

UNMUZZLE THE OX.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY

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ON BEHALF OF

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S AUGMENTATION FUND.

"Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?"
—1 Cor. ix. 9, also 1 Tim. v. 18, and Deut. xxv. 4.

DOETH GOD TAKE CARE FOR OXEN? Yes, most assuredly. God takes care for every creature He has made, great and small, and would have even dumb creatures treated kindly. Therefore He gave a law forbidding the muzzling of the oxen while treading out the grain. He knew the heart of man, and its constant tendency to become hard and grasping. He knew that after his people were settled in Canaan—that land flowing with milk and honey—many a close-fisted farmer would put a muzzle on his ox, because he grudged the few ears of grain it ate while going round and round the threshing-floor. Therefore, by this command, He, as it were, cries to such,

HANDS OFF!

Leave the beast alone. "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." Let him take his fill. So long as he is working hard, the little he can eat will neither harm him nor ruin you. Whereas, if you muzzle him, you may save a little, but you will do a great injury; for it would be the height of cruelty to tantalize the poor beast, hour after hour, with the sight, the smell, and even the touch of that which he wishes all the time to eat, and cannot take a mouthful of. Will not that muzzle make him restive and ill-tempered? Without a muzzle,

THE OX WILL LIKE HIS WORK,

and do it well. With a muzzle, the ox will hate his work, and do it ill. Hence, this kind and considerate command; and it is just a sample of God's goodness to all His creatures. The Royal Humane Society of England, and kindred institutions, are pointed to, and rightly, as instances of the kindly spirit of modern civilization, but he who studies the much neglected laws of Moses will find them fragrant with the sweet perfume of God's benevolence of which this is such a beautiful example.

In all the arrangements of His large and great dominion, there is nothing niggardly, though there is the most marvellous economy. Even what we in our short-sightedness call His prodigality, turns out, on closer inspection to be the highest economy, because the prodigality of perfect love. What tongue can tell His bountiful care? He clothes the grass of the field in a glory greater than Solomon's. He feeds all the fowls of the air, though they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns. He giveth to the beast his food,

and to the young ravens which cry. "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

But out of this ancient law of Moses, Paul gets

SOMETHING MORE

than an evidence of God's care for dumb animals. Inspired by the Holy Ghost, as he gazed on it he saw it brighten into something much higher and more glorious! Therefore, he tells us that this is a command, not given for the sake of oxen alone, nor even principally, but above all and without doubt for the sake of the ministers of the Gospel. See how pregnant and far reaching is every word of God! When He gave this law at Sinai, His eyes were resting not so much on oxen treading out the grain in the Holy Land, as on men laboriously preparing the bread of life for their fellows in every age and throughout all the world; and for the encouragement and protection of such, He framed this law "because he that ploweth ought to plow in hope, and he that thresheth, to thresh in hope of partaking" (R.V.). Thus Paul interprets this old Levitical law and elevates it into an obligation resting on the Christian Church in regard to the support of the ministry. And it is plain that this command thus interpreted was a

GREAT FAVOURITE

with the apostle, and often on his lips. Twice in his epistles, he quotes it in the same connection. Nor is it hard to see the cause of this. It embodies the responsibility of the Church towards those who labour in word and doctrine, in a figure familiar, striking, memorable; a figure, moreover, which connects this special obligation towards one class with the glorious principle of God's universal benevolence and care for all His creatures.

Looking at the question in this light, we get valuable instruction regarding both the ministry of the Gospel and its support.

Think of **THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL** as here referred to. There is a ministry committed to special individuals, *i.e.*, there is a class of men in the Church set apart for a particular kind of work, to which they are to devote themselves exclusively. This is a very patent fact in our ecclesiastical organization as Presbyterians. Such a body of men does exist in our Church; and it is well that it is so, for this arrangement is