

SERMON XXXI.

DUTY OF MASTERS.

COL. iv. 1.

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

THE distinction of the several ranks in society, by which some men have a certain degree of pre-eminence and authority over others, appears to be founded in the original constitution of nature, and must have existed almost from the beginning of the world. As such, it is not set aside, but rather confirmed and strengthened, by the Christian religion. The authority of masters over servants in particular, is, by that religion, expressly established for the mutual convenience and advantage of both.

But, though invested with this authority, masters are never to forget that the distinction between them and their servants is but for a short time, and that in every thing essential they are equals; the work of the *same* Creator, children of the *same* forefather, purchased by the *same* Redeemer, and heirs of the *same* immortality with themselves. If tempted to look down upon their servants with any feeling of insolence and pride, they should say with Job, "Did not he that made me in the womb make them? and did not one fashion us in the womb?"^a

^a Job xxxi. 15.

Or they may check the unchristian emotion, by looking forward to that place where all human distinctions will cease, where they shall equally moulder into dust;—that place of which it is said, "the small and great are there; and the servant is "free from his master."^b

The great principle from which, in this and in every thing else, our conduct ought to proceed, is *love*;—that love which induces a man to look upon every one as a brother, to love his neighbour as himself;—and the great rule by which, in this and every other relation between man and man, our conduct ought to be regulated, is, to do to others as we would *in reason* wish others to do unto us. A master, for instance, should, in supposition, put himself in his servant's place, and consider,—not what he might *unreasonably* wish for,—not what the spirit of ill-humour, or idleness, or self-indulgence, might lead him to desire,—but what *in reason* and *fairness* he would have a right to expect; and let him take care that he behaves to his servant as he would himself *reasonably* wish to be treated in the same situation. Let him require from his servant nothing, which if in his place he would himself think unreasonable; and let him never be guilty towards him of language or behaviour, of which, in such circumstances, he would feel that he had a *right* to complain.

I would here observe by the way, that, under the general term *servant*, I would comprehend all those, who, for whatever length of time, whether for a day, for a week, or for a year, and for whatever consideration, whether wages, or maintenance, or instruction, are engaged to work for another person.

Influenced by the principle of looking upon

^b Job iii. 19.

every man as a brother, of doing as he would be done by, a master will of course take care to comply with the precept in the text, and give unto his "servants that which is just and equal." It is not necessary to point out the precise difference between the two terms of *just* and *equal*; perhaps none was intended by the Apostle. If any *was* intended,—under the term *just*, we may understand whatever is due to a servant in strict justice, by the terms of his hiring, or the acknowledged laws of the country; and under the expression *that which is equal*, we should understand whatever he has a right to expect in fairness and equity, though not the subject of an express agreement.

Under the first term—that which is *just*—will be included the payment of wages *when they become due*;—provided, that is, that the servant is anxious so to receive them; for if a servant or labourer is willing that payment should be delayed, it is evident that no injury is done to him by the delay. When, however, a servant is anxious to receive the money due to him, and it still is withheld, especially where it is withheld for a long time, the precept in Deuteronomy should be remembered; "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy:—At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee."^c The denunciation in Jeremiah also should be called to mind—"Woe unto him—that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work."^d "Behold," says St. James, "the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the

^c Deut. xxiv. 14, 15.

^d Jer. xxii. 13.

"cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."^e

And for the same reason, where sufficient maintenance was part of the agreement, the precept in the text requires the master to provide his servant with a sufficiency of food, however plain and simple; such as in the like situation he would himself think he had reason to expect.

Indeed, in every part of his conduct, he will make the real good, and the reasonable comfort of his servants, the objects of his attention and care. Though he ought not to give way to their unreasonable fancies or desires,—though he will not encourage or indulge them in idleness, which would be hurtful to them as well as to himself,—yet neither will he require from them more work than they are well able to perform, and will take care that he does not render their state painful and galling to them by unnecessary harshness of behaviour. Some persons, from a defect of temper, which has not been corrected or subdued either by their own exertions or by the grace of God, are in the habit of constantly finding fault with their servants, and of never appearing satisfied. A very little reflection upon what they would themselves feel, would tell them how irksome and wearying this must be to those who are the objects of their impatient humour. A very little reflection would make them feel ashamed of thus giving way to a hastiness of manner, which gives pain not only to their servants, but to all who witness it.

There are also, I am afraid, some men in the world who are fond, as they express themselves, of showing their authority; men, who enforce their orders to their servants with violence and threatening, and seldom find fault with or reprimand

^e James v. 4.

them without menaces and abuse; who oftentimes employ oaths and imprecations. Indeed, in every way, like the Egyptian taskmasters of old, they seem to exult in making their servants "serve with rigour." Such conduct, as it generally proceeds either from a violent overbearing temper, or from mere littleness of mind, so it answers but ill, even in a worldly point of view, as it has a tendency to make those who are guilty of it secretly disliked and *despised*. It is most decidedly contrary to the profession of a Christian; for St. Paul expressly enjoins masters to *forbear threatening*.^f They may, and they ought, to be firm and steady with their servants; they may enforce obedience to their lawful commands, and, where their servants are in fault, may admonish, may rebuke them, or, if necessary, may punish them as the law allows; but always with calmness and moderation, like one who bears towards them no ill-will, like as a father would reprimand or punish his children.

