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THE

GOSPEL OF THE CHILDHOOD

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THE

GOSPEL OF THE CHILDHOOD

A practical and devotional commentary on the single recorded incident of our Blessed Lord's childhood

ST. LUKE II. 41, TO THE END

DESIGNED AS
A HELP TO MEDITATION ON THE HOLY SCRIPTURES
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS

BY

EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN, D.D.

DEAN OF NORWICH

NEW EDITION

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1891

TO MY CHORISTERS,

FOR WHOSE INSTRUCTION AND EDIFICATION

THEY WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN,

THESE PAGES ARE INSCRIBED,

WITH THE EARNEST PRAYER THAT

"WHAT THEY SING WITH THEIR LIPS

THEY MAY BELIEVE IN THEIR HEARTS,

AND WHAT THEY BELIEVE IN THEIR HEARTS

THEY MAY PRACTISE IN THEIR LIVES,"

AND SO MAY "GROW IN GRACE,

AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF

OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR

JESUS CHRIST."

PREFACE

THE story of this little book and the reason of its publication is soon told. It has for some time been my habit, in the course of the Saturday Evensong at Norwich Cathedral, to give to the lay-clerks and choristers a brief address, expository of some part of Holy Scripture which bears upon their duties.

Usually the Psalms are our subject, as being that part of Scripture which forms the main staple of the work of a choir, and with the words of which they are necessarily conversant. But the Psalms are exchanged occasionally for something which comes home still more nearly to the responsibilities, dangers, and temptations of

the younger members of the choir. Friends who have heard some of these addresses on the childhood of our Blessed Lord have thought that a serviceable book of devotion for children might be made by compiling them in a little volume, and expunging all too specific reference to the duties of choristers. And I quite concur with them in thinking that, if children could be induced, by a simple (and, at the same time, not too simple) commentary—a commentary which shall suggest more than it says, demand occasionally a close attention, and open out fields of profitable thought not too arduous for the young, —to make our Blessed Lord's childhood the subject of meditation, not only might the foundation be laid in the youthful mind of a habit unspeakably valuable, but one of God's great purposes in vouchsafing to us this precious record of the Lord's childhood might possibly be answered. Of all my young readers I shall ask

three things, as the essential condition of their profiting by what is here offered for their instruction; first, that they shall begin and close their perusal of each Chapter with the devotions which I have prefixed to the Commentary; secondly, that, after reading each Chapter, they shall offer some very brief prayer *out of their own minds*, suggested by some part of its contents; thirdly, that they shall go over the book in order more than once, trying to work the thoughts into their own minds, and make themselves masters of each part of the subject. On no account let more than one Chapter a day be read; and do not tire of turning back and reading it[1] over again. You are not reading for amusement, but for instruction, and to make your heart and conduct better; and real instruction can only be slowly taken in, "line

[1] Perhaps it might be found a profitable plan to read the same Chapter every day for a whole week, and think a little over a fresh part of it each day.

upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." And with this advice I commend my young readers to that Spirit, who hovered over the waters of their Baptism, and who has been ever since seeking to quicken in their hearts those germs of spiritual feeling which He Himself implanted, and who may haply be pleased to make this little book a means of qualifying them for the holy and blessed rite of Confirmation, and of strengthening them for the trial and battle of life. That what is here offered to them may have this happy result, is the earnest prayer of the author.

E. M. G.

Brighton, April 27, 1873.

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Devotions

WHICH THE YOUNG ARE RECOMMENDED TO USE BEFORE THE READING OF THESE CHAPTERS.

¶ *Before you begin a Chapter of this book, repeat very devoutly one of the following Psalms, after first reading the short heading of it; and then, kneeling down, say one or more of the short prayers which follow.*

Psalm I.

This Psalm describes the character of all righteous men, but especially of Him who, alone of all men, was perfectly righteous—our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Tree of Righteousness of God's planting, which was nourished by the waters of the Holy Spirit, given to Him without measure; and He was a tree which brought forth fruit in due season, since from His early childhood He increased in wisdom and in favour with God and man. The

questions which He asked of the Doctors showed that His delight was in the law of the Lord; and the constant use which He made of that law showed how He had meditated in it day and night.

BLESSED is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners : and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord : and in his law will he exercise himself day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the water-side : that will bring forth his fruit in due season.

His leaf also shall not wither : and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper.

As for the ungodly, it is not so with them : but they are like the chaff, which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth.

Therefore the ungodly shall not be able to stand in the judgment : neither the sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

But the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous : and the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Psalm VIII.

This Psalm also speaks of Christ, who was once a babe and suckling, and afterwards a child, and out of whose mouth God ordained strength, when He showed such marvellous understanding among the Doctors in the temple as astonished those grey-headed sages; and who now is exalted to God's right hand, and reigns over all the world, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.

