

TAKEN INTO PARTNERSHIP.

BY THE EDITOR.

"I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds; whom I have sent again; thou, therefore, receive him. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldst receive him forever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved. If thou count me, therefore, a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on my account." Philemon 10, 12, 15-18.

HISTORY is often the richest form of parable, and biography the most graphic kind of preaching. The story of a runaway slave, as told in the epistle to Philemon, is far more than a story. It is an evangel, full of the richest and most pathetic gospel. Let us give attention, while the various phases of this biographical sermon are passed in review.

I. The far-off made nigh. "For perhaps he departed from thee for a season that thou shouldst receive him forever."

Many a soul is brought to Christ through the rebound of sin. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," says Jesus to the refractory soul. But he permitted him to run against the pricks, to be wounded on the sharp points of judgment in order that he might react more powerfully toward love and loyalty to God. If he had not, through wrong doing, been made to confess himself "the chief of sinners," he might never have learned to acknowledge Christ as the chief among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely. So he departed from God for a season that he might be received into his fellowship forever.

Observe, therefore, how evil is often overruled for good. Sin is sin, and can never be anything else; it is the enemy of God and the destroyer of man, and can never be christened into a handmaid of virtue. Sentimentalists may talk about evil being only "good in the making," and sin being the absence of holiness, the blank space in immature character waiting to be filled in with something better. But we count it the foe of man which deserves only the fire of God—a foe with which no soul should presume to be on friendly terms for a moment.

Yet God compels even this enemy to do ser-

vice to man by the injury he inflicts on him. Satan bites the lost sheep and they run to the good shepherd. His sharp teeth tear their flesh till they begin to bleat after Emmanuel, saying, "All we like sheep have gone astray." And then they discover for the first time the divine provision, "But the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This explains our Lord's saying to the Jewish chief priests and elders, "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Not that these disreputable ones were more welcome. God is no such respecter of persons that he prefers the outcast and unclean to the worthy and virtuous. But the self-righteous will not come to him since they feel no need of him. I heard an honest Christian worker say that he had reason to thank God that he ever became a drunkard. "For," said he, "when I was strictly temperate I was a self-satisfied moralist, with never a thought of Christ as one for whom I had need. But when I was overmastered by the power of drink, I was compelled to flee to Christ for refuge. Thus my sin became my introduction to the blessing of my soul."

Many of Christ's elect saints were once the devil's castaways. They rose very high in saintship, because they sank very low in sinship. Here is a hint for Christian workers. Good ball players are skilful at catching the ball on its rebound. Be ready, oh servants of Christ, to catch souls in their recoil from sin, that, by the grace of God, their rebound from evil doing may be a homebound toward God and righteousness. This is the way that Mary Magdalene and Augustine and John Newton and John Bunyan were brought into the kingdom. Their gross departure from God for a season was the means of their being received by him forever.

"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Oh shameful spectacle! this bold apostle following Christ afar off, when angels are pressing near to wipe the bloody sweat from his brow; warming himself at the fire of the enemy, when the Master's soul was chill and faint with dying;

and swearing, when seraphim and cherubim were adoring and wondering to see their glorious Lord "led as a sheep to the slaughter." But all this was permitted, in order to fashion Peter into a chosen instrument for his Master. "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." This broken reed becomes a strong staff; this smoking flax had become a trimmed and shining light. His fall was over-ruled, for his rising again into such strength of manhood, into such victorious saintship, that he was fitted to be one of the very chiefest apostles. He departed from his Lord for a season, that he might receive him forever.

II. The servant made a brother. "Not now as a servant, but above a servant a brother beloved," etc.

You remember how Jesus said to the twelve: "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." How different is the position of a hireling disciple like Judas, carrying the bag, ministering in the temporalities of Christ's kingdom, and the bosom disciple like John, leaning on Christ's breast at supper, sharing his most brotherly confidence and listening to his most cherished secrets. No longer a servant merely, but a "brother beloved" is the true Christian. Look into any well-ordered Christian home among us and see what the gospel has done in this respect. The hired help of the house, after the breakfast is cleared away, is found gathered with the family, reading the Scriptures, joining in the hymn and kneeling in prayer. Isn't that a change in the condition of things from the time when a Roman householder would strike a dagger through the heart of his servant, if he chanced to spill a dish of soup or to break an earthen vessel as he was waiting on the table, and think no more of it than of killing a dog? We need not suppose that Philemon was any such stern and hard master as this. But at all events there would be a great change when Onesimus, the Christian slave, and Philemon, the Christian master, should meet again. The one is still the master and the other the servant. But as related

to Christ, they are both on the same level.

