of the redeemed and believing to their redeeming Lord;

<sup>1</sup> Onesimus was probably a *Phrygian* slave; and there was a proverb, *Phryx plagis emendatur*, "You school a Phrygian with the whip."

<sup>2</sup> See at large Smith's *Dict. of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, s. v. *Servus* (*Greek*); and Becker's *Charicles*, Excursus on "The Slaves."

but its main bearing is all in the fatal direction of seeing in the slave a creature *who has no rights*; in short, a thing, not a person. The cool, pregnant sentences of Aristotle must have satisfied intellectually many a hard-hearted slave-master in the Greek society of St Paul's time<sup>1</sup>.

When we turn from the Greek slave of that time to his Roman fellow (and Onesimus, at Rome, would run all the risks of a Roman runaway), we come on a still darker picture. The Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41—A.D. 54) did something for him<sup>2</sup>, in ways which however shew how bad the general condition was. He set free certain sick slaves whom their masters had *exposed to die*, and decreed that if such slaves were killed, in lieu of death by exposure, it should be murder. Yet even Claudius, and at the same time, directed that a freedman, if giving his ex-master (*patronus*) cause of complaint, should be enslaved again. For disobedience, in short for anything which in the private court of the *dominica potestas* was a crime in his master's eyes, the slave might be privately executed, with any and every cruelty. In the reign of Augustus, the noon of Roman culture, one Vedius Pollio, a friend of the Emperor's, was used to throw offending slaves into his fish-pond, to feed his huge electric eels (*muræna*). He was one day entertaining Augustus at table, when the cupbearer broke a crystal goblet, and was forthwith sentenced to the eels. The poor fellow threw himself at the Prince's feet, begging, not to be forgiven, but to be killed in some other way; and Augustus, shocked and angered, ordered the man's emancipation (*mitti jussit*), and had Pollio's crystals all broken before him, and his horrible pool filled up; but he did not discard his friend. "If," says Horace (*Satires*, i. iii. 80), 'a

<sup>1</sup> There is another and brighter side to the slave-question in Greek literature. Euripides takes an evident pleasure in giving to slaves, in his Tragedies, characteristics of truth and honour, and makes his persons moralize much on the equal nobility of virtue in the slave and in the freeman. See F. A. Paley, *Euripides (Bibliotheca Classica)*, i. pp. xiii. xiv. Yet even Plato recommends a law for his ideal Commonwealth, by which a slave, if he kills a freeman, must be given up to the kinsmen and *must* be slain by them. The killer of *his own* slave is merely to go through a ceremonial purification.

<sup>2</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, c. 25.

man is thought mad who crucifies his slave for having filched something from...the table, *how much more mad* must he be who cuts his friend for a trifling offence!"<sup>1</sup> In brief, the slave in Roman law is a thing, not a person. He has no rights, not even of marriage. To seek his good is in no respect the duty of his master, any more than it is now the duty of an owner to improve his fields *for their own sake*.

The vast numbers of the slaves occasioned a tremendous sternness of repressive legislation<sup>2</sup>. By a law of the reign of Augustus, if a slave killed his master, not only he but every slave under the same roof was to be put to death. In the year 61, the year of St Paul's arrival at Rome, perhaps after his arrival, this enactment was awfully illustrated. A senator, Pedanius Secundus, Prefect of the City, had been murdered by one of his slaves; and the law called for the death of *four hundred* persons. The Roman populace, wonderful to relate, was roused to horror, and attempted a rescue. The Senate, gravely debating the case, resolved that the execution must proceed; it was a matter of public safety. Then the roads were lined with troops, and the doom was carried out to the end<sup>3</sup>.

"A runaway slave could not lawfully be received or harboured. The master was entitled to pursue him wherever he pleased, and it was the duty of all authorities to give him aid...A class of persons called *fugitivarii* made it their business to recover runaway slaves<sup>4</sup>."

It has been urged in defence of the principle of slavery that the Patriarchal and Mosaic institutions protected it, and that the Apostles do not denounce it. Mr Goldwin Smith has ably discussed this problem in his Essay, cited just above, *Does*

<sup>1</sup> Goldwin Smith, *Does the Bible sanction American Slavery?* (1863), p. 30. We quote largely below from this masterly discussion. The story about Vedius Pollio is told by Seneca, *De Ira*, iii. 40, and by Dion Cassius, liv. 23.

<sup>2</sup> They were not assigned a distinctive dress, for fear they should realize their numbers. They usually wore the common dress of the poor, a dark serge tunic, and slippers.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, xiv. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Smith's *Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antiquities*, s. v. *Servus (Roman)*. See in general also Becker's *Gallus*, Excursus on "*The Slaves*."

*the Bible sanction American Slavery?* He points out that in the patriarchal stage of society a certain absolutism, lodged in the father-chief, was natural and necessary, but also by its nature limited and mitigated; and that the whole drift of the legislation of the Pentateuch is towards the protection not of slavery, but of the slave, who there has manifold rights, is never for a moment regarded as other than a person, and at the Paschal Meal, as well as in all the other functions of religion, takes his place beside his master and the rest of the household. As regards the attitude of the Apostles, Mr Goldwin Smith writes as follows (pp. 54 etc.):

“The New Testament is not concerned with any political or social institutions; for political and social institutions belong to particular nations, and particular phases of society...Whatever is done (by Christianity) will be done for the whole of mankind and for all time. If it be necessary for the eternal purpose of the Gospel, St Paul will submit to all the injustice of heathen governments...If it be necessary for the same purpose, the slave of a heathen master will patiently remain a slave.

“Nothing indeed marks the Divine character of the Gospel more than its perfect freedom from the spirit of political revolution. The Founder of Christianity and His Apostles were surrounded by everything which could tempt human reformers to enter on revolutionary courses...Everything, to all human apprehension, counselled an appeal to the strong hand; and strong hands and brave hearts were ready to obey the call...Nevertheless our Lord and His Apostles said not a word against the powers or institutions of that evil world. Their attitude towards them all was that of deep spiritual hostility and entire political submission...Had this submission...not been preached by them, and enforced by their example, the new religion must, humanly speaking, have been strangled in its birth. The religious movement would infallibly have become a political movement....And then the Roman would have...crushed it with his power. To support it against the Roman legions with legions of angels was not a part of the plan of God...<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See some admirable remarks in the same direction in the late

"The passages in the New Testament relating to the established institutions of the time, inculcate on the disciples resignation to their earthly lot on spiritual grounds...(But) they do not inculcate social or political apathy; they do not pass...upon the Christian world a sentence of social or political despair...

