

DEAR CHILDREN,—When I was a child I often wished that I had lived on earth when the Lord was living here; and I used to think I could not know Him as well as those could who saw Him in the flesh; probably you think the same. But there is one way in which you may learn to know Him now, and I want to point it out to you, as, perhaps, you may not have thought of it. All children can understand what sympathy is. You know that if you have enjoyed anything very much, or seen anything that is beautiful, you long to tell somebody about it; you feel that you cannot be satisfied to enjoy it alone; you run to your mother or to some friend if you can and try to make them see what you see and share with you in your feelings. Now this is a right and true instinct, it is thus with you because you need sympathy; it is to your nature what the sunshine is to the flowers. Let me give you one word of caution however. You must bear in mind that grown-up people have a great many demands on their time and thoughts, and you must not let your desire to get their interest make you inconsiderate for them or careless about disturbing them. With this caution, however, you need not hesitate to share with them your pleasures. And I want you to see that this natural wish of yours to be shared with and to share may teach you to understand the Lord Jesus Christ. He has that feeling a great deal more strongly than you have. He not only enters into all your real interests, but He cares that you should enter into His, that you should share His feelings—but always within the limits of your age. A child cannot enter into the feeling of a grown-up person who has suffered much, except in a very small degree, unless the child, too, has known suffering. A healthy, happy child is not called upon to realize the feelings of our Lord in His suffering manhood. It is better for the child to know this, and to say:—

“We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear.
But we believe it was for us,
He hung and suffered there.”

To remember this and to love Him gratefully, this is within the power of a child; but to know and realize what He experienced, this is not. There is, however, a portion of our Lord’s life on earth, a part of His experience, into which a child is fitted by its very youth to enter. And that portion is His childhood. To Him that childhood is as vividly present

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as if it had been experienced yesterday. He can remember all far more clearly than you can recall your past days; for His memory is perfected. And if you want to know the child Jesus you will try to understand how He felt in His child-life, and you will please Him by sympathising with Him in it. But I can fancy that you are saying to yourself, “How can I do this? I do not know the details of His life at Nazareth.” No, but there is a way to understanding the child Jesus better and closer than that. It is a way within the reach of every little child. It is your own little lives, your own feelings which will best enable you to understand His. “But I am naughty sometimes, and He never was”; I think one of you was thinking that, am I not right? Yes, dear children, that is true, but you are not always naughty. There are times when you are light-hearted, because you know you have tried to be good; you know at such times that mother is pleased with you and God is pleased with you. You know what it is to find pleasure in giving pleasure to others. Then you can understand in some degree the happiness of the child Jesus;

“A child who never did amiss,
Who never shamed His mother’s kiss.”

There are many innocent pleasures in your lives very similar to those He enjoyed. When you are having a lovely walk across the hills, you can remember how he must have loved to ramble over the hills of Nazareth to gather the sweet wild flowers in the spring, to listen to the song-birds, to feel the breeze lifting His hair on summer days, and to look at the lovely country stretching away towards the sea. When you are in the midst of a happy game of play, you can think of the little boy Jesus running out from the carpenter’s shop to share in the games of the village children. Remember, when He was a man He spoke of all these things in His words to the people—of the birds and flowers and breezes, and of the children playing in the market place. Do you suppose that He did not enjoy these things in His pure childhood? I think He enjoyed them more than other children, because He was a more perfect child; all the innocent joys that belong to child-life would be more keenly delighted in by His perfect nature. And He would like you to link your lives to the remembrance of His, to make your joys like so many letters of the words by which you spell out

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the meaning and beauty of His life. To think when you enjoy anything that is good and beautiful of how He felt as a child towards those things, and how He remembers those things now. And there are higher joys than these which come from hearing of or seeing any unselfish noble act; from receiving kindness or from making some sacrifice for others; and these will enable you to realize how the noblest child who ever lived must have felt when he [sic] listened to the story of heroic deeds, or when He subdued His own wishes to those of others.

But the life of most children is not all joy, it has its cloudy days, its temptation, its battles. Dear children, I once had a dream which made me understand better than I had ever done before how much of this experience there was in the life of the child Jesus. Children have such hard struggles with themselves, such moments of sorrow, such clouds rush over their young spirits, and few painters have realised [sic] this as present in the experience of the childhood of our Lord. Think of the pictures you have seen of the Holy Child; they do not as a rule suggest that Holiness meant for Him a struggle with temptation, a subduing of innocent desires, a conquest over self. My dream taught me that it was through the struggles of childhood that He “increased in favour with God and man.” I saw Him in my dream as a child; He looked very much like the child in a little picture in my possession by a painter called Verlat. But His expression was quite different, it was this changed expression that gave me fresh insight into the experience of His child-life. I can hardly convey to you what it conveyed to me. The expression in a face says so much which words cannot say. It was perfectly child-like, but it showed me how much of struggle, and noble effort, and self-mastery, that little child had had to learn. Truly He “learned obedience by the things that He suffered.” How bravely He strove to bear pain when He was hurt, how often He struggled to keep back tears of disappointment when some pure pleasure had to be surrendered, how successfully He kept in its right place the holy anger that would stir Him when He saw an act of cruelty or meanness. Yes, He was absolutely ruler over Himself. But how? He chose no easier path than yours, my child. He overcame by fighting with temptation, by subduing the natural and innocent feelings of

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the voice of the Spirit of God, and so, even as a child, the boy Jesus bore on that Heavenly face the marks of suffering, the stamp of the Hero Soul, of the Soul that overcomes.

In the hours of your temptation or when some childish sorrow makes you feel, as you would call it, "miserable," turn your thoughts in sympathy to Him Whose child-life was not less subject to its trials and struggles than yours; Whose fight was not less painful because it was always maintained and always victorious. His aim was the highest possible to any child, and it cost Him many a pang to keep ever true to it in thought and word and deed. And even though you fail so often to conquer yourself, as He conquered, you will find even your failures will teach you to know and love and admire Him more, if you will but think of Him till your thoughts grow into sympathy.

I am, dear children,

One who sympathises with you,

H. A. D.