

the immortality of the soul, upon the ultimate destiny of those who persistently reject the salvation offered by Christ.

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HAD OUR LORD READ THE "TABLET" OF  
KEBES?

ONE of the little company of disciples who attended Socrates during his last hours in the prison-house of Athens was a young Theban named Kebes. He figures as one of the principal interlocutors in that immortal dialogue where the dying Master, *placidus ore, intrepidus verbis, intempestivas suorum lacrimas coercens*, discourses of the Immortality of the Soul. He is, moreover, the reputed author of a quaint little book, once better known than now. It is called the *Tablet*, and is a sort of allegory in the style of a Platonic dialogue. It purports to be a description of a tablet which hung in the Temple of Kronos and emblematically depicted the course of human life. From neither a literary nor a philosophical point of view is it a work of much importance, but it is invested with fascinating interest when it is found to contain two passages which are strikingly analogous to sayings of Jesus.

Here is the first (chap. xv.)—

“‘What is the way that leads to the true Instruction?’  
said I.

“‘You see above,’ said he, ‘yonder place where no one dwells, but it seems to be desert?’

“‘I do.’

“‘And a little door, and a way before the door, which is not much thronged; but very few go there, so impassable does the place seem, so rough and rocky?’

“‘Yes, indeed,’ said I.

“ ‘And there seems to be a lofty mound and a very steep ascent with deep precipices on this side and on that?’

“ ‘I see it.’

“ ‘This, then, is the way,’ said he, ‘that leads to the true Instruction.’ ”

Of course this recalls our Lord's more elaborate image of the Narrow Gate and the Two Ways: “Go ye in through the narrow gate: because broad and spacious is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that go in through it; because narrow is the gate and straitened the way that leadeth to life, and few are they that find it” (Matt. vii. 13, 14).

Even more striking is the other analogy. One of the most remarkable of the *ἄγραφα* of Jesus is the precept *γίνεσθε τραπεζίται δόκιμοι*, “Show yourselves approved bankers” (see Westcott, *Introduction to the Gospels*, App. C). In the Clementine Homilies this is taken as an exhortation to exercise one's critical judgment in order to distinguish between true Scriptures and false; and in this sense it may be compared with St. Paul's exhortation: “Prove (*δοκιμάζετε*) all things, hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. v. 21); and with that other precept of our Lord: “Take heed what ye hear” (Mark iv. 24).

Were it admissible, this would be a most natural and apposite interpretation of the precept. It was one of the special functions of the bankers, at least in Rome, to test coins and ascertain their genuineness (*probatio nummorum*), Heretical writings, which claimed an authority and inspiration they did not possess, were like spurious coins, and it was necessary for a Christian to examine them narrowly and reject base counterfeits. It is, however, a fatal objection to this interpretation of the precept that it takes *δόκιμος* in an *active* sense. The adjective is *passive*, and applies, not to the banker who tests the coin, but to the coin which is tested.

There is another interpretation which the precept may bear, and which is suggested by the following passage in the *Tablet* (chap. xxxi.)—

“God bids us not marvel whatever Fortune may do, nor show ourselves like the unscrupulous bankers (*γίγνεσθαι ὁμοίους τοῖς κακοῖς τραπεζίταις*). For they, when they receive money from people, rejoice and regard it as their own; and, when they are asked for it again, they are annoyed and think themselves hardly used; not remembering that they received the deposits on the understanding that there was nothing to prevent the depositor from taking them away again. God bids us maintain the like attitude also toward what is given by Fortune, and remember that such is her nature that she takes away what she has given, and presently gives again many times as much, and anon takes away what she has given.”

It was usual for persons who had no taste or no turn for business to entrust their money to a banker, allowing him to trade with it on his own account, and stipulating only that they should receive a moderate interest and be at liberty to resume their capital whenever they pleased (cf. *Matt.* xxv. 27). So long as it remained in the banker's hands it was as good as his own except for the trifling discount on the score of interest; and a shrewd financier often made handsome profits by embarking his loans in successful enterprises. It sometimes happened, however, that a client would call in his deposits at an awkward moment when the banker had little money at his command; and then it was necessary for the latter to sell out on any terms. It seems that a banker thus inconveniently situated would sometimes behave unpleasantly, disowning his obligations and putting his client to no little trouble (*Isokr. Trapezit.*; cf. *Becker's Char.*, pp. 67 sqq.). Such is the situation to which Kebes refers when he says: “God bids us not . . . show ourselves like the unscrupulous

bankers. For they, when they receive money from people, rejoice and regard it as their own; and, when they are asked for it again, they are annoyed and think themselves hardly used; not remembering that they received the deposits on the understanding that there was nothing to prevent the depositor from taking them away again."