← "The relation of the Gospel to slavery is well stated in a passage quoted by Channing from Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science*:—"The very course which the Gospel takes on this subject seems to have been the only one which could have been taken in order to effect the universal abolition of slavery. The Gospel was designed...for all races and for all times. It looked not at the abolition of this form of evil for that age alone, but for its universal abolition. Hence the object of its Author was to gain it a lodgment in every part of the world, so that by its universal diffusion among all classes of society it might...peacefully modify and subdue the evil passions of men, and thus without violence work a revolution in the whole mass of mankind. In this manner alone could its object, a universal moral revolution, be accomplished. For if it had forbidden *the evil* instead of subverting *the principle*, if it had proclaimed the unlawfulness of slavery, and taught slaves to *resist* the oppression of their masters, it would instantly have arrayed the two parties in deadly hostility throughout the civilized world; ...and the very name of the Christian religion would have been forgotten amidst universal bloodshed. The fact, under these circumstances, that the Gospel does not forbid slavery affords no reason to suppose that it does not mean to prohibit it; much less...that Jesus Christ intended to authorize it."

"Not only did...the Apostles spread principles and ideas which were sure to work the destruction of slavery, and of the other political and social wrongs of which that corrupt and unjust world was full; but they embodied them in an Institution, founded by their Lord, of which it may be said that though so little revolutionary in appearance that the most jealous tyranny might have received it into its bosom without misgiving, it ex-

Prof. H. Rogers' suggestive Lectures (1874) on *The Superhuman Origin of the Bible inferred from Itself* (Lect. iii.). (Editor.)

ceeded in revolutionary efficacy any political force which has ever been in action among men. At the Supper of the Lord the conqueror was required...to partake in the holy Meal with the conquered, the master with the slave, and this in memory of a Founder who had died the death of a slave upon the Cross, and who at the institution of the Rite had performed the servile office of washing His disciples' feet...Nor has the Lord's Supper failed to accomplish its object in this respect where it has been administered according to the intention of its Founder...

"No sooner did the new religion gain power...than the slave law and the slave system of the Empire began to be undermined by its influence...The right of life and death over the slave was transferred from his owner to the magistrate. The right of correction was placed under humane limitations, which the magistrate was directed to maintain. All the restrictions on the emancipation of slaves were swept away. The first Christian Emperor recognized enfranchisement as a religious act, and established the practice of performing it in the Church, before the Bishop, and in the presence of the congregation. The liberties of the freedman were at the same time cleared of all odious and injurious restrictions. This remained the policy of the Christian Empire. The Code of Justinian [cent. 6] is highly favourable to enfranchisement, and that on religious grounds...

"But the Roman world was doomed; and...partly because the character of the upper classes had been...incurably corrupted by the possession of a multitude of slaves. The feudal age succeeded;...and a new phase of slavery appeared. Immediately Christianity recommenced its work of alleviation and enfranchisement. The codes of laws framed for the new lords of Europe under the influence of the clergy shew the same desire as those of the Christian Emperors to...assure personal rights to the slave. The laws of the Lombards...protected the serf against an unjust or too rigorous master; they set free the husband of a female slave who had been seduced by her owner; they assured the protection of the churches to slaves who had taken refuge there, and regulated the penalties to be inflicted

for their faults. In England the clergy secured for the slave rest on the Sunday, and liberty either to rest, or work for himself, on a number of holy-days. They exhorted their flocks to leave the savings and earnings of the prædial slave untouched. They constantly freed the slaves who came into their own possession. They exhorted the laity to do the same, and what living covetousness refused they often wrung from death-bed penitence...

“If then we look to the records of Christianity in the Bible, we find no sanction for American slavery there. If we look to the history of Christendom, we find the propagators and champions of the faith assailing slavery under different forms and in different ages, without concert, yet with a unanimity which would surely be strange if Christianity and slavery were not the natural enemies of each other.”

Mr Goldwin Smith alludes thus<sup>1</sup> to our Epistle: “In a religious community so bound together in life and death as that of the early Christians, the relation between master and slave, though it was not formally dissolved, must have been completely transfigured, and virtually exchanged for a relation between brethren in Christ. The clearest proof of this is found in that very Epistle...which those who defend slavery on Scriptural grounds regard as their sheet-anchor in the argument. St Paul sends back the fugitive slave Onesimus to his master Philemon. Therefore, we are told, slavery and fugitive slave laws have received the sanction of St Paul...It is very true that St Paul sends back a fugitive slave to his master. But does he send him back *as a slave*? The best answer to the argument drawn from the Epistle to Philemon is the simple repetition of the words of that Epistle [vv. 10—19]...Onesimus is not sent back as a slave, but as one above a servant, a brother beloved... Such a feeling as the writer of the Epistle supposes to exist in the hearts of Christians as to their relations with each other, though it would not prevent a Christian slave from remaining in the service of his master, would certainly prevent a Christian master from continuing to hold his fellow Christian as a slave.”

<sup>1</sup> *Does the Bible, &c.*, p. 64.



It may not be out of place to quote here two passages which will bring out another side of the matter :

“Our Lord’s miracles upon slaves must not be forgotten. He did not hesitate to set out for the house of the Centurion at Capernaum, at the request of the messengers, in order to heal a paralysed slave. His last act as a free man before His death was to heal the wounded ear of the slave Malchus. He Himself ‘took the form of a slave,’ both in ministering to others in His life, and also in the manner of His death. Thus He glorified the relation; and His Apostles were not ashamed to magnify it by styling themselves ‘the slaves or bondmen of Jesus Christ’...”

