THE RENDERING OF ROMANS XII. 16.

THE Revised Version of *τοῖς ταπεινοῖς συναπαγόμενοι* is "Condescend to things that are lowly," with the margins, "Greek, be carried away with," and "Or, them" (that are lowly). Thus the reading of the Authorised Version is relegated to the margin, and the old Authorised Version's margin, "Be contented with mean things," is (to my great regret) omitted. The passage is interesting both linguistically and ethically. *Συναπάγομαι* occurs only twice elsewhere in the Greek New Testament, and then only in a bad sense, "to let oneself be carried away, or seduced, by anything" (see Gal. ii. 13; 2 Pet. iii. 17). In the Septuagint of Exodus xiv. 6, *συναπήγαγε* is the equivalent of לָקַח "he took," or, as the context would allow us to paraphrase, "he forced to go (with him)." On grounds of Greek-Biblical usage, therefore, "condescend" seems too weak a rendering of *συναπαγόμενοι*; but, if it be allowed, surely its most natural complement in the phrase is, not "to lowly things," but "to lowly persons." As a matter of English usage, we can say "to condescend to a person," but hardly, in the ordinary English of a practical exhortation, "to condescend to a thing," unless we mean "to condescend to perform an unworthy act." If the Revised Version's exegesis of the passage be adopted, surely it will be better to change the Authorised Version's rendering of the participle.

Returning to the three passages in the Greek Bible referred to, we may notice that they all imply the communication of an irresistible impulse. If, then, we confine ourselves to Greek-Biblical usage, the meaning of the phrase will be, "Letting yourselves be carried away with an enthusiasm for lowly persons, or for lowly things," not merely, as Dr. Farrar puts it (*St. Paul*, vol. ii. p. 259, note), "Letting the lowly lead you with them by the hand,"

which would rather be *συμπεριφερόμενοι* (as Sept. of Sirach xxv. 1), but, "Letting them drag you away with them."

The objections in the present writer's mind to this interpretation are: (1) that it expresses a requirement pitched in too high a key for the immediate context; perhaps one might add, too narrow in its compass for any congregation composed of variously gifted persons, some of whom presumably would have to lay the Gospel net in the haunts of those who would be neither lowly in station nor lowly in mind; and (2) that *συναπάγομαι* does not seem to be used in a distinctly good sense, *i.e.* of giving way to a good impulse. It may be doubted, too, whether, "Let yourselves be captivated by the lowly," is a natural exhortation to make in any language.

At any rate, we shall never perhaps feel quite sure of our ground, as long as we keep to considerations drawn from Greek usage. Let us try those suggested by Semitic. The Syriac Peshito represents the Greek phrase, by "Unite yourselves with the lowly-minded"; Delitzsch, in his new translation of the New Testament (the edition quoted is the fourth, 1882), by כִּי אִם־הִתְרָעוּ אֵת־הַשְּׁפָלִים, "but make friends with those that are lowly." Neither of these helps us much philologically. But on referring to his separate translation of the Epistle to the Romans, with philological notes, published in 1870, we see what view the latter scholar really takes of the passage. There he renders the phrase כִּי אִם־תִּתְנַהֲגוּ עִם־הַשְּׁפָלִים "but familiarize yourselves with those that are lowly." This throws fresh light on the Greek. Every Hebraist knows that נהג means "to drive," but in Eccles. ii. 3 recent authorities have pointed out that we should probably adopt the sense "to conduct oneself." This supplies the bridge to a well-established meaning of the word in the language of the Talmud and of the Targums, "to be accustomed to," or, as it may mean in Ithpeel, "to accustom oneself to," "to familiarize oneself

with." Delitzsch's early rendering, therefore, seems to me philologically the best. He could not indeed retain it in his popular Hebrew version (a monument of consecrated learning), because, being Chaldaizing, it would not have been universally intelligible.

Hebrew students, I believe, are very strongly of opinion that Hebraistic considerations are destined to influence New Testament exegesis more than they have yet done. A German Jewish scholar has admitted that "form and matter, contents and dress (of the New Testament), are productions of the Hebrew spirit and of Hebrew intuition."

St. Paul himself, as M. Renan reminded us in *Les apôtres*, is apt to think in Semitic forms; hence we may in part explain his abruptness, and also perhaps a few at least of his strange expressions. That the Greek phrase before us is a strange one, can hardly be doubted. We can account for it with ease by supposing that St. Paul translated the Hebrew phrase which was in his mind with regard to its primary rather than its secondary meaning. The latter however gives a more appropriate rendering (granting it to be an allowable one) of the Greek phrase than any of those which divide the suffrages of the commentators.

It is perhaps an additional advantage (and this brings us to the ethical point of view referred to at the outset) that we thus get rid for ever of the questionable advice to "condescend." Whether "condescension" has altered its meaning in recent English, I know not; but I fancy that the moral sense of most preachers prompts them to emphasize the duty, not of "condescension," which is too suggestive of patronizing, but of friendly sympathy with the poor and their ways. Our grand example is One who descended, but did not condescend; who did not move about among men as a superior being, but became "like unto us in all things." God Himself is hardly to be called condescending; Hupfeld's and Dr.

Kay's rendering, "thy condescension," for עֲנוָתְךָ in Psalm xviii. 35 (Heb. 36), is subtly devised but inferior, perhaps, to that of Delitzsch (who, however, in his note uses "condescension" as a synonym for "humility"), "thy humility." It is hard, no doubt, for a rich or great man to descend without condescending, but surely He who dwells at once "in the high and holy place," and "with him that is lowly in spirit" (Isa. lvii. 15), is not, according to the deepest view of His character, to be called "condescending." At any rate, "condescend" is an equivocal phrase in a Pauline epistle, and only to be allowed from stern necessity. St. Paul did not "condescend," nor indeed did he "let himself be captivated" by one class more than another. "To the weak he became as weak" (1 Cor. ix. 22); that is true, but he also tells us that he is "become all things to all men," and that he is "debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise" (Rom. i. 14). All men who had need of him could "captivate" him, while their need lasted. But for daily life, for familiar intercourse, St. Paul, like his and our Master, was contented with lowly things and persons, partly because the poor seemed to need him most, partly because he was free from self-importance, and hated "disputes who should be greatest." He "set not his mind on high things, but familiarized himself with lowly things." He was a working-man, and lived as working-men lived. And those who cannot follow St. Paul in the letter, any more than they can so follow the Master, may still carry out the spirit of his teaching, by "making friends with the lowly," and cultivating that simplicity in externals which, in some of our moods, seems to us to be vanishing more and more from English society.

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