O LORD our Governour, how excellent is thy Name in all the world : thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens !

Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies : that thou mightest still the enemy, and the avenger.

For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers : the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?

Thou madest him lower than the angels : to crown him with glory and worship.

Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of thy hands : and thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet ;

All sheep and oxen : yea, and the beasts of the field ;

The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea : and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas.

O Lord our Governour : how excellent is thy Name in all the world !

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Psalm XLII.

This Psalm may be understood of the longing of our Blessed Lord after communion with God in His house of prayer — the longing which drew Him back to the Temple, after His earthly parents had left it. He had gone with them to the house of God, in the voice of praise and thanksgiving, among such as keep holy-day ; and had found the visit so full of consolation and delight, that He clung to the sacred courts, and could not tear Himself away.

LIKE as the hart desireth the water-brooks : so longeth my soul after thee, O God.

My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God : when shall I come to appear before the presence of God ?

My tears have been my meat day and night : while they daily say unto me, Where is now thy God ?

Now when I think thereupon, I pour out my heart by myself : for I went with the multitude, and brought them forth into the house of God ;

In the voice of praise and thanksgiving : among such as keep holy-day.

Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul : and why art thou so disquieted within me?

Put thy trust in God : for I will yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance.

My God, my soul is vexed within me : therefore will I remember thee concerning the land of Jordan, and the little hill of Hermon.

One deep calleth another, because of the noise of the water-pipes : all thy waves and storms are gone over me.

The Lord hath granted his loving-kindness in the day-time; and in the night-season did I sing of him, and made my prayer unto the God of my life.

I will say unto the God of my strength, Why hast thou forgotten me : why go I thus heavily, while the enemy oppresseth me?

My bones are smitten asunder as with a sword : while mine enemies that trouble me cast me in the teeth;

Namely, while they say daily unto me : Where is now thy God?

Why art thou so vexed, O my soul : and why art thou so disquieted within me?

O put thy trust in God : for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Psalm LXXXIV.

This Psalm also may be understood of the love and longing for God's house, which our Lord showed in His youth, and all His life through, and which is also felt by all the true servants of Christ, that is, by all good and holy people.

O HOW amiable are thy dwellings : thou Lord of hosts!

My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord : my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.

Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young : even thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house : they will be alway praising thee.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee : in whose heart are thy ways.

Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well : and the pools are filled with water.

They will go from strength to strength : and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer : hearken, O God of Jacob.

Behold, O God our defender : and look upon the face of thine Anointed.

For one in day thy courts : is better than a thousand.

I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God : than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness.

For the Lord God is a light and defence : the Lord will give grace and worship, and no good thing shall he withhold from them that live a godly life.

O Lord God of hosts : blessed is the man that putteth his trust in thee.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Psalm CXIX. 97–104. (*Quomodo dilexi.*)

This Psalm may be understood of our Blessed Saviour's love for and study of the law of God, while yet a child, which made Him wiser than the aged, and gave Him more understanding than His teachers; in which love and study all His disciples should imitate Him.

LORD, what love have I unto thy law : all the day long is my study in it.

Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies : for they are ever with me.

I have more understanding than my teachers : for thy testimonies are my study.

I am wiser than the aged : because I keep thy commandments.

I have refrained my feet from every evil way : that I may keep thy word.

I have not shrunk from thy judgments : for thou teachest me.

O how sweet are thy words unto my throat : yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth.

Through thy commandments I get understanding : therefore I hate all evil ways.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Psalm CXXII.

This is one of the Songs of degrees, sung, at the different stages of their journey, by the pilgrims who went up to Jerusalem at the three great festivals. It is probable, therefore, that our Lord and His parents sung it, as they went up, when He was twelve years old, to keep the feast of the passover.

I WAS glad when they said unto me : We will go into the house of the Lord.

Our feet shall stand in thy gates : O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is built as a city : that is at unity in itself.

For thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord : to testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord.

For there is the seat of judgment : even the seat of the house of David.

O pray for the peace of Jerusalem : they shall prosper that love thee.

Peace be within thy walls : and plenteousness within thy palaces.

For my brethren and companions' sakes : I will wish thee prosperity.

Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God : I will seek to do thee good.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Psalm CXXXI.

This Psalm describes our Blessed Lord's lowliness of mind, who, though He is God of God, Light of Light, and very God of very God, yet condescended to take our nature upon Him in all the successive stages of it, and became a child before He was a man, and submitted to learn of the Doctors in the Temple, and was subject unto His earthly parents, that He might fulfil the law of God for children, and leave them an example that they should follow His steps.

LORD, I am not high-minded : I have no proud looks.

I do not exercise myself in great matters : which are too high for me.

But I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother : yea, my soul is even as a weaned child.

O Israel, trust in the Lord : from this time forth for evermore.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

I.

COLLECT FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

II.