“If the abolition of slavery is to turn all servants into hirelings, and make cash payment the only tie between employers and employed, the change will not be an unmixed benefit...If there is to be no bond between servants and masters and mistresses except the contract that determines the time of labour and the rate of payment, then all that ennobles the relation will be lost. Better have the slavery of Onesimus than that. On both sides there ought to be some acknowledgement of a *bond*, that should not be degraded into bondage, but should make the servant of to-day what the slave of the Old Testament was, *only not a son*, and capable of filial relationship, if the need should arise. ‘If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed,’ not to depart but to abide in the house for ever, as sons and heirs of God through Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

To much the same purpose is the following extract, from the Preface to *Philemon* in the Berlenburg (or Berleburg) Bible (about 1727); a German translation of the Bible, with Commentary, emanating from a mystic school of Pietism :

“This Epistle is much the shortest of the Epistles of Paul which are contained in Scripture, but it is very nobly (*herrlich*) and lovingly written...It is really sad that beginners in the Christian life will not take it with a better grace when they have

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Waller, D.D., *Handbook to the Epistles of St Paul*, pp. 178—180.

to be servants. Too commonly among the Anabaptists<sup>1</sup> people want not to submit to the straits (*Elenä*) of human life, but to be free. But this is mere self-love; as if we were already really capable of freedom. God helps us to freedom, in Christ, but He does not meanwhile take away from us the burthens of this life, which we must endure in the patience of Christ. The newly converted, even in the early Church, if servants, wanted no longer to do their duty by their Christian masters. The thought is (*man denckt*), 'I am as pious as my master!' But the self-spirit (*Ichheit*) must die. The Apostles were constrained to raise their admonition against such a state of things. Christianity is essentially submissive (*Das Christenthum ist was unterthäniges*). So we ought not to burst loose, but to shew that we have a broken spirit."

In closing, we quote a few lines from the recently (1889) recovered *Apology*, or Defence of Christianity (the earliest extant writing of its kind), written by the philosopher Aristides, and addressed to Hadrian, or possibly to Antoninus Pius, about A.D. 130. The author speaks as in some sense an independent observer:

"Now the Christians, O King, by going about and seeking have found the truth...They know and believe in God, the Maker of heaven and earth, in whom are all things and from whom are all things...They do not commit adultery or fornication, they do not bear false witness, they do not deny a deposit, nor covet what is not theirs; they honour father and mother; they do good to those who are their neighbours, and when they are judges they judge uprightly;...and those who grieve them they comfort, and make them their friends; and they do good to their enemies; and their wives, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters modest; and their men abstain from all unlawful wedlock and from all impurity, in the hope of the recompense that is to come in another world; but as for their servants or handmaids, or their children, if they have any, they persuade them to become Christians for the love

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to revival movements of the time, which, with many admirable results, had their aberrations.

they have towards them; and when they have become so they call them without distinction brethren."<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER V.

### ARGUMENT OF THE EPISTLE.

1—3. PAUL, a prisoner for Jesus Christ's sake and by His will, with the Christian brother Timotheus, greets Philemon, that true fellow-worker for Christ [at Colossæ,] and the dear [Christian sister, Philemon's wife,] Apphia, and [Philemon's son] Archippus, true comrade in Christ's missionary warfare. May all blessing be upon them from the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ!

4—7. He thanks his God for Philemon by name, whenever his converts are present in his prayers, hearing, as he has heard [from Epaphras] of his faith reposed on the Lord Jesus and the love he so practically shews towards all his Christian neighbours; praying that the charitable bounty prompted by his faith may tell all around him, giving [the recipients and witnesses of it] a fuller view of all the graces Christians possess, to the glory of Christ. For indeed Paul has received great joy and encouragement on account of Philemon's life of love [reported to him,] as he thinks how the hearts of the Christians have found rest [from the strain of poverty and care] by the aid of this his true brother.

8—21. So [writing to one who understands *love*,] Paul, though he might claim an apostolic right to speak more freely and authoritatively to Philemon about duty, yet in view of their personal Christian affection rather comes as his suppliant; just in the character of Paul, the aged, and now not only old but helpless, in imprisonment for Christ. He is Philemon's suppliant for a son of his (Paul's), a son whom he has begotten [to a new life in Christ] in his Roman prison. It is Onesimus ("*Helpful*"), [Philemon's domestic slave]; once anything but *profitable* to Philemon, [for he had pilfered from him, and absconded,] but profitable

<sup>1</sup> *Texts and Studies; the Apology of Aristides* (Cambridge, 1891), p. 49. The translation here given is that of Mr J. Rendel Harris, from the Syriac Version of the Apology. See also an admirable little volume, *The newly recovered Apology of Aristides*, by Helen B. Harris (Mrs Rendel Harris).

now to Philemon, aye and to Paul too, [to whom Onesimus has been devotedly serviceable.] He sends him back to his master [with this letter;] *him*, or let him rather be called a piece of Paul's own heart! He could half have wished to keep Onesimus at his side, to be his loving attendant (as the substitute of loving Philemon) in this imprisonment endured for the Gospel's sake. But he would not act so without Philemon's decision, [which of course he could not get, at such a distance;] otherwise the kindness on Philemon's part would at least have seemed to be a thing of compulsion, not of freewill. And perhaps it was on purpose for such a return to Philemon, in an indissoluble union, for time and for eternity, that Onesimus had been sent away from him for a little while; [to be given back now by the Lord] no more as a mere slave, but as a brother, a dear brother, dearest to Paul, dearer than dearest to Philemon, to whom he is now joined both by earthly and by spiritual ties. If Philemon, then, holds Paul for an associate [in faith and life], he must receive Onesimus just as he would receive Paul. If Onesimus had stolen, or was in debt, before his flight, let the amount be charged to Paul; here is his autograph note for the repayment. Meanwhile, he will not dwell on the thought that Philemon owes to Paul [not only the new-making of Onesimus but] himself besides, [as his son in the faith of Christ.] Ah, let Philemon give Paul joy, and rest his heart, by action worthy of a man in Christ. He has written thus with full confidence of his assent, and more than assent, to the request.

**22.** Meanwhile, will Philemon prepare lodgings for him [at Colossæ?] He expects to be restored to his beloved converts, in answer to their prayers.

**23—24.** He sends greetings to Philemon from [his old friend] Epaphras, who shares his prison; and from Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, who are working with Paul for Christ.

**25.** May the presence and power of Christ be with the inner life of Philemon and his family.

GRACE makes the slave a freeman. 'Tis a change  
That turns to ridicule the turgid speech  
And stately tones of moralists, who boast,  
As if, like him of fabulous renown,  
They had indeed ability to smooth  
The shag of savage nature, and were each  
An Orpheus, and omnipotent in song:  
But transformation of apostate man  
From fool to wise, from earthly to Divine,  
Is work for Him that made him. He alone,  
And He, by means in philosophic eyes  
Trivial and worthy of disdain, achieves  
The wonder; humanizing what is brute  
In the lost kind, extracting from the lips  
Of asps their venom, overpowering strength  
By weakness, and hostility by love.