May not this be the key to the interpretation of our Lord's precept: "Show yourselves approved bankers"? It would then be a warning against worldly-mindedness, according well with the spirit of our Lord's teaching and recalling that word of the Apostle: "Them that are rich in the present world charge not to be high-minded nor have their hope set upon the uncertainty of riches, but upon God who furnisheth all things unto us" (1 Tim. vi. 17). Great indeed is the uncertainty of riches. Nothing that we possess is our own. We hold it on loan from God. It is a deposit which He has entrusted to us that we may trade with it for His honour and glory. At any moment He may resume it; and our duty is to show ourselves approved bankers, trading diligently with our Lord's deposits and cheerfully surrendering them when He requires them of us. The precept is an exhortation to cultivate a spirit of detachment from worldly things, sitting loosely by them and never setting our hearts upon them.

Besides these two outstanding analogies there are phrases in the *Tablet* which recall language used by our Lord. Thus we read in chap. iv.: "He (ὁ Δαίμων) enjoins on them that are entering what they must do that they may enter into life" (ὡς ἂν εἰσέλθωσιν εἰς τὸν βίον); and our Lord says to the young ruler (Matt. xix. 17): "If thou wouldest enter into life (εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελεθεῖν), keep the commandments."

Such resemblances suggest the question whether it may not be that our Lord was acquainted with the *Tablet* and borrowed His imagery from it. This may seem the simple

and necessary inference, yet it is impossible to accept it off-hand. On the ground of a couple of somewhat doubtful anachronisms and the occurrence of some half-dozen words which are alleged to belong to the Greek of a later age, not a few critics deny that the *Tablet* was the work of Kebes the Theban and assign it to Kebes of Cyzicus, a Stoic philosopher of the second century of our era. External evidence casts but little light on the problem. The *Tablet* is twice mentioned by Lucian (*De Merc. Conduct.* § 42; *Rhet. Praecept.* § 6) who was born about 130 A.D.; and Tertullian, who was born some twenty years later, mentions the interesting fact (*De Praescr. Hæret.* xxxix.) that a relative of his had executed a poetic paraphrase of the work in the Vergilian measure. It seems a pretty safe inference that the *Tablet* was a recognized classic in the time of Lucian and Tertullian. Had it been the work of an obscure contemporary, Lucian would hardly have styled the author—as he does in both the passages just cited—ὁ Κέβης ἐκεῖνος, *ille Cebes*, "the celebrated Kebes."

Of course, were the *Tablet* proved to date from the second century, the supposition that it was known to our Lord would be ruled out of court; and the question would then arise whether the author, whoever he might be, was acquainted with the teaching of Jesus. The argument against its early date is, however, by no means conclusive. The truth would rather seem to be that, while the dialogue is in the main genuine, the closing chapters (xxxiii.–xli.) are by a later hand. They abound in faulty constructions and are obviously a clumsy and superfluous addition.

It is fortunately unnecessary to enter here into this vexed question. Whatever be the date of the *Tablet*, the image of the two ways is very ancient. It is as old as Hesiod (850–800 B. C.), who says (*O. et D.* 287–92): "Vice even in troops may be chosen easily; smooth is the way, and it lieth very nigh. But in front of Virtue the immortal gods

have put sweat. Long and steep is the way to her, and rough at first; but when one cometh to the summit, then it is easy, hard as it was." Pythagoras of Samos (570-504 B.C.) adopted the image and elaborated it. He employed as a symbol of the two ways the letter  $\Psi$ , the archaic form of  $\Upsilon$ , hence called "the Samian letter" (Persius, iii. 56-7; v. 34-5). The straight stem represented the innocent period of childhood, and the divergent branches the after-course of youth and manhood pursuing the straight path of Virtue or the crooked track of Vice.

