

## ΑΡΠΑΓΜΟΣ (PHILIPPIANS II 6).

I VENTURE to doubt whether either the Authorized or the Revised Version of this passage represents the real thought of the Apostle. According to the former our Lord claimed equality with God ; according to the other either He had it, but renounced it, or He did not seek to grasp forcibly at this prerogative and equality which was afterwards freely conferred upon Him as the reward of His self-humiliation and obedience.

It is admitted that *ἀρπαγμός* usually and naturally means the action of plundering ; but that it may, and sometimes does, have the meaning of *ἀρπαγμα*, plunder, booty. The word is not found elsewhere in the N.T. or in the Septuagint ; while *ἀρπαγμα* occurs in the latter seventeen times, always in the sense of plunder, prey, booty, or stolen property. The probability is therefore that St Paul, who knew his Greek Bible well, would have used *ἀρπαγμα* if he had not meant the action of plundering.

Now consider his readers. It has been maintained, on purely negative evidence, that there were few Jews in the Philippian Church. But such a city, on a great trade route from East to West, with all the advantages of a Roman colony, would be sure to attract the enterprising, trading Jews. St Paul thought it necessary to warn the Philippians against Judaizers, whose influence would be greater with believing Jews than with Gentiles. His boast of his own pure Hebrew descent and Jewish orthodoxy is out of place if only a small fraction of the church were Jews ; indeed it would have been provocative of the faction and vain glory which he deprecates. It is not too much then to assume that the Philippian Church was familiar with Jewish conceptions of the Messiah as a conquering Davidic king who would attract the desirable things of all the nations to Jerusalem. The idea of *ἀρπαγμός* was inevitably associated with such a king. Did not all eastern kings and potentates assume that royal power and glory demanded that, so far as they were able, they should plunder their enemies and aggrandize themselves and their subjects ? Even under the Roman Empire, the Philippian Christians, many of whom must have been in fairly good circumstances, some of them keen business men (ii 4), may have had good cause to grumble in private at the *ἀρπαγή* and *ἀρπαγμός* of tax-gatherers and praetors. The *ἀρπάγματα* did not come their way.

Very naturally then the Philippians would understand *ἀρπαγμός* in an active sense. But they would never imagine that St Paul spoke of robbing God, but rather that he was telling them that the Messiah, Christ Jesus, did not think that to be on an equality with God spelt

rapacity, plundering, self-aggrandizement ; that on the contrary He gave all away, did not set up as an earthly king, but was among His disciples 'as one that serveth', with all the infirmities of our mortality, submitting at last to the most shameful death. And here was St Paul exhorting them to imitate His mind.

'Ἀρπαγμός, in this sense, was just the temptation presented to our Lord, when in the wilderness the vision of all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them was unrolled before Him. The same temptation recurred again and again, but He always put it away as the suggestion of Satan to whom by yielding to it He would have virtually bowed the knee.

Will the language bear this meaning? Compare such expressions as 'To me to live is Christ,' 'What things were gain to me, these I counted loss for Christ,' 'The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking,' 'Supposing that godliness is money-getting, πορισμός,' 'Account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation,' and the saying attributed to our Lord, *Ὁὐκ ἔστιν ἀρπαγμὸς ἡ τιμὴ*.

The objections to taking *ἀρπαγμός* as equal to *ἄρπαγμα* seem to me insuperable. This latter does not mean a thing to be grasped in future, but one which has been grasped and carried off already. If a *res rapienda* were meant we should have had *ἀρπακτέον* or *δεῖν ἀρπάξασθαι* or some such expression, which would have been unequivocal. Besides, the assertion is too weak. To say that He did not think equality with God a thing to be clutched at, to be retained or to be obtained by force, is far from saying that He willingly surrendered His claim. The more comprehensive the predicate is, the stronger is the affirmative statement, the weaker the negation.

If the Philippians were in some danger of being influenced by Judaizing Christians, no doubt they would have also many discussions with unbelieving Jews who boasted of the glory and dominion they would enjoy when their Messiah came, and scoffed at the Crucified. And they had many prophecies which they could quote. How could the Apostle help the Philippian Church? I can conceive of no better way than this exhibition of the Lord as voluntarily and gladly rejecting the earthly ideal for the spiritual, and thus winning the Name that is above every name.

JOHN ROSS.