COWPER.

## THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON.

PAUL, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon *our* dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,

### TITLE.

The oldest known form is the briefest, TO PHILEMON. That in the A.V. is from the Textus Receptus. Other forms are, PAUL'S (or THE HOLY APOSTLE PAUL'S) EPISTLE TO PHILEMON. One title runs, THESE SURE THINGS WRITES PAUL TO FAITHFUL PHILEMON.<sup>1</sup>

See note on the title of Colossians.

### 1—3. GREETING.

1. *Paul*] See on Col. i. 1.

*a prisoner*] To the Colossians he had said "*an Apostle.*" Here he speaks more personally. Cp. for the phrase, or its like, Eph. iii. 1, iv. 1; 1 Tim. i. 8; below, ver. 9.

*of Jesus Christ*] If he suffers, it is all in relation to his Master, his Possessor. See our note on Eph. iii. 1.—Outwardly he is Nero's prisoner, inwardly, Jesus Christ's.

*Timothy our brother*] See notes on Col. i. 1. This association of Timothy (Timotheus) with himself, in the personal as well as in the public Epistle, is a touch of delicate courtesy.

*Philemon*] All we know of him is given in this short letter. We may fairly assume that he was a native and inhabitant of Colossæ, where his son (see below, and on Col. iv. 17) lived and laboured; that he was brought to Christ by St Paul (ver. 10); that he was in comfortable circumstances (see on vv. 2, 10); and that his character was kind and just, for St Paul would suit his appeals to his correspondent; and that his Christian life was devoted and influential (vv. 5—7). In fact the Epistle indicates a noble specimen of the primitive Christian.—See further, *Introd.* to the Ep. to Philemon, ch. iii.

The name Philemon happens to occur in the beautiful legend of Philemon and Baucis, the *Phrygian* peasant-pair, who, in an inhospitable neighbourhood, "entertained unawares" Jupiter and Mercury

<sup>1</sup> The omission of one syllable in this Greek title (so as to read *βασίλειος* instead of *βέβαιος*) makes it run as a hexameter line, and gives the sense

"Paul on a slender theme thus writes to the faithful Philemon."

If we are right in this guess, perhaps this title was devised by a *depreciator* (pp. 147, 148) of the Epistle, and afterwards altered, at the expense of metre, by some wiser man.

2 and to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier,  
 3 and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace,  
 from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Ovid, *Metam.*, viii. 626—724), “gods in the likeness of men” (see Acts xiv. 11).

Philemon, in legend, becomes bishop of Colossæ (but of Gaza according to another story), and is martyred there under Nero. Theodoret (cent. 5) says that his house was still shewn at Colossæ.—See further Lightfoot, p. 372.

*fellowlabourer*] See on Col. iv. 11. Philemon, converted through Paul's agency, had (perhaps first at Ephesus, then on his return to Colossæ) worked actively in the Gospel, whether ordained or no.

2. *our beloved Apphia*] Read, probably, *our* (lit., *the*) *sister Apphia*. The Vulgate combines the two readings, *Appia sorori carissimæ*.—We may be sure that Apphia was Philemon's wife. Her name was a frequent Phrygian name (written otherwise *Aphphia*; other forms found are *Apphê*, *Aphphê*), and had no connexion with the Latin *Appia*. See Lightfoot's abundant evidence, pp. 372—4.—We know Apphia from this passage only. Legend says that she was martyred with Philemon at Colossæ.—See further above, p. 152.

*Archippus*] Probably Philemon's son and (Col. iv. 17) a missionary-pastor of Colossæ and its neighbourhood. Of him too we know nothing outside these allusions; his martyrdom, when he suffered with his parents, is a legend only.—Lightfoot (p. 375) inclines to think that his pastorate lay at Laodicea, reasoning from the passage Col. iv. 15—17. But would he not have lived at Laodicea, if so? And if so, would he have been saluted thus, in this letter referring wholly to the home, in closest connexion with his (assumed) parents, and just before a mention of “*the church in their house*”? On the other hand, Archippus may have had to do with the mission at Laodicea, perhaps as superintending pastor, while resident at Colossæ. Possibly he had lately undertaken such an extension of charge, and this might be referred to Col. iv. 17. But (see note there) we incline to think that that verse refers to Archippus and to a recent appointment to ministry at Colossæ.—See further above, p. 152.

See note on the Subscription to the Epistle, for a (late) mention of Archippus as “*the deacon*” of the Colossian Church.

*our fellowsoldier*] In Christ's great missionary campaign. Cp. Phil. ii. 25, and our note. For the imagery, cp. 2 Cor. x. 3—5; 1 Tim. i. 18; 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.—Wyclif, “*archip oure euene knyzt.*”

*the church in thy house*] Cp. Col. iv. 15, and note. Philemon's house was the Christian *rendezvous* of Colossæ, and his great room the worship-place.

3. *Grace be unto you, &c.*] Verbatim as in the received text of Col. i. 2; where see notes. In this private Letter, written about a practical matter, as much as in the public and didactic Letter, all is hallowed with the blessed Name.

I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my 4 prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast 5 toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; that the 6

#### 4—7. THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER.

4. *I thank my God*] For the phrase precisely cp. Rom. i. 8; 1 Cor. i. 4; Phil. i. 3 (where see our note). All the Epistles of St Paul, save only *Galatians*, contain a thanksgiving in their first greetings.

"*My God*:"—so Rom., 1 Cor., Phil., just quoted, and Phil. iv. 19. Profound personal appropriation and realization speaks in the phrase.

*making mention of thee*] So Rom. i. 9; Eph. i. 16, where see note; 1 Thess. i. 2; and cp. Phil. i. 3. How often the names written in his Epistles must have been uttered in his prayers!

*always*] Alford, Lightfoot, and R.V., connect this word with "*I give thanks*"; the Greek order of the sentence allowing it. Ellicott divides as A.V. The question, happily unimportant, is very much one of rhythm and balance, and we think this inclines to A.V. If so, he means that Philemon is habitually mentioned whenever his converts are present in his thanksgivings.

*in*] Lit., "*on*"; on occasion of, at the times of.

5. *hearing*] doubtless from Epaphras, perhaps with Onesimus' confirmation from *his* point of view. The Greek implies a *process* of hearing; the subject was *continually* present in conversation.