Though it be granted that the *Tablet* dates from the second century of our era, the question remains: Did our Lord borrow from Pythagoras His image of the Two Ways? And this raises the larger question whether he had any acquaintance with Greek literature. It may help us to a satisfactory solution of the problem if we consider what was the Jewish attitude in our Lord's day towards pagan culture. It was for the most part an attitude of inveterate hostility. The proud imagination of Alexander the Great had conceived the grand design of welding the whole East into one vast Greek empire, Greek not only in government but in language, customs and religion; and he and his successors had bent their energies to the realization of the magnificent dream. In every conquered land they founded new cities and peopled them with Greek colonists. Each of these cities was a centre of Hellenic civilization, infecting the native population with the Greek spirit and compelling the adoption of the Greek language for the transaction of business. When Israel was conquered, it fared with her as with her neighbours, and even her stubborn nationality would have been obliterated by the flood of Hellenism but for the mad tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes who attempted to effect the transformation with a high hand and roused Jewish patriotism to successful resistance under the Maccabees. The spirit of the Asidæans lived on

in the land and inspired a fierce abhorrence of pagan manners and institutions.

It is true indeed that the aristocratic Sadducees had bowed before the conqueror and abetted his designs. And even among the Pharisees there was a party which, while heartily loyal to the faith of Israel, regarded the Hellenic culture with kindlier eyes and a more tolerant spirit. The founder of the liberal school was the gentle R. Hillel, and his most distinguished follower was R. Gamaliel, the teacher of St. Paul. Gamaliel advocated the study of the *Chokmath Javanith*, and it was surely a striking providence which brought under his large-hearted influence the young Pharisee who was destined to be the Apostle of the Gentiles. St. Paul's classical quotations (Acts xvii. 28; 1 Cor. xv. 33; Titus i. 12) are reminiscences of his early training "at the feet of Gamaliel." It is impossible to estimate the debt which the world owes to that generous Rabbi who all unwittingly did so much to prepare the champion of a universal Christianity for his high vocation.

The liberal Pharisees, however, were a small and unpopular minority. The prevailing sentiment was that of the school of Shammai, which loathed whatever savoured of Hellenic civilization. It is related of R. Ismael that on one occasion he was asked whether, after one had mastered the law, one might not then turn to the study of Greek literature. He quoted Joshua i. 8 and added: "Find a time which is neither day nor night and give yourself during it to the study of the Greek wisdom." And R. Akibha once declared that no Israelite who read the books of the Greeks would attain unto eternal life.

Such was the general sentiment of the Rabbis in our Lord's day; and it was natural that the laity should adopt the tone of their teachers and look askance at Greek culture. There is no injustice in Origen's sneer at Celsus' imaginary

Jew who quoted Euripides, that Jews were not wont to be so well versed in Greek literature (*Contra Celsum*, ii. p. 80, Spencer's edition). A Jew with Greek quotations at his finger ends would have been reckoned at once a traitor and a heretic. Jesus was born in a peasant home and reared among peasant folk. From childhood He would know the sacred Scriptures, and there is abundant evidence in the Gospels how earnestly He had studied them, and what strength and comfort they afforded Him in His seasons of weakness and sorrow. But the likelihood is that never during those years which He spent in the village of Nazareth, did He see a Greek book; and, if ever the name of a great classic was mentioned in His hearing, it would be in a tone of hatred and abhorrence.

Is there any reason for believing that Jesus had transcended His environment and become acquainted with pagan literature? It seems indubitable that His image of the Two Ways is an echo, if not of Kebes, then certainly of Pythagoras; yet it does not follow that He had read the writings of either or had any direct acquaintance with their philosophy. Pythagoras was one of the great teachers of the ancient world, and some of his doctrines would pass current where his name was unknown. It does not follow that a man has studied Darwin because he talks about Evolution; and no more did the repetition of Pythagorean catch-words argue an acquaintance with the philosophy of Pythagoras. That image of the Two Ways would arrest the imagination. It would pass into a proverb and might well be quoted where the very name of its author had never been heard of. It would be no marvel though it found its way into the land of Israel, and were caught up by Him who loved to speak in parables, employing the homeliest pictures in illustration of His heavenly teachings.

And what of the other seeming analogy? May it not be that here also Jesus employed a homely and familiar

phrase? In all likelihood there was some proverb in the ancient world about bankers and their ways; and it is a reasonable and sufficient explanation of the resemblance between that phrase of Kebes *μὴ γίνεσθαι ὁμοίους τοῖς κακοῖς τραπεζίταις* and our Lord's precept *γίνεσθε τραπεζίται δόκιμοι* that the common proverb suggested both.