MERCIFUL Lord, I beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon my mind, that I, being enlightened by the doctrines of thy holy Word, may so walk in the light of thy truth, that I may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

III.

COLLECT FOR ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST.

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IV.

COLLECT FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give

us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

V.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. *Ps.* cxix. 18.

O Lord Jesus Christ, open thou mine understanding, that I may understand the Scriptures. *See S. Luke* xxiv. 45.

O Spirit of truth, guide me into all truth. *S. John* xvi. 13.

Take away the vail from my heart, O Lord, when I read the Scriptures. *See* 2 *Cor.* iii. 15, 16.

VI.

Let thy fatherly hand, O Lord, ever be over me; let thy Holy Spirit ever be with me; and so lead me day by day in the knowledge and obedience of thy Word, that in the end I may obtain everlasting life; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION; BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL: FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN.

Concluding Devotions.

¶ *After you have finished the study of one of these Chapters, and made a short prayer out of your own mind on part of its contents, close your meditation for the day by kneeling down and saying these prayers :—*

I.

O LORD Jesu Christ, who, that thou mightest leave an ensample unto the young, didst condescend to be subject unto thy parents after the flesh; Grant me grace to order myself lowly and reverently to all who are set over me, so that following the steps of thy great humility, I may in my youth be conformed unto thine image, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, blessed for ever. Amen.

II.

O BLESSED Saviour, who, that thou mightest sanctify the period of growth, didst condescend to grow both in wisdom and in stature; Make me swift to hear and inquire of my teachers, and to improve all the talents and opportunities which thou vouchsafest to me, so that, diligently seeking after wisdom, I may grow therein, and may find favour with thee and with man, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

III.

LET thy fatherly hand, O Lord, be ever with me for my protection; thy mercy in Christ for my salvation; thine unerring Word for my instruction; the grace of thy life-giving Spirit for my consolation, even unto the end and in the end. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with my spirit. Amen.

CHAPTER I.

Of the Holy Child Jesus.

OUR Blessed Lord, God manifest in the flesh, grew up gradually to man's estate, like other people. He was first an infant, unconscious of what was going on around Him; then a child, with powers of mind just dawning; and lastly a boy, before He became a man. Now fix your mind on this point for a few minutes. Christ might have been made fullgrown at once. Once upon a time there was a man, who was so made; it was Adam. Adam never was an infant, or a child, or a boy. Adam was unlike all his descendants in this, that he never was dependent upon parents, never had any home of his childhood to which he could look back. The moment after God created him, he was fully conscious of what was going on around

him; his powers were quite ripe; and he began to observe, and think, and reason at once. Now our Blessed Lord is called by S. Paul "the last Adam," "the second man;" that is to say, Adam was a type or figure of Christ. And one might have expected, therefore, that our Lord would be what Adam had been, a man sent into the world fullgrown. Infancy, childhood, boyhood, are very humbling conditions. Infants cannot think at all; if they can just take notice of some shining object held before their eyes, that is as much as they can do. Children can understand a few things; but there are many subjects which, because their minds are so weak, cannot possibly be explained to them. Boys and girls can learn and receive instruction from others; but their judgment is not formed, and it would be a great risk indeed to leave a matter of any importance to their decision. And so one might have imagined that, when the Son of God, who had lain in the bosom of

1 Cor. xv. 45, 47. Rom. v. 14.

See S. John i. 18.

the Father from all eternity, condescended to come into the world and to be made in the likeness of men, He would not become first an infant, then a child, then a boy, but would appear as a man at once. Whereas, on the contrary, we are expressly told that the Child Jesus "grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom," and again that "Jesus" (as to his human soul) "increased in wisdom," as well as in "stature."

S. Luke ii. 40.

S. Luke ii. 52.

Let us reverently seek to understand why this was so.

Firstly; our Blessed Lord's condescension is infinite; and therefore in coming into the world, He desired to stoop as low as ever He could stoop, in order to set us the more striking example of lowliness of mind. Therefore He preferred, for His entrance into the world, the condition of an unconscious babe, and of a little child dependent upon its parents, to that of a full grown and independent man. It was the same when He *went out*

of the world. He might have died the death of one of the world's heroes, a gallant death, which men admire, or at least He might have died in a private chamber, amid the sighs and tears of those who loved and adored Him; but this would not have been going low enough for Him; because the infinitely great One is also infinitely humble. "I am meek," says He, "and lowly of heart." And He gave proof of it, by coming into the world as a babe, and going out of it as a criminal. His death was by a public execution—a scene which usually draws together the lowest rabble; and among the last sounds which greeted His ear were jeers and revilings. So His course ended as it had begun—in the lowliness of an inconceivable condescension.

