

and purge them of all that now makes it hard to say, "Thy will, not ours, be done." Only, let us ever remember that, when we pray aright, we do not attempt to dictate, to prescribe, to change the perfect Divine Will, and, still less, to whine and wheedle till we get our own way: we rather endeavour to lift our imperfect wills into harmony with God's perfect Will, whether it say "Ay" or "No" to our passing desires, whether it be revealed in miracle or in law.

CARPUS.

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A CHAPTER OF GOSPEL HISTORY.

6.—THE SAGES AND THE BABES. (*St. Matt. xi. 25, 26.*)

THESE verses exhibit the Lord Jesus giving devotional expression to his feelings of joy and sorrow amid the encouragements and discouragements of his ministry. The words are found also in the Third Gospel, there in a somewhat different historical connection. In Matthew, Jesus utters the prayer amid discouraging circumstances, as if consoling himself, under the disappointments of life, by the thought that a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven; and that whatever lot it pleases God to appoint, it is one's duty and wisdom to acquiesce in as the best, however contrary to human wishes. He finds Himself despised, rejected, deserted, doubted, on every side. The great world of culture, fashion, and religious profession disregards Him; the common people, as represented by the inhabitants of the towns wherein most of his mighty works were done, vex and grieve Him by their fickleness. Even John the Baptist makes Him

painfully conscious of the weakness of human nature by sending a message which implies doubt whether He be indeed the Christ. In this forlorn situation He falls back on his Father in heaven, and finds in his bosom the rest and comfort which He seeks in vain elsewhere; confessing to his Father the sorrowful facts in a spirit of filial resignation, and then going on to console Himself by the reflection that the Father knows Him as his Son, whoever may be ignorant of his person and claims, and that He is the sole revealer of the Father, whether men receive Him as such or not.<sup>1</sup> In Luke, on the other hand, the same words appear as an utterance, not of sadness but of joy, spoken on the occasion of the return of the Seventy with glowing accounts of the success of their mission. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said" what is here recorded. The difference, however, is on the surface rather than in the heart of the matter. The sadness implied in Matthew's account was relieved by some such joy as Luke refers to; for Jesus speaks of babes to whom were revealed the things hidden from the wise. On the other hand, the joy which Luke ascribes to the Saviour must have had a shadow of sadness on it; for whence otherwise that significant allusion to the unbelief of the wise and prudent? Whether uttered only once, or as some think twice, the words express both gladness and sadness, and shew us the august Speaker doing what all should do—making God his chief good, and both sorrowing and rejoicing in Him.

As it stands in Matthew's narrative, this memor-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 27.

able utterance of Jesus breathes more of the spirit of sadness than of gladness, and may be thus rendered: "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them only unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Reading the words thus, as a humble confession, we observe in them, first, a clear perception and frank admission of the facts. Jesus knew the exact state of the case, and did not disguise it from Himself. He saw and acknowledged that few believed in Him, and that these few were drawn, not from among the men of talent and learning, but from among those who were illiterate, and, in comparison, as babes in knowledge. In this severely truthful description of the situation we discern a proof that Jesus was indeed meek and lowly in heart. Vain men would rather not know the truth when it is other than flattering. They make themselves believe that their influence is greater than it really is, both in its extent and in its quality. They magnify the number and the importance of their followers. They think all eyes are upon them; and whoever shews any special liking for them, is in their esteem, on that very account, a superior person. "Babes" is the last title they would think of giving their admirers. Our blessed Lord was above such weakness. Meek and lowly in spirit, He sought not to honour Himself by conferring undeserved honours on his friends; but was content to be the Saviour of very real sinners, and the Master of disciples who were mere babes.

We note further that the facts are admitted without *bitterness*. There is no feeling of resentment in

Christ's bosom against those who do not believe in Him, no sneer in the tone with which He pronounces the words "wise and prudent." The prevalent unbelief does indeed affect Him keenly, but it is with sorrow, not with anger. He does not mean to give thanks for the blindness of the wise, as well as for the vision of the simple. It is on the latter only that his mind rests with complacency. He would be glad if all had eyes to see; but since that may not be, He is thankful that some have, even though they be men of no account in enlightened circles. That this is the true state of the Speaker's feelings is manifest from the spirit of resignation in which the adverse aspect of facts is spoken about. It is in such a spirit that He alludes to the fact that only babes believe in Him. It is not what He wishes; but it is his Father's will; and that is enough. He accepts a lot which his heart would not have preferred, because it is appointed by One in whose wisdom He has absolute confidence. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." The tone is the same as in Gethsemane, when He said, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done." The Son of Man could not resign Himself without a pang to the unbelief of any—learned or unlearned, wise or simple.

