

1 Corinthians - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 865. Boxing

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1 Corinthians 9:26. So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.

The allusion here is to boxing. It was customary for the boxers while training to strike out at an imaginary adversary merely for exercise. This was "beating the air." The text may refer to this, or to the efforts which, when the real contest took place, each made to avoid the blows of his adversary, so that these blows should fall upon the air. The apostle struck real blows at a real adversary.

The "beating" was done by means of leather bands which were fastened around the arms and wrists, and were sometimes studded with nails and loaded with lead or iron. This made the blow heavy, and frequently dangerous. Fighting in this way was "resisting unto blood"; this is the ground of the image in Hebrews 12:4.

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 863. Set Forth Last

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1 Corinthians 4:9. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

The apostle may have had in his mind the public exhibition of the bestiarii and gladiators; the former were men who fought with beasts, and the latter men who fought with each other. Some thus fought for pay, while others were criminals who were compelled to contend with beasts or with armed men as an expiation of their crimes, and as a source of amusement to the spectators. In the early part of the day of such an exhibition the prisoners were given arms wherewith to defend themselves, but at the close of the exhibition, at noon, the poor wretches had nothing to protect them, and soon fed easy and certain victims to the destroyer. Thus the apostles were set forth last.

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