There is not a shred of evidence that Jesus had the slightest acquaintance with the literature of the great world beyond the land of Israel. There are perhaps only two other passages in His teaching where the faintest echo of its busy and wondrous life may be distinguished; and it will probably be thought by many that the resemblance is in each instance somewhat remote. One is that hard saying of our Lord to the Syrophœnician woman: "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mark vii. 27; Matt. xv. 26). Is not this the Greek proverb *σεαυτὸν οὐ τρέφων κύνας τρέφεις*, "You starve yourself to feed dogs"? "It was said," Erasmus explains, "of one who, while too poor to procure the necessaries of life, endeavoured to maintain an establishment of horses or servants. It will be appropriately employed against those who, by reason of the narrowness of their means, have scarce enough to maintain life, yet ambitiously endeavour to emulate the powerful and wealthy in fineness of dress and general ostentation" (*Adagia*, sub proverb.). It takes the sting out of our Lord's reply to that poor heathen woman when it is understood that He was not flinging at her the brutal epithet wherewith Jewish insolence branded the Gentiles, but quoting a familiar proverb in a half-playful spirit in order to test her faith. It is as though He had said: "My grace is for those of My own household, and why should I lavish it upon a stranger?"

Again, the Greeks had a proverb "with unwashed feet" (*ἀνίπτοις ποσίν*), derived apparently from the ritual of the Mysteries. It means, according to Suidas, "without any

preparation" (*χωρίς τινος παρασκευῆς*), and is aptly exemplified by a passage in Lucian's sketch of the eclectic philosopher Demonax. Demonax, says his biographer, was no novice when he entered on his profession. "He did not rush at it, as the saying goes, 'with unwashed feet,' but he had been nurtured with poets and remembered most of them, and had been trained to speak, and had a thorough acquaintance with the philosophic schools." Is not this the key to the interpretation of that parabolic action of our Lord in the Upper Room, when "He put water into the bason, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded" (John xiii. 4)? Alike in Greece and in Palestine it was customary, when guests arrived at a house, for slaves to receive them and wash their feet heated with travel and soiled with the dust of the way; but it was not this menial office that the Master performed. The thing was done, not on the entrance of the disciples, but either during the meal or after it was finished, according as *γινομένου* or *γενομένου* is preferred in *v.* 2. It was rather an acted quotation of that familiar proverb. Even in that solemn hour, when the shadow of the Cross had fallen upon Jesus, the disciples were disputing "which of them should be accounted the greatest"; and, when He rose and washed their feet, it was as though He had said: "Such worldly and selfish ambition proves you still uninitiated into the mysteries of My Kingdom. Its law is love and its glory service. If you be not clothed with humility, you are no disciples of Mine. Think not to enter My school 'with unwashed feet.' If I wash you not, you have no part with Me." <sup>1</sup>

Such are the only points of contact between the teaching of Jesus and pagan literature—these four proverbs which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. discussion of our Lord's use of these two proverbs by the present writer in *Expository Times*, Sept. 1900, and April 1901.

had floated into Palestine and whose alien origin had doubtless been forgotten. Is it not marvellous that the incarnate Son of God should have lived and died in that little land of Palestine so utterly neglectful, to all appearance, of the world He had come to save?

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NOTES ON SELECT PASSAGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.<sup>1</sup>

GENESIS ii. 23: "And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." By a simple transposition, "This now is bone of my bones," etc., the intention of Adam to distinguish the creature now brought to him from all former ones is clearly made out. "This *is* now" would imply that she was not so before, which is *not* the sense intended. And the Hebrew word is not  $\eta\tau\epsilon$ , but  $\text{עַתָּה}$ , "this time," which the Revisers have substituted for the A.V. "now" in Genesis xxix. 35 and Judges xv. 3. Prof. Chenery has proposed, "This time it is bone of my bones," etc. But  $\text{אִתּוֹ}$  is clearly "this (creature)."

GENESIS iii. 6: "Good for food" (A.V. and R.V.). See also Genesis ii. 9, vi. 21 (*bis*). But in Genesis i. 29, 30, where A.V. has "for meat," R.V. (first revision) has given "for food," but R.V. (second revision) goes back to "meat." Referring to the New Testament Revision, I find that the rule is to retain the "meat" of the A.V. whenever the Greek word is  $\beta\rho\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ,  $\beta\rho\omega\mu\alpha$ , or  $\beta\rho\omega\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$  (only excepting

<sup>1</sup> This is the first instalment of a series of Notes selected from the original MSS. forwarded by the late Dr. Field to the Secretary of the Old Testament Revision Company. Dr. Field was an original member of the Company; but, being very deaf, he chose this method of communicating his views rather than personal attendance at the meetings. His contributions were read out by the Secretary, and usually formed the starting-point of the discussion which followed. The original MSS. are now in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, and it is by the kind permission of the College Council that this portion of their contents is now made public.—J. H. BURN.