*love*] See below vv. 7, 9. The whole letter is from love to love.

*faith*] Some commentators (see Ellicott's note, where the view is discussed and rejected) explain this as "*fidelity*" (as probably Gal. v. 22 and certainly Tit. ii. 10). But that meaning is rare in St Paul, and needs strong evidence for adoption in any given case. The ruling meaning, "*trust, reliance*," is quite in place here.

*toward...toward*] The "received" Greek text, retained here by Lightfoot, has two different prepositions, which we may render *toward* and *unto* respectively; "*toward*" the Object of faith, "*unto*" the objects of love.

*toward the Lord...saints*] R.V. (and so Alford) reads the whole passage; "*thy love, and the faith which thou hast toward &c.*," making "*the faith*" only, not "*thy love*," refer to *both* the Lord and the saints; (the man's reliance on Christ *coming out in* a "work of faith," called briefly "*faith*"—see ver. 6—towards the saints). But Lightfoot, we think rightly, distributes the references of love and faith, cross-wise, to the saints and the Lord respectively. Cp. for support Col. i. 3, 4, a passage written so nearly at the same time. No doubt the arrangement of the Greek, on this view, is peculiar. But in this domestic letter several natural liberties of language occur.

"*All saints*":—read, *all the saints*, with whom Philemon had to do.—On the word "*saints*" see note on Col. i. 2.

6. *that*] This word refers back to the "*prayers*" of ver. 4; ver. 5 being a parenthesis of thought. As in his other thanksgivings, so



communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good *thing* which is in you in Christ, Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love,

in this, he passes at once into prayer that the good he rejoices in *may grow*.

*the communication*] R. V., "*fellowship*." The Greek word occurs Rom. xv. 26; 2 Cor. ix. 13; Heb. xiii. 16 (and the verb, Rom. xii. 13; Gal. vi. 6; Phil. iv. 15); in the sense of charitable distribution, bounty. So it seems to be here. Philemon, comparatively wealthy, was the generous giver to his poorer fellow-believers.

*of thy faith*] I.e., which thy faith prompts, and in that sense makes. Philemon's faith was as it were the inward "distributor to the necessities of the saints," while his hand was the outward. The phrase, so explained, is unusual, but other explanations are much further fetched.

*may become effectual*] **Operative** (Ellicott), or **effective** (Lightfoot). He prays that Philemon's life of practical love may "*tell*" around him.—Wyclif, "*may be made opene*." This is from the Latin, which (see Lightfoot) depends on a slight variant (one letter only) in the Greek.

*by the acknowledging*] Lit. and better, **in the (true) knowledge**. As the recipients and witnesses of his goodness saw more and more clearly the motive and spirit of it, they would have a truer insight (*epignōsis*) into the power of the Gospel; and "*in*" that insight would consist the deepest "effect" of Philemon's goodness.—On the word here rendered (R. V.) "*knowledge*," see on Col. i. 9.

*every good thing*] Every grace; the gift of love in all its practical manifestations.

*in you*] Probably read, **in us**; us Christians as such. So Ellicott, Alford, Lightfoot, and margin R. V.

*in Christ Jesus*] Read, **unto Christ** (perhaps omitting *Jesus*).—"Unto" Him:—i.e., to His glory, the true aim of the true life of grace. The servant is so to live that not only shall he be seen to be beneficent, but his beneficence shall be seen to be due to Another, whose he is.—Perhaps these words go with "*the knowledge*" just above; as if to say, "your good shall be recognized to His glory." But this collocation is not necessary.

7. *we have*] Better, **I had**; i.e., when the news reached me.

*joy*] Another reading, ill-supported, has "*grace*"; which would bear here the sense of thankfulness. One Greek letter only makes the difference.

*consolation*] R. V., **comfort**, which is better. The Greek word commonly denotes rather strengthening, *encouragement*, than the tenderer "consolation"; and the word "comfort" (*confortatio*) fairly represents it (see on Col. ii. 2). The news of Philemon's love had *animated* the Apostle.

*in thy love*] Lit. and better, **on (account of) thy love**; this life of "faith which worked by love" (Gal. v. 6).

*the bowels*] Better perhaps, **the hearts**. So R. V. See our note on Phil. i. 8. In the Greek classics the word here used means "the *nobler*

because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such a one as Paul the

vitals," as distinguished from the intestines; and though the LXX. do not follow this usage, it fairly justifies us in adopting in English the "nobler" word, by which we so often denote "*the feelings*."

*are refreshed*] Lit. and better, **have been refreshed** or **rested**. See the same verb, and tense, 2 Cor. vii. 13. The cognate noun occurs, e.g. Matt. xi. 28.—The tired hearts of the poor or otherwise harassed Christians had found, in Philemon, a haven of *rest*.—See ver. 20 for the same phrase again.

*by thee*] Lit., **through thee, by means of thee**. He was *the agent* for his Lord.

*brother*] The word of holy family-affection is beautifully kept for the last.—See on Col. i. 2.

### 8—21. A PERSONAL REQUEST: ONESIMUS.

8. *Wherefore*] Because I am writing to one whose life is the fruit of a loving heart.

*though I might be much bold*] Lit., "*having much boldness*"; but the insertion of "*though*" rightly explains the thought.—"*Boldness*":—the Greek word, by derivation, means **outspokenness**, and its usage almost always illustrates this. See on ii. 15 above, and our note on Eph. iii. 12.—He has the right to "*say anything*" to Philemon.

*in Christ*] Whom he represents as apostle, and who also unites him and Philemon in an intimacy which makes outspokenness doubly right.

*enjoin*] A very strong word. The cognate noun occurs Tit. ii. 15; "*rebuke with all authority*."—"Love must often take the place of authority" (Quessnel).

*convenient*] **Befitting**; the French *convenable*. So Eph. v. 4, where the same Greek (which occurs also Col. iii. 18; see note) is represented. In older English this was a familiar meaning of "*convenient*"; thus Latimer speaks of "*voluntary works, which...be of themselves marvellous...convenient to be done*." See the *Bible Word Book*.

9. *for love's sake*] Lit., "*because of the love*"; i.e., perhaps, "*because of our love*." Ellicott, Alford, and Lightfoot take the reference to be to (Christian) love in general. But the Greek commentators (cent. 11) Theophylact and Oecumenius (quoted by Ellicott) explain the phrase as referring to *the* love of the two friends; and this is surely in point in this message of personal affection.

