

## “THE BOY JESUS.”<sup>1</sup>

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LET us start by affirming the downright human life of Him who wrought with human hands the creed of creeds. To me the whole thing goes, if our Saviour is to be less human than the child whom St. Luke described as “advancing in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men.” We know growth when we see it, and St. Luke says He grew. “Progressive manifestation,” as some would put it, is not the word growth writ large: it is something else,—something more applicable to the hero of the Apocryphal gospels, or the Christ of a stained glass window, with no true human substance or environment, and no perspective.

One great debt we owe to the Revisers of 1881,—they restored to us the word “boy”: nowhere does it occur through the whole New Testament in King James’ Bible. Jacob and Esau were allowed to be boys, no one else: certainly not He of Whom we now read “the *Boy Jesus* tarried behind in Jerusalem and His parents knew it not.”

Think of an English schoolboy, that unique product of our complex life. One has felt, in talking to schoolboys, how very far are their ideas and ideals from the girlish form in Eastern garb that pictures have made familiar: between “the Holy Child” as we have learnt to see Him, and the English boy as we know him, the distance is enormous: the need of a middle term is forced upon one. And we find it here—“the Boy Jesus.” I do not wonder that the old translators avoided the expression, with their notions of reverence: they knew English boy-life as parents, as school-masters, as once boys themselves. But we have it now: Jesus was a boy, a real boy; not a Jewish boy merely, but (for He was Son of Man: beneath the oriental clothing of His thought and life there is nothing provincial)—but a truly human boy.

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Now let us with all reverence and with some attempt at fulness look at that Divine boy-life in its growth and its surroundings. Much has been made of the silence of those years at Nazareth, not too much, as long as free inquiry is not barred. But the *argumentum a silentio* may easily be pressed too far. Often and often a thing has not been revealed on purpose that men may look for themselves. What man can know is surely not forbidden for man to learn. We have materials enough: the varied literature we call the Bible, Mishna, and Talmud; then there is Josephus; and Eastern travels, with Eastern manners now, allowance being made for change in the (so-called) unchanging East; and Jewish life in London. With much of that my acquaintance is not first-hand; but I have tried to verify.<sup>2</sup>

Of all that went to mould and unfold that boyhood, foremost stands the life of the home. There is a good deal of cant about the English home. Because our language has the word ready and compact, and because just across the Channel we fail to find the word or the thing as we know it, we give the world to understand, in our self-satisfied British way, that nothing like an English home ever was or anywhere is. We need not travel far. The home life of the Jews is at our doors: there is no life like that anywhere, and there never was. Writes a modern Jew, in words with a larger meaning than he intends, “from the inexhaustible spring of Jewish family love rise the saviours of the human race.”

It has struck outsiders, the most ignorant and the least sympathetic. Here is a strange negative testimony: Tacitus<sup>3</sup> states it as a curious fact, that these pig-headed Jews, like the

German barbarians, hold infanticide to be a crime, and their reason for not suppressing superfluous offspring he prosaically ascribes to their perverse desire to overrun the earth—*augendae multitudinis causâ*. He clearly thought the fact remarkable, little as understood the cause. If one could only have given him an insight into the life of some family in the Jewish quarter of Rome!

“God could not be everywhere,” said the Hebrew proverb, in fine paradox,—“God could not be everywhere, and so He

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made—*mothers*.” Let St. Paul testify to that: “The faith that dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and, I am persuaded, in thee also.” They were more than “kindred points,” heaven and home: home was the nursery of heaven. “From a babe (*ἀπὸ βρέφους*)” had Timothy known “the sacred writings.” It is hardly an exaggeration. Rote work on the Scriptures began almost with the power of speech, far in advance of the understanding. And—

“Was not our Lord a little child  
Taught by degrees to pray  
By father dear and mother mild  
Instructed day by day?”

Moreover the year-long life of the home was a course of object lessons in the faith: the solemn grace at table, the *mesusah* at the door, the *tephillim* on arm and forehead, the recurring sabbath lights, the frequent festivals with all that they involved in picturesque variety,—everything was there to stimulate the natural curiosity of the child. Those “obstinate questionings of sense and outward things” that parents know so well were to be met; the father was charged to answer them, formally at the Passover, informally at other times. “And when thy son asketh thee ... thus shalt thou say unto him. And thou shalt talk of those things when thou sittest down and when thou risest up, when thou walkest by the way,” and so on. But no doubt the mother had the larger share in this. She would repeat sacred words as the child was with her at work in the house or trotted by her side as she went to the well or to glean in the fields. So to Mary’s Child, at any rate, religion would be associated from the first, not with professional piety, but with a mother’s tenderness, with a father’s loyal love; outside, it would be linked with the sights and sounds of nature, and with the places in the town (for a town it was and not a village) to which Joseph went to work. And thus, when he reached manhood, the fatherly, motherly love of God was seen in the sunshine and the flowers and the birds, and also in men kind and true. We might spend hours in listening for these silent voices, in tracing these quiet influences in which He grew up: it was in an atmosphere of love—true love, not enervating sentiment, for it was based by law and custom upon reverence. His after-teaching shows that His notion of a parent was

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inseparable from watchful care and patient love and wise bounty—always giving good gifts to His children.