Yet whatever agony may be beneath these words, the resignation they express, let us note this further, is *absolute*. There is no murmuring against the Father in heaven, any more than there is bitterness against men on earth. God's sovereignty is loyally acknowledged. Jesus calls his Father "Lord of

heaven and earth," with express intent to recognize his right to do as He pleases, to give or withhold spiritual vision, to reveal his Son to men, or to leave them in the darkness of ignorance and prejudice and self-conceit.

The foregoing remarks may suffice to bring out the general drift of this devotional utterance of Jesus, in which resignation and thanksgiving are blended. We now add a few additional observations on some special points.

1. And first a word on the vague expression, "these things" (*ταῦτα*), by which the subject of revelation is indicated. There can be little doubt what "these things" are. They are the things which were always in Christ's mind as the objects of absorbing interest, and which, in speaking to his Father, who knew him perfectly and was acquainted with his inmost thoughts, it was quite unnecessary to particularize. They are the things of the Kingdom, to which, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorted his disciples to give the first place in their hearts, and to which He Himself never failed to assign the position of sovereign importance. In the case of ordinary men such a phrase as "these things," denoting the things they habitually think of or care for, might safely be assumed to mean something very different—even food, and drink, and clothing. "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." After these things do even Christian disciples too often seek, albeit they are aware that their heavenly Father knoweth that they have need of all these things, and has promised that to those who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, all these things shall be added. But with Jesus it is

altogether different. When He speaks vaguely of "these things," we may be quite sure that He means precisely those things which we are so apt to put in the second place, viz., the kingdom of God, the righteousness of God, the good will of God to mankind. These things He placed above all other things, all through his life on earth: they were more to Him than meat; for He said, and could say with truth, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." The very vagueness of his language here is an additional evidence of the fact stated, if such were necessary; for the vagueness springs from the circumstance that the Speaker's thoughts are so habitually fixed upon certain things, that it does not occur to Him to say what the things are about which He is thinking. He takes for granted that his Father will understand what his Son is always thinking of; just as, when a boy of twelve, He was surprised that his earthly parents did not know how He had been occupied during the time that He had been absent from them. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" What else did ye imagine I could be doing, than attending to the things of my Father? said the boy then. What else, we may ask, than these same things, can the man Jesus be alluding to in this address to his Father now? It is not impossible that the manner of expression was determined by some outward occasion, as, *e.g.*, by the reports of the Seventy concerning the success which had attended their preaching of the good tidings. In that case "these things" would mean the truths of the kingdom which the evangelists had just been pro-

claiming with acceptance to the people. But it is unnecessary to make any such supposition. Jesus could have expressed Himself as He did, though there had been no outward occasion to give a definite reference to his words.

2. It is of importance to form as distinct a conception as possible of the two classes named in the text—of those from whom the things of the kingdom are hidden on the one hand, and of those to whom they are revealed on the other. The former are described by two epithets<sup>1</sup> rendered in the English Version “wise and prudent,” not very happily in so far as the latter of the two is concerned, inasmuch as the term “prudent,” in its current acceptance, suggests the idea of a man who for prudential reasons is cautious and reserved in his attitude towards new opinions, which is certainly not what is meant by *συνετός*. That there were “prudent” ones in the sense explained among those who believed not in Christ, we know from the Fourth Evangelist, who mentions that among the chief rulers many believed on Jesus, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. But it is not to such that reference is made here. The term in question may best be rendered by some such adjective as “intellectual,” “knowing,” or by some such phrase as “possessed of a well cultivated understanding.” The two epithets, or the nouns which correspond to them, are often found conjoined in Biblical Greek in such a way that a sharp distinction between the two ideas seems neither intended nor possible. Bengel dis-

<sup>1</sup> ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν.

tinguishes the two words thus: the σοφοί are those who claim for themselves the *noetic* habit; the συνετοί are those who claim for themselves the *dianoetic* habit;<sup>1</sup> which is no doubt a felicitous way of putting the matter, so far as verbal expression is concerned, but which it is to be feared conveys little information except to such as themselves belong to the class described. Perhaps the best popular rendering we can give is that adopted by the translators of the Old Testament to convey the sense of the Hebrew equivalents of the two Greek words under consideration, in a text of Deuteronomy, where the legislator represents the nations around Israel as filled with admiration of her, as a people knowing and doing God's commandments, and exclaiming, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."<sup>2</sup> Those from whom the things of the kingdom are hidden are "the wise and understanding people" of Christ's time. And we may safely assume that their wisdom and understanding have reference to, and are exhibited in connection with, the very things which, according to the Hebrew legislator, were to provoke the admiration of the heathen nations towards the people of Israel, viz., the knowledge and practice of God's law. The wisdom of the Hebrews was an ethical wisdom, and their learning consisted in a minute acquaintance with the book of the law, in which they took delight, and on which they meditated day and night.