So is the believer and his Saviour. His servants we are forevermore; but his brethren also, communing with him in the most intimate fellowship, telling him your trials as a brother "born for adversity." Here is the test of your intimacy with Christ—that you have secrets to tell that the world knows not of. "Behold, I show you a mystery," says Paul to the Corinthians. Expressed colloquially it would be: "Behold, I tell you a secret. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Nobody knows that but the Christian who is intimate with Christ. Ask the men of this world what is the most certain fact concerning the future, and see if they do not reply: "The one thing which is certain is that all men shall die." And a multitude of profound Christians will join in this verdict. That shows plainly that they do not know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. "Behold, I tell you a secret," says Paul. "We shall *not* all sleep." *We shall not all die.* Multitudes will be alive at the Lord's coming who will not die. Paul, how did you learn that secret? "I was caught up into paradise; I heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful to utter. And as John leaned on Christ's bosom at the supper, so I was privileged to lean on his bosom in paradise. But remember I also heard things which I was commanded to utter. And you may know them as well as I, if you will seek to be intimate with your Lord." "Henceforth I call you not servants, but brethren; and all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Let philosophers search their books; let soothsayers consult their oracles; but because ye are my brethren, "to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God."

Come, Christian, what's the good news of God? Hasn't Jesus told you anything worth repeating of late? If so, tell it out in our assemblies for prayer, that we may know it also: and as you tell it, all shall exclaim, "Behold, he has been with Jesus and learned of him."

And not only to us but to those without. Christ sends us with the message, "Behold, I

bring you good tidings of great joy." Have you kept the good news to yourself? One of the most execrated names in history is that of a man who kept back the king's pardon from a condemned nobleman who had been unjustly sentenced to death. To you is committed the word of reconciliation, and the precious secrets of that word are more and more revealed to you through communion with Christ. What will the angels think of you, what will the Lord think of you, if you keep those "secrets," to yourself and do not tell them out?

III. The alien made a partner. "If thou count me therefore as a partner receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on my account." The deepest mystery of redemption is revealed in these words. Christ is the mediator between God and men; but that means something more than a go-between and negotiator. He is the kinsman of both parties. It is as the co-partner with God that he undertook our cause on the cross, and it is as the co-partner with man that he maintains our cause in heaven. Some opposers have ridiculed the doctrine of atonement as theological bookkeeping; the sinner's guilt charged to Christ and Christ's righteousness charged to the sinner; and so salvation effected by a kind of double-entry. But listen to the real statement of the case:

There is Christ standing before the throne. He has made a full and complete atonement for our sins upon the cross, and in the scars of his hands and his feet and his side, there is written the receipt in full of a fulfilled law. Here comes a sinner pleading for mercy. Jesus beholding him looks into the Father's face and exclaims: "*If thou count me as a partner receive him as myself.*" Christ does not stand before the Father as a beggar, negotiating an unmerited loan of mercy; but as a co-partner with God having an equal right to all the funds of grace that are treasured up in heaven. This is what is meant by the words of John, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It would be unjust in God not to extend pardon to us now that Christ has purchased that

pardon on the cross. Let thousands and tens of thousands come: let them make a run on the bank of heaven if they will; but it will never stop payment. The blood-money of redemption which Christ has on deposit there is an infinite capital. His account can never be overdrawn. "The exceeding riches of his grace" is the Scripture estimate of his wealth. Therefore it is said in Scripture that "he is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him." As rich as God himself, since he is God's equal partner.

But he is just as truly the partner of man; for as God's son he is also our brother. Here comes a penitent, pleading for mercy. And Jesus pleads his case with the Father. "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that to my account," he says. What! that liar's falsehoods, that blasphemer's oath, that drunkard's revelries, that harlot's impurities! Charge them all to Christ's account! Yes, if they are only willing to endorse the charge with penitence and faith, and a sincere turning from their iniquities. "If he hath wronged thee:" oh how we have wronged God; what slight of his love, what neglect of his claims, what insults to his holiness, what mockery in his worship! Oh, "whither shall I go from his presence, or whither shall I fly from his spirit!" No, I may fly to his arms, this moment if I will, since all these sins are put to Christ's account, and being put to his account were nailed to his cross and so taken out of the way forever.

How MANY a Christian pilgrim would never have seen any thing of the spiritual manna, and the spiritual stream from the rock, had God listened to him when, with fear and trembling, he besought him not to lead him into a desert.

— *Krummacher.*

WHEN WE run after Christ he doth not run from us: yet many times when we run from him he runs after us.

A VENERABLE old man says: "Let the slandered take comfort— it's only at fruit trees that thieves throw stones."