*beseech*] The verb is one which often means "*exhort*," in a sense less tender than "*beseech*." But see e.g. Phil. iv. 2 for a case where, as here, it evidently conveys a *loving* appeal.

*being such a one as*] Does this mean, "*because I am such*," or "*although I am such*"? The answer depends mainly on the explanation of the next following words.

aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my

*Paul the aged*] *Paulus senex*, Latin Versions; "and so apparently all versions" (Ellicott). So R.V. text. Its margin has "*Paul an ambassador*"; and this rendering is advocated by Lightfoot in a long and instructive note. He points out that not only are *presbýtês* ("an elder," which all mss. have here) and *presbýtês* ("an envoy") nearly identical in form, but that the latter word was often spelt by the Greeks like the former. And he points to Eph. vi. 20 (see our note there), where "*the ambassador in chains*" expressly describes himself—a passage written perhaps on the same day as this. So explaining, the phrase would be a quiet reminder, in the act of entreaty, that the suppliant was no ordinary one; he was the Lord's envoy, dignified by suffering for the Lord.

But, with reverence to the great Commentator, is not the other explanation after all more in character in this Epistle, which carries a tender pathos in it everywhere? A fresh reminder of his *dignity*, after the passing and as it were rejected allusion to it in ver. 8, seems to us to be out of harmony; while nothing could be more fitting here than a word about age and affliction. The question whether St Paul was "an old man," as we commonly reckon age, is not important; so Lightfoot himself points out. At all periods, men have called themselves old when they felt so; Lightfoot instances Sir Walter Scott at fifty-five. (St Paul was probably quite sixty at this time.) And it is immaterial whether or no Philemon was his junior. If he were Paul's coeval, it would matter little. The appeal lies in the fact of the writer's "failing powers," worn in the Lord's service; and this would touch an equal as readily as a junior. To our mind too the phrase, "*being such a one as*," conveys, though it is hard to analyse the impression, the thought of a pathetic *self-depreciation*.

On the whole we recommend the rendering of the A.V. and (text) R.V. But by all means see Lightfoot's note.

*also a prisoner of Jesus Christ*] See on ver. 1.—"*Also*":—the weakness of age was *aggravated* by the helplessness of bonds.

10. *I beseech thee*] See on the same word just above.

*my son...whom I have begotten*] Lit., "*whom I begot*." But English demands the perfect where the event is quite recent.

"*Son*": "*begotten*":—cp. 1 Cor. iv. 15: "I begot you, *through the Gospel*." The teacher who, by the grace of God, brings into contact the penitent soul and Him who is our Life, and by faith in whom we become "the children of God" (Gal. iii. 26), is, in a sense almost more than figurative, the convert's spiritual father. The spiritual relationship between the two is deep and tender indeed. The converted runaway had taken his place with Timothy (1 Tim. i. 2; 2 Tim. i. 2) and Titus (Tit. i. 4) in St Paul's *family circle*.

See Gal. iv. 19 for the boldest and tenderest of all his *parental* appeals.

*Onesimus*] The name stands last in the sentence, in the Greek; a perfect touch of heart-rhetoric.

bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but **11**  
 now profitable to thee and to me: whom I have sent again: **12**  
 thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: whom **13**

“The name was very commonly borne by slaves” (Lightfoot, p. 376). It means “*Helpful*,” “*Profitable*”; and such words were frequent as slave-names. Lightfoot (p. 376, note) quotes among others *Chrestus* (“*Good*”), *Symphorus* (“*Profitable*”), and *Carpus* (“*Fruit*”). Female slaves often bore names descriptive of appearance; *Arescousa* (“*Pleasing*”), *Terpousa* (“*Winning*”), &c.

On Onesimus and his status see *Introd.* to this Epistle, ch. iii., iv.

**11. in time past]** In the Greek, simply, *once*.

*unprofitable]* A gentle “play” on “*Helpful*’s” name; an allusion, and no more (for no more was needed), to his delinquencies. To Onesimus himself Paul had no doubt spoken, with urgent faithfulness, of his *sin* against his master. What the sin had been we can only guess, beyond the evident fact that he had run away. Vv. 18, 19, suggest that he had robbed Philemon before his flight, though the language does not imply more than petty crime of that kind.

Perhaps Philemon would recall the “unprofitable bondservant” of the Lord’s parable, a parable recorded for us by “the beloved physician” now at Paul’s side (Luke xvii. 10).

*and to me]* “An after-thought... According to common Greek usage the first person would naturally precede the second” (Lightfoot). The words are a loving testimony to Onesimus’ devotion.

**12. whom I have sent again]** Lit., “*I did send*”; the “epistolary aorist,” as in Col. iv. 8, where see note.—How much lies behind these simple words; what unselfish jealousy for duty on St Paul’s part, and what courage of conscience and faith on that of Onesimus! By law, his offended master might treat him exactly as he pleased, for life or death. See *Introd.*, ch. iv., and Appendix M.

“No prospect of usefulness should induce ministers to allow their converts to neglect relative obligations, or to fail of obedience to their superiors. One great evidence of true repentance consists in returning to the practice of those duties which had been neglected” (Scott).

*receive]* **Welcome**; the same word as that in Rom. xiv. 1, 3, xv. 7; and below, ver. 17.

But there is strong evidence for the omission of this word, and (somewhat less strong) for the omission of “*thou therefore*.” This would leave **him, that is** &c., as the true reading. If so, this clause should be linked to that before it;—**Whom I have sent back—him, that is, &c.**—a bold but pathetic stroke of expression. Such a connexion seems better than that adopted by Lightfoot, who begins a new sentence with “*him*,” and seeks the verb in ver. 17.

*mine own bowels]* **Mine own heart**; see on ver. 7. The Greek might, by usage, refer to Onesimus as St Paul’s *son*; as if to say, “bone of my bone.” But, as Lightfoot points out, this would be unlike St Paul’s use of the word everywhere else; with *him*, it always indicates *the emotions*.—*Cor, corculum* (“*sweetheart*”), are somewhat similarly used in Latin, as words of personal fondness.

I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might  
 14 have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: but  
 without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit  
 15 should not be as *it were* of necessity, but willingly. For  
 perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou

13. *I would*] Lit., "*I was wishing*"; the imperfect indicates a half-purpose, stopped by other considerations. Lightfoot compares for similar imperfects Rom. ix. 3; Gal. iv. 20.

