selves, alone, with the doors of life closed on all sides against him. His miserable divided mind and self-centred soul could see no door of heaven opening to him. All the sagacity and adroitness had ended in a vain and fruitless shame. He saw no light of spiritual opportunity. Finding earth's doors and heaven's doors closed against him, he sought to hide away behind the gate of death the life which was such a miserable failure. His fate is the warning against the chimerical theory that the favour of men, won by concession of principle, can secure any permanent refuge in the time of direct and loneliest necessity. It is the lesson against endeavouring to win on both sides—on the spiritual and on the temporal.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

W. B. RIPON.

THE DIFFICULT WORDS OF CHRIST.

1. THE CHILDREN AT PLAY.

MATT. XI. 16–19.[1]

THIS passage is a criticism passed by Christ upon the generation to which He belonged, in respect of their treatment of the Baptist and Himself.

Characteristically He has embodied His rebuke in a figure of speech. It is also characteristic that the image is borrowed from common life. He took the commonest incidents of everyday life, such as the mending of the rent in an old garment or the lighting of the household lamp,

[1] "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children."

and made them into pictures of immortal truth. It is still further characteristic that this figure is borrowed from the children's world. This was a world in which He was quite at home, and He observed its scenes with a sympathetic and retentive eye.

The scene here described is apparently a game. He had noticed the children in the market, playing first at a marriage, when one piped and the others danced about him, and then at a funeral, when one beat his breast, as if in terrible distress, and the rest followed mourning. The picture remained in His mind, and now, on an important occasion, it becomes the vehicle of His doctrine.

There is a difficulty, however, in construing the figure. Who are represented by the children who complain to their companions?[1] The old view (Chrysostom, Calvin and many) was that they were Jesus and the Baptist; but of late the foremost exegetes (Lange, Meyer, Weiss, Holtzmann, Bruce; not Stier or Godet) maintain that they must be the Jews.[2] Jesus says: "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children, . . . saying, We have piped unto you," etc. Distinctly, it is maintained, the speakers are the generation—that is, the contemporaries—of John and Jesus.[3]

The question is whether, when Jesus begins a comparison by saying that a certain thing is like another, of which a picture follows, it must be the first object mentioned in the picture that corresponds to the subject of the sentence. A good many of Christ's sayings begin with these very words: So-and-so is like such-and-such: but an examination of

[1] According to different readings, ἑταίροις or ἑτέροις.

[2] If this view is to be taken, I would suggest that the two halves of the complaint be attributed to Sadducees and Pharisees respectively.

[3] Meyer alleges two other reasons—(1) the three λέγουσιν, whose subjects must correspond; but this is only the same argument in another form; and (2) the order of the clauses of the complaint, which would have been reversed had John and Jesus been intended.

them does not bear out this literalist view. For instance: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man who sowed good seed in his field": it is not really to the man, but to the field that the kingdom is compared. Still more evidently, when He commences, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto ten virgins," the strictly literal interpretation cannot be pressed. When Jesus says that one thing is like another, He is not laying down the image on the top of the thing whch it is to illustrate in such a way that the two must correspond point by point: the phrase "it is like" is rather a link by which the thing to be illustrated is loosely connected with the illustration, which is then developed as a picture with perfect freedom.

When we look into the substance of the comparison, this seems still more probable. The new view represents the contemporaries of John and Christ as proposing to them to start with them first on one line of action and then on another, as the children proposed to their fellows to begin playing first at one game and then at another; and the fault supposed to be attributed to them is a spirit of childish fickleness and changeableness. But is this at all an accurate account of the relative positions of these two and their contemporaries? What proposals for new action did their contemporaries make to them? Were not John and Jesus the innovators, who proposed the new departures, but could not get their contemporaries to join? Besides, is it historical to say that fickleness and an excessive disposition to change were the characteristics of the age of Jesus? Quite the contrary is the case. There have been generations when great religious teachers have had to resist such tendencies of the public mind, and call their contemporaries to stand in the old paths. Jeremiah's, for instance, was such a time. But in the age of Christ the genius of the nation, against which its prophets had to contend, was a conservatism wedded to old customs and traditions. The

Baptist and Jesus were both originators of great forward movements, which required men to leave old tenets behind and move on into new regions by paths unknown; but they could not rouse the age out of its indifference and self-satisfaction.

