

ON THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE.

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IN the history of the creation of the world we read that when darkness was upon the face of the deep, the Almighty gave command that there should be light. It is the first fact recorded after the creation of the heaven and the earth; and there must have been some reason for this command being issued, and for its being recorded on the sacred page.

That reason is not far to seek. The light was commanded to shine upon chaos, not because it was needed by the great Worker. "The darkness and light are both alike to Him." But this is because He is Himself "light," and the "Father of lights, in whom there is no darkness at all." Light is the primary need of the worker, and the statement is as true in the intellectual and moral spheres as in the natural world. Whatever may be our position, our circumstances, or our responsibilities, our first requisite is knowledge.

It does indeed seem wonderful that any words should be needed to commend a truth so evident. Would a benighted traveller listen to us if we set ourselves to prove that the day-spring would bring him neither cheer nor help him on his journey? Would a blind man be patient if one should seek to convince him that it would be no benefit to him to have poured upon his eyeballs that "holy light, offspring of heaven first-born," the sweetness of which he had never experienced, or perhaps, still worse, had even lost?

And yet there are strange prejudices lingering in men's minds against knowledge, and the seekers after knowledge. And foolish and irrational as those prejudices mostly are,

there is probably something in men's ways of pursuing knowledge which partially accounts for the error of its opponents; and it becomes us who desire the "advancement of learning" and knowledge, to understand what is amiss in our spirit or methods, that we may not needlessly cast stumbling blocks in the way of others.

Perhaps the hardest thing said of knowledge is that which comes from one who was free from the vulgar prejudices of the ignorant and thoughtless. St. Paul says: "Knowledge puffeth up," and if this statement were intended to be understood in a broad and unqualified manner, it would present a very serious difficulty. But it is impossible to believe that St. Paul intended to condemn the pursuit of knowledge as such, whether of things natural or of things spiritual. St. Paul was himself a highly educated man; probably for this very reason he was added to the number of the Apostles. On every occasion of writing to churches or individuals, he shows the most earnest desire to give them a complete knowledge of all that concerned their relations and duties to God and man. "I would not have you ignorant" (1 Cor.), he says, and this is the keynote of all his testimony. "Give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching," he says to St. Timothy (1 Tim. iv. 13), and on this subject there is no discord in the teachings of Holy Scripture. "Wisdom," says the preacher (Ec. i. 18), "excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness," and the wise man bids us "get wisdom, get understanding;" and again he says, "wisdom is the prin-