*me*] Lit., *myself*.

*in thy stead*] **On thy behalf**; as thy representative, substitute, agent.

He assumes the loving Philemon's personal devotion.

*ministered*] as personal attendant; the habitual reference of the verb. Cp. e.g. Matt. iv. 11, viii. 15; Luke xvii. 8, xxii. 26; Joh. xii. 2; 2 Tim. i. 18.

*of the gospel*] "For the hope of Israel," and of the world, "he was bound with this chain" (Acts xviii. 20). Cp. Phil. i. 13.

On the word "*Gospel*" see note on Col. i. 5.

14. *mind*] Properly, "*opinion*," **decision**. Latin Versions, *consilium*.

*would I do nothing*] Lit., "*nothing I willed to do*." The A.V. represents the idiom rightly.

*that thy benefit*] The primary reason, doubtless, was that it was Onesimus' duty to return, and Paul's to give him up. But this delicate subsidiary motive was not less real.

"*Thy benefit*"—lit., "*thy good*," **thy kindness**. The reference seems to be to Philemon's general kindness to his friend, of which the permission to Onesimus to stay would have been an instance. So Ellicott.

*not as it were of necessity, but willingly*] It might seem that he almost suggests to Philemon to *send Onesimus back to him*. But this is not likely in itself, in view of the long and costly journey involved; and besides, he looks forward to visit Colossæ himself before long (ver. 22). What he means is that he sends back Onesimus, because to retain him would be to get a benefit from Philemon willing *or not*, and Philemon's "*good*" had always been willingly given.

"*As it were*" softens the "*of necessity*"; Philemon might not be unwilling, but there would be *the look* of his being so.

15. *For*] He gives a new reason for Onesimus' return. Perhaps it was *on purpose* for such a more than restoration that he was permitted to desert Philemon. So to send him back is to carry out God's plan.

*perhaps*] He claims no insight into the Divine purpose, where it is not revealed to him.

*departed*] Lit., **was parted**. From one point of view, that of providential permission, the runaway was *sent* away. Chrysostom (quoted by Lightfoot) beautifully compares Gen. xlv. 5, where Joseph says to his brethren, "*God did send me before you*."

*for a season*] Lit., "*for an hour*." So 2 Cor. vii. 8; Gal. ii. 5.

*receive him*] The Greek verb is often used of *receiving payment*; e.g.

shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but <sup>16</sup> above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him <sup>17</sup> as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, <sup>18</sup>

Matt. vi. 2, 5, 16. We might almost paraphrase, "*get him paid back*"; as if he had been "*lent to the Lord.*"

*for ever*] Lit., "*eternal,*" *aibnion*. The adjective tends to mark *duration as long* as the nature of the subject allows. And by usage it has a close connexion with things spiritual. "*For ever*" here thus imports both natural and spiritual permanence of restoration; "*for ever*" on earth, and then hereafter; a final return to Philemon's home, with a prospect of heaven in Philemon's company.

**16. not now as a servant] No more as bondservant.** Not that he would cease to be such, necessarily, in law; St Paul does not say "*set him free.*" But in Christ he was free, and of kin.

*a brother beloved*] Cp. 1 Tim. vi. 2 for the same thought from the slave's point of view. These simple words are an absolute and fatal antithesis to the principle, and so ultimately to the existence, of slavery.

"Christianity alone can work these holy transformations, changing a temporal servitude into an eternal brotherhood" (Quesnel).—See further, *Introd.*, ch. iv., particularly pp. 163, 164.

*specially to me*] Lit., **most of all to me.** Philemon's beloved "*brother*" was Paul's most beloved "*son.*"

*but how much more*] A verbal inconsistency, conveying a thought of noble warmth and delicacy. He had said "*most to me*"; but after all it is "*more than most*" to Philemon.

*in the flesh*] A remarkable phrase, as if slavery were a sort of kinship. This thought appears, as a fact, in combination (and contrast) with the harshest theories of ancient slavery. Thus Aristotle (*Polit.*, i. ii.; see *Introd.* to this Epistle, ch. iv.) writes, "*the slave is a portion of his master; as it were a living, though separated, portion of his body.*" And again: "*he shares his master's reason, so far as to perceive it.*" The Gospel would of course assimilate and enforce with all its power *that* aspect of the connexion.

*in the Lord?*] In whom there is "*neither bond nor free,*" and in whom now master and slave were "*one man*" (Gal. iii. 26—28).

**17. count]** Lit., "*have,*" **hold.** The word is similarly used Luke xiv. 18; Phil. ii. 29.

*a partner*] **An associate, a fellow;** in faith and interests. The Apostle is altogether the man, the friend.—Cp. 2 Cor. viii. 23.—Wyclif, "*as thou haste me a felowe.*"

*receive*] On the word, see note on ver. 12.

*as myself*] **As me;** and so as your "*fellow,*" in Christ. "After calling the slave...his brother, his son, his heart, what can this apostolic soul do further but call him his other self?" (Quesnel).

**18. If he hath wronged thee]** Lit., **But if he wronged thee,** before, or when, he fled. See on ver. 11. Horace (*Sat.*, i. i. 78) says how

19 put that on mine account; I Paul have written *it* with mine  
own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how  
20 thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. Yea,  
brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my  
21 bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience

the anxious master "fears lest his slaves should pillage him and fly"  
(*ne te compulset fugientes*).

*oweth*] The slave might be trusted by his master with money for purchases; or he might work at a trade, or do casual service for others, his master claiming the proceeds. Thus he might be his owner's debtor. See Smith's *Dict. of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, art. *Servus*.

*put that on mine account*] Latin Versions, *hoc mihi imputa*; Wyclif, "*asette thou this thing to me*."—Such collections as the Philippians sent (Phil. iv. 10—18) enabled him to offer this generous guarantee.

19. *I Paul have written it*] Lit., "*did write it*;" an "epistolary aorist" (Col. iv. 8); "the tense commonly used in signatures" (Lightfoot).—Here, surely, he takes the pen (cp. Col. iv. 18) and writes his indebtedness in autograph, with a formal mention of his own name; then, he gives the pen back to the amanuensis.

"A signature to a deed in ancient or mediæval times would commonly take the form..."*I so-and-so*" (Lightfoot).