And while a master, who is desirous of acting suitably to his Christian profession, is anxious to the utmost of his power to promote the temporal comfort and temporal welfare of his servants, he will be still more anxious to set forward their eternal welfare. In his own conduct he will endeavour to give them an example of all Christian virtues; and will never suffer them to sin against God without admonition or reproof,—unless, when he has strong reason to fear that such admonition or reproof would be ineffectual, and thrown away upon them. If they are ignorant, and destitute of religious knowledge, as is too often the case, he will, as he judges most expedient, either instruct them himself by word of mouth, or take care that they are properly instructed by others, or lend

^f Ephes. vi. 9.

them useful books by which they may instruct themselves. He will, if the circumstances of his family permit it, regularly call them to join in family prayer to God; and on the Lord's day especially, will not only take care to allow them as large a part of it as possible for reading and religious exercises, but will also require them to be present regularly at the public worship of God, and to pay due attention to the instructions of the minister. This attention to family religion is recommended in Scripture both by precept and example. "I know him," says the Almighty of Abraham, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."^g The noble resolution of Joshua is well known—"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."^h

Such are the duties—I ought perhaps rather to say, *some of the duties*—which masters owe to their servants. The performance of them may be enforced by a variety of motives. Such performance would tend not a little to advance the peace and comfort of families, and masters would find their own worldly interests, and the care and quiet of their lives, greatly promoted by it. It is enforced, however, still more strongly by the principles of our holy religion.

Allow me to repeat the consideration, which I mentioned at the beginning of this discourse. In all cases we should *do as we would be done by*. Put yourselves in the place of your servants: suppose that by change of circumstances you were actually to be reduced to their state, and think what you would then have a *right* to expect. Think how you would endure to be treated with violence or contempt—to be assailed with threaten-

^g Gen. xviii. 19.

^h Joshua xxiv. 15.

ing, and curses, and imprecations. If you feel, as you surely must feel, that it would render your situation in life doubly irksome and galling, be not guilty of such behaviour towards your servants.

Consider too, that an humble and low rank in life has been ennobled by being borne by the Saviour of the world. *He took upon him the form of a servant*, he performed the humblest offices, and *came not to be ministered unto* as a master, *but to minister as a servant*. Let this consideration incline you to regard such a station in life with respect. Reflect also that the meanest servant has as great an interest in the death and mediation of Christ, as the highest monarch; that he is equally invited to partake of divine grace, is equally admissible to the highest glories in heaven; and will there be exalted above you, if he is more holy than you. Take heed, therefore, that you despise not your poor brother, for whom Christ died, because his rank is low, because his condition in life is that of a servant.

The great argument, of which St. Paul makes use to enforce upon masters the performance of the duties incumbent upon them, is the consideration that they have also a Master whose eye is upon them, and who is able to call them to account. Thus, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, he says—“Ye masters, do the same things unto them”—do your duty to your servants as punctually and exactly as I have required them to perform their duty to you—“forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.”ⁱ And so again, in the text, nearly in the same words—“Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master

ⁱ Ephes. vi. 9.

“in heaven.” *Ye have a Master in heaven*, who is no respecter of persons, who considers all men as equal, and as distinguished from each other only by greater or less progress in holiness and religion. The difference of ranks and stations is indeed of his appointment, but this difference is merely for a short time. Those who are invested with any degree of authority or power over others, instead of being lifted up by it, or tempted to pride or arrogance, should draw from it matters of humiliation and fear. They should regard such authority or power as a talent, for the use or abuse of which they will be called to a solemn account; and should remember, that in proportion as more was committed to them, so will more be required. This consideration, duly impressed upon the conscience, and kept always present to the mind, would, through divine grace, go far towards enforcing the performance of your duty in this, and all the other relations in life. *You have a Master in heaven*; a Master who will one day take account, and a *strict account*,^k of you, and all his other servants. Let the thoughts of this induce you always to give unto your servants “that which is just and equal”—that which is *just*—that to which, by their agreement with you, or by the laws of the country, they are justly entitled—and that which is *equal*, that which, though not due by positive agreement, they have yet a right to expect in fairness and equity. Let this consideration restrain you from all intemperate violence of behaviour or of language towards them—above all, from enforcing your commands by oaths and curses. Let it make you anxious to render them as comfortable as the nature of your service will permit. Let it, in short, induce you to seek to advance their happiness in this life, and to set forward the salvation of their souls in the life to come.

^k Matt. xviii. 23.

The Master's Prayer.

O God, whose providence disposes the several ranks and conditions of men in this world, assist me in fulfilling all the duties which belong to my station. Enable me to walk in my house with an upright heart. Make me kind to my servants, and always ready to give unto them that which is just and equal; knowing that I also have a Master in heaven. Make my servants truly to fear thee, and to be governed by thy holy laws in their behaviour both to me and to each other. Enable us all faithfully to serve thee, and to walk in the paths of truth and holiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XXXII.

DUTY OF SERVANTS.

COLOS. iii. 22.

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.

As the ordinary business of the world is carried on by the aid of the many various classes and conditions of men; so, each of the persons, of whom these several classes consist, is called upon by the precepts of religion to *do his duty* in that particular state in which the providence of God has placed him. One of the most numerous of these classes consists of those who have agreed to give their time and their labour for a certain price—for stipulated wages—thus contracting the relation of *servants*. Servants are placed in a situation of great usefulness, which has peculiar duties belonging to it; upon the observance of which, much of their own comfort and respectability, much too of the peace and well being of society in general, is found to depend.

In the plain advice which I wish to offer to those who are servants, I shall endeavour shortly to state, first, the duties which they owe to their masters; secondly, the behaviour which they ought to observe towards their fellow-servants; and, lastly,