<sup>1</sup> *Sapientibus*, qui sibi arrogant habitum noëticum; *prudētibus*, qui sibi arrogant habitum dianoëticum.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. iv. 6. The Hebrew equivalent for σοφός καὶ συνετός (or ἐπιστήμων) is חָכָם וְיָדָע.



Having ascertained who are the wise and knowing ones, we have a clue to the meaning of the term employed to denote the recipients of God's revelation through Christ. The babes (*νηπίοι*) are the people who know not the law, and who as such were held in great contempt by men of the other class; as we can see from words reported in the Fourth Gospel to have been spoken on a certain occasion by Pharisees concerning those who believed in Jesus. "This people which knoweth not the law are cursed."<sup>1</sup> The babes are men who in the esteem of those skilled in the law are what Peter and John were in the esteem of the Sanhedrists at a subsequent time—unlearned laymen, utterly devoid of the legal knowledge possessed by professionals.<sup>2</sup> They have no wisdom or learning to boast of, any more than the infant that is yet unable to speak. Their only virtue is childlike receptivity and teachableness; they can drink in as new-born babes the pure milk of Christ's word; they are not too wise to learn.

3. We observe that Christ makes the unbelief of the wise and understanding, and the faith of the babes, depend on the sovereign will and decree of God over all. The Apostle Paul does the same thing in the well-known passage in his First Epistle to the Corinthian Church, when he says, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Acts iv. 13. *ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἰδιῶται.*

which are despised, hath God chosen, to bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence.”<sup>1</sup> It is a view at once true and practically important ; specially appropriate to the utterances of devotion, and well fitted to serve the purpose to which it is applied by Paul, viz., to humble the pride of men. This view, however, does not preclude the inquiry how far the facts on which it is based are susceptible of psychological explanation ; in other words, how far “wisdom” and the lack of it tend in their own nature to hinder or facilitate the reception of truth ? That there is such a tendency, we might suspect from the fact that the experience of Jesus repeats itself in connection with all new movements and new ideas. It is not among the “wise,” and, we may add, the “righteous,” that new truths find their first disciples, but among men without repute, either for learning or for virtue ; a fact which M. Renan has recognized and expressed with his usual felicity. Speaking of the progress of Christianity in such cities as Alexandria, Antioch, and Corinth, he remarks, “Like the socialism of our day, *like all new ideas*, Christianity germinated in what is called the corruption of great cities. That corruption, in truth, is often only a life more full and free, a more powerful awakening of the innermost forces of humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to see how this law was likely to verify itself in the experience of Christ. The wise men of Judæa had their minds made up about all things, human and Divine. They had a fixed idea of God, a fixed interpretation of every Scripture text, a fixed theory about Messiah, a fixed system of Mes-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 26-29.

<sup>2</sup> “Saint Paul,” p. 334.

sianic marks, fixed notions concerning the kingdom of God and concerning the nature of righteousness. Suppose one came with a new set of ideas on all these topics, what chance was there of his getting access with his new views to minds thus preoccupied with a definite and complete system of opinions? If, for example, the wise ones think of God merely as the High and Lofty One, living above the world, what chance is there of getting them to take in the idea of an *incarnation*, the idea that God is a Father, who has an eternal Son, who in the fulness of times became man? Or, again, if these wise ones conceive of righteousness as consisting in the punctilious observance of an elaborate system of rules, what likelihood is there that they will regard with favour a righteousness which springs out of faith in God's grace, and manifests itself in devoted love to the person of Him who proclaims and embodies Divine grace—a righteousness not only possible to the most depraved, but in which precisely they are most likely to make the greatest attainments? Or, yet once more, if these wise ones have got a cut and dry theory concerning Messiah, determining all the circumstances of his birth, vocation, and destiny, what hope is there that Jesus of Nazareth will get Himself accepted as Messiah, however worthy intrinsically, if in any particular He fail to correspond with their predetermined marks? Why, they will demonstrate to their own satisfaction that He cannot be the Christ, by the prompt application of some of their handy tests, such as, "Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." The very fact that Jesus is surnamed "of Nazareth," will be held con-

clusive against his claims. Thus we see how, pride and self-conceit apart, these men, just because they were wise in their own way, full of ideas and settled opinions concerning all the things of which Jesus spoke, were all but doomed to an attitude of unbelief. Their minds were full of thoughts and beliefs with which they were perfectly satisfied, and there was no hunger and no room for new thoughts and beliefs concerning the same things. If, therefore, Jesus desires to find disciples, He must seek them elsewhere—not in Jerusalem, the seat of the scribes and Pharisees, but in Galilee, where life is simple and natural; not among the learned in the law and in the Scriptures, but among the mob, who know not the law; not among the elders, who by long study have matured a system of opinions which has become a part of themselves, but among the young, who have not had time to build up a system, and whose minds are comparatively empty, and open, and receptive. Galilean rustics, illiterate laics, open-hearted ingenuous youths, may believe in Jesus, even though He be a Nazarene; may believe Him to be the Christ, and even the Son of the Living God; for they have no ready-made list of marks for testing Messiahship, but can only discern by a sure spiritual instinct that Jesus is a good man. Nor do they presume to determine what God can do and cannot do, but are quite open to the doctrine that in Jesus God is manifest in the flesh in the fulness of grace and truth. And so it came to pass that the empty and the hungry were filled with the good things of the Kingdom, and the rich in reputation for wisdom were sent empty away; the wise and the understanding