*I will*] The "*I*" is emphatic in the Greek.

*albeit I do not say*] Lit., and better, **that I say not, not to say.**

*thou owest unto me...besides*] As if to say, "I am restoring to you Onesimus, *made new*; this far more than clears any loss he cost you when he fled; thus you are *indebted*, even in money's worth, to me; and *besides*—you owe me yourself."

*thine own self*] The converted man "comes to himself" (Luke xv. 17) as never before. "It is a new creation" (2 Cor. v. 17); as it were a new self. Under God, this is due to the human bringer of the converting word; and so to him, under God, the convert feels instinctively a moral indebtedness; he owes him help and service in the new life.

20. *Yea*] So (in the Greek) Matt. xv. 27; Phil. iv. 3.

*brother*] Again the word of love and honour, as in ver. 7.

*let me have joy of thee*] We may render, less warmly, "*Let me reap benefit of thee*." So the Geneva Version; "*Let me obteyne this fruit of thee*." But the Greek usage of the verb before us here, *in the optative*, in which it often conveys a "*God bless you*," favours the text. He does not merely ask to be served, but to be made very happy.—Tyndale renders, "*Let me enioie thee*."

Latin Versions, *Ita, frater, ego te fruuar*; which Wyclif, mistaking, renders, "*so brother I schal use thee*."

*in the Lord*] All is "*in Him*," for His living members.

*refresh my bowels*] Refresh, or rest, my heart. See on ver. 7 above.

*in the Lord*] Read undoubtedly, **in Christ**.

I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say. But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ

**21. thy obedience]** The obedience of love, as to a father and benefactor. Cp. Phil. ii. 12. Not love of authority, but a tender gravity in a case so near his heart, speaks here.

*I wrote]* Better, in English epistolary idiom, **I have written.**

*also do more than I say]* He means, surely, that Philemon will emancipate his slave-brother. But he does not say so in set terms. "The word emancipation seems to be trembling on his lips, and yet he does not once utter it" (Lightfoot, p. 389).—See further *Introd.*, ch. iv.

## 22. HE HOPES TO VISIT COLOSSÆ.

**22. But withal]** Here is a different matter, yet not quite apart from the main theme. "There is a gentle compulsion in this mention of a personal visit to Colossæ. The Apostle would be able to see for himself that Philemon had not disappointed his expectations" (Lightfoot). And more; would not the joy of the prospect make "obedience" on Philemon's part doubly willing?

*prepare]* The verb is in the singular.

*a lodging]* The Greek may mean either "*lodging*" or *hospitality*. General Greek usage is in favour of the latter. The "*hospitality*" would no doubt be gladly provided in Philemon's own house; but St Paul, with his unflinching courtesy, does not *ask* this.

*I trust]* **I hope.** He makes no prophecy, where none is authorized. Even when (as Rom. xv. 24, 28) he speaks positively of his plans, it is with an evident reservation of "if the Lord will." The prospect of Rom. xv. had by this time been much modified.

*through your prayers]* which "move the hand of God," being all the while part of His chain of means. For St Paul's estimate of the power of intercessory prayer see e.g. Rom. xv. 30—32 (a close parallel); 2 Cor. i. 11; Phil. i. 19.—Neither for him nor for the Colossians did the deep peace of self-resignation mean Stoic apathy, nor, surely, even the "indifference" of the Mystics.

*I shall be given unto you]* With a noble *naïveté* he recognizes his own dearness in the eyes of his converts; he does not affect to think that his return would not be "*a gift*" to them.

Lightfoot cites Acts iii. 14, xxv. 11, for the use of the Greek verb in connexion with *a person*.

## 23—25. SALUTATIONS.

**23. There salute thee]** Cp. Col. iv. 10.

*Epaphras]* Cp. Col. i. 7, and note.

*my fellowprisoner]* Cp. Col. iv. 10, and note. This passage is in favour of explaining the term there also to mean "a visitor who is so much with me as to be, as it were, in prison too."



24 Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-  
25 labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with  
your spirit. Amen.

¶ Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.

24. *Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas*] Cp. Col. iv. 10, 14, and notes.

This group of names (with the names of Archippus, ver. 2 above, and Onesimus, ver. 10) links this Epistle to that to Colossæ, in time and place of writing, and in destination.—See Paley's acute remarks (*Horæ Paulinæ*, ch. xiv.) on the subtle tokens of independence in the two lists and so of literary genuineness. See also Salmon, *Introd. to N. T.*, pp. 467, 468.

*my fellowlabourers*] A favourite word with St Paul; see above, ver. 1.

Demas stands here among the faithful. But see on Col. iv. 14.

25. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*] So Rom. xvi. 20, 24; 1 Cor. xvi. 23; 2 Cor. xiii. 13; Gal. vi. 18 (where the whole formula is verbatim as here); Phil. iv. 23; 1 Thess. v. 28; 2 Thess. iii. 18; Rev. xxii. 21. Cp. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

"*The grace*" is in short the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in His saving presence and power; Himself at once Gift and Giver. So the Epistle closes, as it began, "*in Him*."

*with your spirit*] Not "*spirits*"; as if Philemon and his house had, in Christ, "one spirit," one inner life.—See further, Appendix N.—The same phrase occurs Gal. vi. 18 and (in the true reading) Phil. iv. 23; where see our note.

*Amen*] The word is probably to be retained here. So R.V. text. It is properly a Hebrew adverb, meaning "*surely*;" repeatedly used as here in the O. T. See e.g. Deut. xxvii. 15, &c.; Jer. xi. 5 (marg. A.V.).

#### THE SUBSCRIPTION.

*Written from Rome, &c.*] Lit., **TO PHILEMON IT WAS WRITTEN FROM ROME BY MEANS OF (i.e., of course, "it was sent by hand of") (THE) DOMESTIC ONESIMUS.** Obviously, the statement is true to fact. On the antiquity of this and similar Subscriptions see note on that appended to Colossians.

A few MSS. (of cent. 8 at earliest) have, **(THE) EPISTLE OF THE HOLY APOSTLE PAUL TO PHILEMON AND APPIA, OWNERS OF ONESIMUS, AND TO ARCHIPPUS THE (sic) DEACON OF THE CHURCH IN COLOSSÆ, WAS WRITTEN FROM ROME BY MEANS OF (THE) DOMESTIC ONESIMUS.**