It is only a sentimental reason against the new construction: yet it may not on this account be without weight: that it takes all the sunshine out of the picture of child life which the illustration presents. In the old way of looking at it, we have a street or a playground with children of diverse dispositions—some bright and sanguine, ready to propose what would supply occupation and entertainment for all; others uninterested and lethargic, always finding fault and frustrating what is proposed. And such a playground, I venture to say, corresponds with reality. But the new construction sees nothing in the playground but fickleness, sulkiness and disorder. In Professor Bruce's very able statement of it, for example, in his *Parables*, there is not a gleam of sunshine left. Is this the picture of the children's world likely to have come from the brush of Christ?

In short, by sticking to the old way of construing the parable, there is nothing to lose, because all that is really brought out by the new is included; and there is everything to gain.

When we turn from the illustration to the thing illustrated, there is not much difference of opinion as to the truth enforced.

Christ gives clearly the reasons why John and He were not successful; or rather, He gives the reasons which their contemporaries alleged for deserting them. For a time John enjoyed great popularity and success. The whole country went out to him, and thousands were baptized. His preaching shook the minds of men, and it looked as if

they were so deeply moved that anything might be done with them. Soon, however, enthusiasm died down; the tide of the national life returned to its wonted channels; and the Baptist was neglected. People had to assign a reason for their indifference, and they discovered it in the preacher's manner of life. He came neither eating nor drinking; he was an ascetic. But he carried things too far. He is a little wrong in the mind, they said—"He hath a devil." And so they turned away from him, having by the help of this reasoning restored their self-satisfaction. Jesus, in His turn, had a year of popularity. For a time His sunny influence moved the general mind even more strongly than the stormy attack of John had done. The flute-note of love in His preaching thrilled even those who had not been stirred by the thunder of the law. From every quarter of the land hearers flocked to Him, and He moved in a perpetual crowd. But soon, in His case also, the tide ebbed. And again a reason was found. Jesus came eating and drinking;[1] He was not an ascetic like John, but lived as other men; He availed Himself of the social gatherings of ordinary life to extend His influence and find an audience for His message; He did not even disdain, on such occasions, the company of publicans and sinners. Here was something to lay hold of and object to; and, as it went from mouth to mouth, it swelled in its progress, till He became a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

Thus their reasons for forsaking the two prophets contradicted one another. Had they been in earnest in their objection to John—that they were seeking a bright and cheerful form of religion—then they would have welcomed Jesus; and, had they been in earnest in their objections to

[1] "Hunc locum observent qui summam perfectionis statuunt in externa vitæ austeritate; nam secundum hanc regulam præstantior esset Joannes Filio Dei." —CALVIN.

Jesus, they would have been satisfied with John. But this is always the way with those who are not in earnest: they never lack a reason, though they may have to give opposite ones at different times. As someone has quaintly said, in summer it is too hot, and in winter it is too cold. The law is too harsh, and the gospel too soft. Religion is too rigid and unbending to-day, and too hysterical to-morrow. Nowhere is this contradictoriness more common than in the region of anti-religious speculation. Here the Bible is objected to because it narrates so uncompromisingly the lapses of its heroes, there because it makes their sainthood too immaculate (Kögel). To-day Christ is unacceptable because Scripture makes Him a God, to-morrow it is discovered that the record can be so interpreted as to make Him not even a good man. The phases of unbelief change from year to year; and yet there is never wanting some reason for disbelieving the Gospel.

Ostensibly it was not to the message of either John or Jesus that objection was taken, but, in each case, to something in the message-bearer. It was John's asceticism apparently that was complained of, and Christ's free-living. This also is characteristic of the rejectors of the Gospel in every age. They do not say to others, they do not even confess to themselves, that it is religion itself they dislike. They fix on some external and accidental thing connected with it, to which objection can be taken, and make this a shield with which to parry the attack on the conscience and the life. Very often it is something in the conduct of professors of religion: they are too strict and solemn like John, or they are too happy and enthusiastic like Jesus. The alleged inconsistencies of Christians are deemed a sufficient reason for living a life of sin; as if the existence of some unworthy Christians were not rather a reason why those who see their defects should themselves come forward with a better illustration of Christianity. The deficiencies

of the preachers of the Gospel supply numberless excuses. One is too learned, another not learned enough; one is too worldly, another too other-worldly; one is too haughty, another too familiar; and so on without end.

