

“OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM.”

*S. Mark, x. 14.*

BY THE REV. C. B. PHILLIPS.

THERE is a remarkable silence in Gospels about the childhood of our Lord. With the exception of the story of the Magi, the Flight into and Return from Egypt told by S. Matthew and the details of The Circumcision and the journey to Jerusalem when the Holy Child was lost, recorded by S. Luke, we know nothing of that period of His life on Earth. Even if it be true that none of his townfolk believed on Him, it might have been expected that the piety of His disciples would have recovered some facts from the public memory, and that in any case the tradition would have been enriched at a later date by the members of the family circle. The most generally accepted explanation of this silence on the part of the historians is, that during His life in Nazareth our Lord did nothing to challenge notice. It is also evident that the silence is an indirect witness to the credibility of the great events of the later years, as there was every reason why the tradition, had it not been based upon fact, should have invested the earlier with supernatural glories and surprises. We may however conjecture that earliest in time would come the education in the home. The Jewish Law impressed upon parents the duty of instructing their children in the knowledge of God, and also of disciplining them in religion and morality. Says Josephus “we take most pains of all with the instruction of children, and esteem the observation of the Laws, and the piety corresponding with them, the most important affairs of our whole life.”

It was the home in Nazareth that opened to the Holy Child the avenues of knowledge, and first put Him in possession of the treasures of the Old Testament. It also seems certain that in His home there was a type of family life which made father-

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hood stand to Him as the manifestation of a love beneficent, disinterested, and all forgiving. It is probable that the Holy Child had other teachers. We know, in the course of the same century, of a resolution, on the part of the authorities, to provide teachers in every province and every town; and before the attempt was made to secure an universal system, it was natural that tuition should be given in connection with the Synagogue. The stated services of the Synagogue, in which the chief part was the expounding of the Scriptures, must have been an event of deepest interest to the awakening mind of the Holy Child. From early childhood He accompanied the Virgin Mother and St. Joseph to Jerusalem to keep the Feast—the utmost stress being laid by the Rabbis upon this, as a means for the instilment of piety. It has also been well pointed out that Palestine was itself a wonderful educational instrument. It was a little country, a great part of which could be seen from a mountain top, and every district could be visited in a few days’ journey; its towns and valleys were filled with memories which compelled the citizen to live in the past, and to reflect, at every stage and prospect, on the mission of His people and the ways of God. Jesus Christ by becoming for us and for our salvation a little child has consecrated childhood forever. By embracing that period of life He has invested it with sanctity. And the characteristics of Childhood are declared by Him to be the conditions of an entrance into His Kingdom. “Except ye become as little children ye cannot enter in.” It is a fresh, daring, beautiful description. And Jesus Christ takes His unalterable stand upon it. What is to be

childlike? It is to live freshly in a glad fresh world: but it is also to be immature, to have no grip of things, never to face facts squarely: that is not intended at all. "In understanding" says St. Paul "I would have you men." It is one special mark of Our Lord that He looked the worst in the face, and called it bad. But the guileless heart, the soul that is glad because there is love, and home, and fatherland about it, all that is childlike, and of such is the Kingdom.

In claiming the child-mind Our Lord was reaching in to the very highest in man. Says Wordsworth, "Wisdom is oft-times nearer when we stoop, than [sic] we soar," and when the Son of God stooped to little children He was usually rising to the crown of life. All those who are nobly and morally great exhibit some tokens of the childlike heart. The people with the one talent are the people who bury it in the napkin. Great

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souls, with the ten talents gleaming into genius live in a world so full of Divine life that they sometimes earn for themselves the name of "imprudent and careless ones," but in the sight of God they are little children. A genius has been defined as "a person who keeps unsullied through the stern teaching of the years the spirit of the little child." There is genius in childhood, but there is childhood in genius too. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." The child-spirit was alive in Our Lord to the close of His earthly life. The writings of the prophet Isaiah are more than a poetic fancy, and Isaiah says "a little child shall lead them." When we listen to the account of some unfathomable mystery, as recorded by the Evangelists in the life of Our Lord on Earth, we can hardly help thinking of His divine origin; and when we read of Him healing the Canaanite's daughter, or raising the widow's son, or weeping by the grave side, we cannot help thinking of his humanity. But when we come across those passages about the lilies, the birds, the ravens, then we cannot help feeling that Isaiah was right, "a little child shall lead them."

No suffering hardened Him. No disappointments embittered Him. No pain lessened His love. He still believed in spite of Judas Iscariot. He still had a Father in spite of Calvary. And that sublime spirit, as of a child, has been as the dew of heaven to the world. Well then, what of us? Have we lost the child-heart? How quickly it dies away; how imperceptibly it departs under the pressure of the world! The greatest losses, however, are those we never observe. And few losses are greater than the loss of the spirit of the little child. In the first place we cease to be receptive. The child knows nothing of the past as yet, the child is not yet anxious about the future. The child's time is "now" and "now" is God's time too. But we become so engrossed in the past, and are so taken up with the future, that we have little heart for the message that comes to-day. We do not welcome impressions "now" and so we become heavy and gloomy; but to feel the eternal in the passing moment, not to be burdened with vain regrets, not to be always thinking of the morrow, that is to be childlike, and "of such is the Kingdom." Perhaps it is this receptivity that makes little children "dwell apart." It may take a keen observer to notice it, but little children are lonely. They do not realize it, nor is their loneliness the result of sorrow. But they dwell apart

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because they live in their own world, a bright and wonderful world, a world that has its own visions and voices, and it is hard for grown-up persons to touch the "golden and ivory gates" of the children's world. May not this isolation of the little one be very similar to the isolation of the saint? God's true children also dwell apart, but not in empty solitariness. Such have their

own world just as the children have. And surely in that New Creation where the Saviour reigns there is what may be termed "a peopled isolation" like that of little children. When the spirit of the child departs, then simplicity is gone. There is something sublime about the faith of little children. How eager they are! How curious! but always trusting. Oh! that we could trust Our Father like that! It is something to be trusted even by a little child, and surely, one speaks with all reverence, God is happier when we trust Him. But better than being trusted is to trust, to walk by faith and not by sight, and when the spirit of the child departs it is not easy to recall it. Hence we degenerate into worldliness and faithlessness. Yet again when the child mind goes, the sense of wonder departs. For the child is above all else a wonderer, he is set in the centre of a most wonderful world. Nothing is commonplace for little children [sic] The rolling of the wagon along the street, the gathering clouds in the sky, the sunshine on the hillside, the opening flower, the wayside trees, to the child all these things are invested with wonder. "Childhood," says the poet, "is the hour of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower." And what a poor thing is life when the wonder of it passes away. "I had rather" says Ruskin, "live in a cottage and wonder at everything, than live in a castle and wonder at nothing." We all feel the trials of life, we all know its disappointments, but can we feel the wonder of it? Not unless we try to preserve the mind of the little child within us. God's name is wonderful, and the wonder is that He should give His only-begotten Son to die for man. Can we realize that wonder? Only if we become as little children, for "of such is the Kingdom." Let us never forget that the Holy Ghost is a personal Power. He can quicken, He can renew, He can restore. He can impart to man the mind of a little child, He can bring back the child spirit, yielding to His holy influences we can acquire that sublime trustfulness, that simplicity of faith, that sense of wonder which are the goodly heritage of a little child.