remained in darkness, and the babes were initiated into the mysteries of the kingdom.

4. We said at the outset that in these words addressed by Jesus to his Father in heaven a tone of sadness is audible. We say so still ; for it is a mistake when it is supposed, either by friend or by foe, that Christ, or any one who shares his spirit, could regard the unbelief of the wise with any other feeling than sorrow. Celsus, a well-known antagonist of Christianity in early ages, committed this mistake. In his book against the Christian faith he represented the preachers of the gospel as saying in effect, "Let no one who is educated, wise, or prudent, approach ; but if any one is illiterate, foolish, untaught, a babe in knowledge, he may confidently come to us ;" and as aiming at making converts only of the silly and senseless, of slaves, women, and children. He then asked in amazement and disgust, "Whence this preference for the sinful?" and contrasted with the strange practice of Christians the more rational practice of Pagans, in inviting to initiation into their mysteries the men of pure and exemplary lives, and devoted to wisdom. Origen, to whom we are indebted for our knowledge of this Pagan philosopher's work, replies to the taunt in a manner which we believe to be in perfect accord with the mind of Christ when He uttered the words before us. He frankly, in the name of Christianity, pleads guilty to the charge of loving the sinful and the ignorant, but at the same time denies that the Church cares only for such. "I seek," he said,<sup>1</sup> "the foolish, no doubt, but I also seek those endowed with mental gifts. I seek them even

<sup>1</sup> *Contra Celsum*, iii. 59.

by preference." Similar was the feeling of Jesus. He was thankful for the faith of even babes, but He also desired to find believers among the wise, and grieved because there were so few. But we must add, and this is the point which we wish to insist on at present, Christ was sad, not for his own sake, but for the sake of those who remained unbelieving. He had no need to take a desponding view of the situation so far as it concerned Himself. Doubtless the superficial aspect of affairs was dark enough. On one side, against Jesus, were the righteous, and the wise, and the polite—the *élite* of Jewish society; on the other, for Him, a small number of persons without learning, of uncultivated manners, and even of very questionable moral character. Truly a most unequal battle to all appearance. Yet the cause of Jesus is not so forlorn as it seems. There is hope for it in these same babes. The future is with them. They are the children of a new time, who will live and multiply and replenish the earth, when the elder generation with its wisdom shall have gone the way of all the earth. Then these "babes" in knowledge, with all their ignorance and rudeness, have two virtues of cardinal importance in the struggle of life—sincerity, and the courage which springs from strong conviction. In one of Plato's dialogues, Socrates describes a friend of his, meaning himself, as one who was not polite, but a vulgar fellow, *caring only for truth*.<sup>1</sup> It is an immense advantage to a cause when its supporters answer to this ironical description. That Christ's "babes" were of this sort, we know

<sup>1</sup> *Hippias Major*. Τοιοῦτός τις οὐ κομψός, ἀλλὰ σурφετός, οὐδὲν ἄλλο φροντίζων ἢ τὸ ἀληθές.

from the account in the Acts of Peter and John's appearance before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrists were struck with the boldness of the two illiterate and rustic men who stood before them. Yes! they were not polite or learned; but vulgar fellows who cared only for truth, but cared for it more than for their own life; perfectly sincere, and heroically courageous. The cause that has such men on its side, has God on its side also, and will prosper. The wise and the cultivated may regard them with a smile of contempt, but in so doing they greatly err. The distinguished French author already quoted may here again be cited as a witness. Speaking of the manner in which Gallio treated Paul when he was brought before his tribunal, M. Renan remarks: "One of the things which lead men of the world into many mistakes, is the superficial repulsion awakened in them by people without culture and without manners; for manners are only an affair of form, and those who are devoid of them sometimes have reason on their side. The man of good society, with his frivolous disdains, passes almost always, without observing him, the man who is in the act of creating the future. They are not of the same world, but the common error of the polite is to believe that the world which they see is the whole world."<sup>1</sup> Jesus knew that the foolish things of the world, the "babes," would eventually prevail over and confound the wise, and knowing this, He preserved his soul in patience and peace.

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<sup>1</sup> "Saint Paul," pp. 244, 245.