Home education only—so far. “If you set a child to study before it is six years old, you shall always have to run after yet never get hold of it.” The Talmud in laying down that was no doubt thinking of regular schooling outside the home. For kindergarten of a natural kind was

going on the whole while in the simple open-air life of that Nazareth home. Our Lord could not forget the children's games—their funerals and their weddings—and the discipline such games implied, when properly played: He thought of the children who sulked and would not dance at the wedding feast, or mourn with the mourners. A delightful touch is that reference to the early life of play.

But at six, school life would have begun. There was an Education Act not all unlike ours. Only the religious difficulty could not arise because Church and State were one. The Act itself was not put in force, as far as we know, till the time of one Jesus, High Priest, A.D. 64, but no doubt his edict gathered up and made universal a system long in vogue. Schooling, then, was compulsory, and it was free. It was supported by a voluntary rate. Every town was bound to have its primary school with a master, roughly, for every twenty-five scholars; if the number rose to forty, an assistant was to be employed, if to fifty, a second qualified teacher. Teachers were all to be married men, like parish clergy in the Eastern Church. They were expressly forbidden to threaten what they would not carry out. In July and August no chastisement was allowed, and work limited to four hours a day; and on no day were there to be lessons between ten and three. So carefully guarded were the children from overpressure and unwise handling. And, that it might be clearly seen that the teacher was *in loco parentis*, the Talmud shews it the father's special duty to take his child to school, morning by morning: even men of distinction would eat no breakfast till this was done. Don't you like to see a father with his face set citywards, in one hand a brief-bag and perhaps a satchel too, on the other side tiny legs trotting to keep pace with his stride—parent and child alike going "to his work and to his labour until the evening."

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As to the methods of teaching and subjects taught. Contrasted with the educational ideas of Greece, Hebrew ideas were crude, no doubt. The mind of a well-educated man was likened to "a well-plastered reservoir from which not a drop oozes out." This (and I think it is typical) looks feeble by the side of Socrates and his "art maieutic," the spiritual midwifery that brings to birth what has grown within. That, of course, shews an idea of education, the other is descriptive of cram. But, in its working, and taking it in its entirety, I am prepared to maintain that the Hebrew education was the best national system the world has ever seen: faced with that, our system is all-too-sadly wanting. To begin with, it was rooted in the home and firmly rooted there: men, and women too, had more leisure in their simpler mode of life. Also (and this is my present point) the teaching had a unity for which modern teachers, with examination requirements before them, may sigh in vain,—a unity alike of method, of subject, and of end: it looked to, it radiated from, it was bathed in the light of God, and the Scriptures were its one text-book. It seems odd to us, with our shoals of lesson books. They had "Readers" as we have; but the portions were all from the Old Testament. Children did sums, but most, if not all of them, turned upon the Jewish calendar. The same with their astronomy. The law their students learnt was canon law. The history, with its handmaid, geography, was all their own: it was all about their own Church and State, rousing their patriotism while sometimes it fed their bigotry. At any rate, it made masters and children alike keenly interested and enthusiastic. As for literature, outside their sacred books and commentaries thereon, it did not exist for them. Joshua had been told to meditate in the law day and night. What time then was left for "Greek wisdom," as they called it? That hour, was the dictum, which is neither day nor night; as we

might say, the “Greek Kalends.”

It is well known that, though there were no technical schools, technical instruction was obligatory on children of every class in society. “If you don’t teach your child a trade, you *do* teach him to steal.” The notion of vulgarity had never, as with Greeks and the more inane sort of Englishmen, attached to handicraft. The man who did

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not know the law,—the half-educated boor, whatever his birth might be,—he was the vulgar person in Palestine. Nor let us leave out the coping-stone. Not only was the youth’s memory stored with large portions of Holy Writ, but he actually had to write it all out with reverent, painstaking accuracy.

A genius is not made by his education; but it does help to mould him. We imagine, though we can go no nearer to proving it, that he is the product of generations that have gone before. Be that as it may, great emphasis is laid on the human ancestry of our Lord. And, reading the Old Testament as a whole, we see a nation at school for 1800 years, from time to time gathering up results in some representative man, like David, and constantly tending to incarnate its best and highest life. Christ, the Messiah, fulfilled that tendency and finally gathered up the results. So, in considering how His human nature was educated, we might go back to the Call of Abraham. But we take it up at the point where the long process has come to flower in the Virgin of Nazareth.