But the contemporaries of John and Jesus, though so ready with reasons, did not give the real reason. The reasons they gave were only excuses. The real reason was that they were afraid of John's glittering axe "Repent" (Kögel), and of Christ's winnowing-fan, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." That was the real reason, and it will be the real reason to the end of the chapter.

Though the mission of the Baptist and of Jesus was a failure, as far as their contemporaries were concerned, it was not entirely a failure even among them. This is the last idea in this passage; but the words in which it is expressed are difficult—"And[1] wisdom is justified[2] of her children."

The expression is a curious one; for one naturally asks why anything so far above suspicion as wisdom should require to be justified, and how it can be justified. The sense seems to be that suspicion is cast upon wisdom when men condemn as unwise what it has done, as the contemporaries of John and Jesus condemned their methods; but, in such circumstances, it may be said to be justified by other men, when they condemn this condemnation and express their appreciation of wisdom's ways. In truth, all men are at all times practically either condemning or justifying wisdom according as they ignore or follow the path which it has prescribed for their own life.

Some suppose that Christ was speaking ironically; as if, after quoting the remarks of His contemporaries, He had

[1] Καί, with great slowness and emphasis, = καίτοι.

[2] Ἐδικαιώθη, gnomic aorist.

said, "These are wisdom's children; and this is all they know of her ways"! Others have taken the words to mean "in spite of her children";[1] as if He had said, "Let her children misunderstand her as they may, yet time and events[2] always have justified, and always will justify wisdom."

But what Jesus really meant is made plain by the words with which this passage is introduced in St. Luke: "And all the people that heard him (*i.e.* John) and the publicans *justified* God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized of him."[3] The counsel of God, which is just another name for the wisdom of God, was displayed in the mission and the preaching of John; but the Pharisees rejected it; they did so practically by not submitting to the rite to which it summoned them. But the common people and the publicans, by submitting to baptism, justified God, or God's wisdom.

These, then, are the children of wisdom,[4] by whom she is justified. They are the same as are designated in words which occur a little later in the same discourse to which this passage belongs—ver. 25: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Though the great mass of their generation, and especially the learned and influential, rejected John and Jesus, yet there were those who discerned in them messengers of Heaven and received them as gifts which the divine wisdom had

[1] The proposition is peculiar—ἀπό, *apart from* her children: she is justified from their condemnation. But ἀπό may be used for ὑπό; cf. Acts ii. 22.

[2] Here may be mentioned the reading ἔργων, adopted in the Revised Version and by Westcott and Hort, who, however, have τέκνων in St. Luke. It seems to have arisen through a substitution of τέχνων for τέκνων.

[3] It is doubtful whether these are words of Jesus or of the evangelist. I incline to the former view.

[4] Cf. Ecclesiasticus iv. 11: "Wisdom exalteth her children, and layeth hold of them that seek her."

sent. Therefore they lent an attentive ear to their messages and enriched themselves with the influences which they brought. They were not disappointed: their faith was justified, and they in turn justified God.[1]

Now, what distinguished them from others? Why did they receive John and Christ, while others rejected them? Jesus says they were the children of wisdom.[2] They were those in whom the wisdom of God in the old dispensation and the Old Testament had done its work. They were chastened and expectant. Therefore, when the divine wisdom appeared in a new form, they submitted themselves to its leading. They went down not only into the water of Jordan, on the hand of John, but into the valley of humiliation and penitence. Instead of criticising the preacher, they absorbed the sermon, and allowed it to do its work in their heart. Then, when yet another manifestation of the divine wisdom appeared, they were ready to receive also what He brought. Knowing, through John's ministry, what sin was, they were able to appreciate the great announcement of the new dispensation, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

JAMES STALKER.

[1] "*All* her children," says St. Luke; on which Calvin remarks characteristically: "Ergo, quamlibet multi apostatæ a Dei ecclesia desciscant, semper tamen apud omnes electos, qui vere sunt ex grege, persistet Evangelii fides."

[2] Compare Christ's saying to Pilate: "Every one that is of the truth (*i.e.* a son of truth) heareth My voice."