A somewhat favourite picture in the middle ages was St. Ann teaching the Virgin to read. It represents the fact, which the Magnificat proves, that the mother of Jesus was no mere village maiden. She knew her country’s literature: its power had passed into her blood. The spirit of the old poet-prophets was there: with all her modesty and quiet simplicity, she was a mother in Israel. And it is from her that the home education of Jesus starts. At the very first she had all to do for the Babe herself (St. Luke notes the fact and Giotto has caught it), all without the sympathy and help of neighbour or of nurse. The Babe was given a common name: one that, like our English Henry or Edward, recalled great figures in the nation’s past,—the warrior who led Israel into the promised land, the priest who brought them back from exile,—Joshua, Jesus. Pass by the scenes of the infancy, and follow the little family down to Nazareth, the place from every point of view (we will not dwell on that) fitted to be the home of education for Him who was to teach the world. Lange has called the choice of Nazareth a “master stroke of Divine wisdom.” Fill in the surroundings and picture the home—poor, but not squalid. ...

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Follow the Child through all His stages of growth. Nothing is so eloquent of Jewish child-love as the complete calendar of child-growth in the language of the Jews: every three years or so was classed with an appropriate name. They had hardly any names for their meals, those simple folk; we have plenty, but we simply cannot find English for their steps in the life of childhood. Significant difference! Follow Him through His schooldays as we have tried to trace them out, at home, in school-room or synagogue, in the country-side, or in the lanes of Nazareth. Bring the narrative down to that moment of crisis, when at twelve years old He went with His Mother and Joseph to Jerusalem.

And so we come to the incident in which alone, as far as our records go, the Silent Word breaks the silence of thirty years. In those twelve verses at the end of St. Luke’s second chapter, the boyhood of Jesus is described in two words, “growth” and “submission”—submission, with

the apparent exception that proves the rule, and growth in three stages clearly defined, as the Revisers have marked the paragraphs.

*Out of childhood*, at verse forty-eight—“And the child grew, and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”

*Out of boyhood*—“The boy Jesus tarried behind.” “Wist ye not that I must.”

*Into manhood*—“And Jesus (not the child or the boy, but simply Jesus) advanced in wisdom and age and in favour with God and men.”

The whole seems to me gathered up into those words: “Wist ye not that I must?” It was a Son making reply to His Mother,

“A Son Who never did amiss  
And never shamed a mother’s kiss  
Nor crossed her fondest prayer.”

And He was saying “I must.” She had expostulated, not (I am sure) in the hearing of all, but, as Holman Hunt seems to suggest, softly and aside—“My child, why hast Thou thus dealt with us?” It was no child that answered, but a boy passing into manhood—“*I must.*”

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Is it not sometimes so? The child has gained on the parent, or rather the parent has been losing ground; you are behind time; the hour strikes and finds you unprepared; startled, you wake with a shock; it is a *man* who is saying “I must.” We fathers and mothers lose sight of the other side of Commandment V. “‘Honour thy father and mother’ comes first, in order of time. But this is meant to follow, all the more as the years draw on, ‘Honour thy son and thy daughter—honour, not pet them, or flatter, or patronize, or neglect.’” It is a Pagan who reads us that lesson; one who wrote about Rome in her vilest days, a scoffing satirist—strange commentator on the Decalogue, this Juvenal. “Hush,” he seems to say with a touch of awe. “Hush, there’s a conscience growing in your child—*maxima debetur puero reverentia.*”<sup>4</sup>

Parents, honour your children. Never is that more needed than just when youth is changing towards maturity. I have shewn you the stages of growth marked in this section, the Child Jesus (*παίδιον*), the Boy Jesus (*παῖς*), and then simply Jesus. The passage opens with “The Child”; it closes with the grown Man; and the story that lies between them shews us the Boy lost and the Man found, found you remember where. That story is timed (bear with me while I partly repeat: I want to be quite clear)—timed precisely where the second and third stages touch, at the meeting-point of “the Boy” and “Jesus”: the “Boy Jesus” it was who tarried behind at Jerusalem. And He left His boyhood there as He said that word “I must.”

It is a story ever new. The child is passing into the lad, the lad slowly waking to find himself a man, and “his parents know not of it.” They “know not” what is going on beneath their very eyes, the up-springing of boy, of youth, of man. Amid the rush of grown-up life they “suppose him to be in the company”—a mere child, and like other children.

“Like other children.” I remember a grim Minor Canon of Canterbury (he was a father himself and lived near a big school), who would say, when asked to take some interest in the boys and their doings, “Do you know, I find one little boy very much like another little boy.” There are parents like that. So much the worse for them: their boys will lead

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them a life. And so much the worse for the children—bairns no blessing but a burden, for the most part in the way.

Well, what is to be done? That story will tell us, if we let it. The feast is over, the vast concourse breaking up. In the narrow streets all is confusion, bustle, distraction. Somehow they have lost touch of their Child,—that first. Then, when they know their loss, they go in search, but they follow (mark this) every clue but the highest; that they leave to the last. But the highest was the right direction after all. Yes, here is the holiest mother that ever breathed, with the light and leading of God's Own Spirit, if ever woman had, even she only half-believes the divine life in her Son—and He is the Son of the Most Highest. The House of His Father is left untried till other places have been searched in vain. If such a mother could miss the clue, what earnest heed is due from us!

There is our lesson, first, to keep touch with your boy, secondly to revere him—*puero reverentia*.

Keeping touch is never easy: it is quite impossible if you crystallize while your child is growing. And reverence is not easy: it is quite impossible if one gets too dim-sighted to see into the child's soul. Crystallize? How can one help it, if one lets fuss distract one from the things that interest young life,—fuss of home, fuss of parish, fuss of business. Dim-sighted? How can one help the film drawing thick across the soul's eye, if one gets less, not more, earnest about prayer!

And so the crisis comes. The boy speaks out, "I must." He cannot explain (boys are so reserved), but the soul is mutely expostulating (you read it in the eyes), "How is it that ye sought Me?"—sought Me in the lower part of the town instead of going straight uphill into the Temple itself? Wist ye not: did you know nothing of what God had planted within for you to water? No! "they understood not the saying which He spake unto them,"—the holy Mother's sorrowful confession through her chronicler, St. Luke—the sorrowful confession, too late, of some parents still,—"We did not understand." All the same it was the crisis for them as for the Child; and on that word, "I must," we turn over a leaf, and a fresh chapter opens in that Life of Lives. See how it opens, mark its bearing for us, and I have done.

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"And Jesus"—the man; now He had a man's responsibility, He counted for a man (their twelve answered to our eighteen or twenty)—"Jesus advanced." Before, it was "He grew"; now it is more, "He advanced." That word is a picture. You see a pioneer, axe in hand, advancing through some tangled forest. I repeat, Nazareth was no quiet village, but a busy, though not close-packed, town; and doubtless Jesus worked to support His mother when Joseph died. And the axe He hewed His way with was that mighty word, "I must." I must—be in My Father's house, about His business. I must—work the works of Him that sent Me. I must—go up to Jerusalem and there suffer many things. The Son of Man must—be lifted up.

It is the word of great men, this Must. Your small man "thinks he had better" do this, "may as well" do that, "supposes he ought to" go there. The great man says, "I must." Great poets sing because they must, great artists paint or carve or compose because they must. There is something in genius that drives the man on and will not let him rest—a Must making for perfection. And the Christian who has been rightly trained hews his way with a moral must.

To that all our education should tend, the creation of a *moral* must, not by mere pressure from without, "you must, you must not," but by developing the inner voice that says,

"I must not, I must." In days of growing independence we use an almost apologetic or coaxing tone about duty. But we want our children to breathe air in which right is natural and wrong unnatural, until doing the right becomes a matter of course. It is delightful to hear this sort of thing,—“So you said no?” “Why yes, mother; of course I did: the other chaps might do it, but I *couldn't!*”

It is the old method of habit, as old as Aristotle, and older—acts repeated till they are habitual, till goodness becomes the native air. Act, habit, character. First a discipline, then an atmosphere, and so a life. That is education, rooted in the home, fed and fostered at school, with school and home co-ordinated in mutual confidence. And the product is, “I must.”

Four great words go to spell that must—words that are respectively the character of man's freedom, his patent of

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nobility, evidence of his power, ensign of his royalty: I am, I ought, I can, I will,—Privilege, Duty, Power, Resolve.

Privilege involves Duty: *noblesse oblige*: I am, therefore I ought.

Duty implies Power. God does not mock us: I ought, therefore I can.

And the whole crowned by the royalty of Resolve—I will.

I am—within my Father's house, a living Christian.

I ought—to be about my Father's business an active Son of God.

I can—as a man of prayer; for prayer is “suppliant omnipotence.”

I will—set out through difficulties to cut my way: so only am I free.

Those words spell out the Must of the Son of Man, Who grew with human growth that He might before us, and for us, and in us, at every stage of life, as Child, as Boy, as full-grown Man, make free human choice to do the Father's will.

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<sup>1</sup> Read before the Dulwich Branch of the P.N.E.U.

<sup>2</sup> Brough's *Early Life of our Lord* and Edersheim's *Social Life among the Jews* have been most helpful.

<sup>3</sup> Hist. v. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Juv. Sat. xiv. 47.