S. Mat. xi. 29.

Secondly; our Lord, out of His infinite compassion for us, earnestly desired to sympathise with men in all their trials, and in every condition in which they can be placed, in order that He might bless and comfort them by His

sympathy. No one class of people was to be able to say, "The Lord Jesus never knew what our trials were." And therefore it would not have answered His purpose to come into the world in a peculiar way, as Adam did, or to go out of it in a peculiar way, as Enoch and Elijah did. No, He would come into it by the usual gate—infancy, and go out also by the usual gate—death. So that the smallest child, the youngest boy, cannot say, "The Son of God is so great that He cannot enter into my feelings, or stoop to help me in my little troubles." And the man or woman who is laid upon a very suffering death-bed, cannot say, "The blessed Jesus, who is now exalted to God's right hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, cannot understand what I suffer—this sickness of heart, this harassing restlessness, this weary, moaning wakefulness, while all other inmates of the house are fast asleep." Oh! who

See Eph. i. 21.

can possibly understand the bodily pain and weakness, which accompany death, as He can?

Lastly; one can quite see this, that for a grown up person never to have known childhood, or home, or a mother's care, would cut them off from all the most beautiful and tender associations of our nature. If there are drawbacks about infancy and childhood, inasmuch as children are very weak, ignorant, and dependent, and cannot even earn their own bread, there is a good deal to make up for the drawbacks. It makes a man tender, as no other thought can, to look back on his childhood and early home, on the strong interest which his parents used to take in him, and on the sacrifices which they were at all times ready to make for him. Now our Blessed Lord was to be infinitely tender, in order that He might attract the miserable and suffering to Himself; and He was to exhibit all the beauties and graces of which human character is capable; and therefore

it was that He willed to have a home of childhood, and to be dependent upon a mother's care, and to lisp His earliest prayers at a mother's knee, which is the way in which all of us first learn to pray. These experiences contributed to make His human soul tender.

My child, the object of your God in becoming a child, will be fulfilled in you, if you will only do these three things :—

Firstly. Take to Him all your little troubles and trials in prayer, and assure yourselves that He is most ready to hear and help you ; nay, that there is nothing He more delights in than to see the young draw near to His feet. You wrong Him if you imagine that anything which vexes and tries you is beneath His gracious notice and care. Why did He become a child, but to assure children of His sympathy with them ?

Secondly. Take Him for your example. Read over often—once a week at least—the few verses which give us an account of His

childhood (S. Luke, ii. 40, to the end). Observe there His love of God's house of prayer, His teachableness, His desire for instruction, His submission to His parents (while all the while He was their God), His growth in wisdom and in favour with God and man; and try to copy Him in these points.

See S. Luke ii. 46. vv. 46, 47. v. 51. v. 52.

Thirdly. Trust with all your heart in the goodness which He as a child exhibited, and which was *perfect* goodness, such as yours can never be. Only for the sake of that goodness of His, will God forgive your faults, your fits of temper, your indolence, your greediness, your selfishness, your falsehood. Plead with God, when your conscience tells you you have done wrong, the merits of the Holy Child Jesus; and God will then look at you, not as you are in yourself, but through Him (just as, when you look at white paper through coloured glass, you see the paper as if it were the colour of the glass), and will forgive, and bless you, and smile upon you with fatherly love. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

On the Goodness of God in giving us an Account of the Childhood of the Lord Jesus.

IN our last Chapter we dwelt on the fact that our Blessed Lord condescended to be a child before He became a man. Adam was made a full-grown man at once; but our Lord, the second Adam, went through the ages of infancy, childhood, and youth, before He came to man's estate.—This, however, might have been the case, and yet it might not have pleased God to tell us anything about His Childhood. But He *has* told us something about it—nay, He has told us much, though in very few words. All that He has told us is contained in the twelve

last verses of S. Luke ii., which we propose to consider verse by verse. But what I want to make you think of to-day is God's goodness in giving us any account at all of what, to all children and persons under age, must be a matter of the greatest interest and importance. Let me put it in this way to you:— God's Word, the Bible, is perfect. Now, what do we mean by perfection? What is a perfect thing? A perfect thing is that to which you can add nothing that would really further the end for which the thing was made, and from which you can take away nothing without spoiling it. Now, first, God's Word is perfect, because we can add nothing to it which would really further its end. Its end is to make people holy and good, like God and Christ, and to bring them to salvation. And the Bible contains everything which can really bring about this end, although it is quite silent about a number of things which we might be curious to know. For example,

God could have told us in the Bible, had he pleased, a great deal about the stars, He could have told us whether the other planets are worlds like the earth, whether there are creatures living in them ; and if so, whether these creatures are reasonable beings like ourselves. But He has told us not a word about the stars, as to what they are, and whether anybody lives in them. The Bible says no more about the stars than this—that God made them. "He made the stars also." This knowledge tends to do us good, because it leads us to think what a magnificent being God must be, who, by speaking a single word, could make all those thousands of beautiful jewels, which hang in brilliant clusters upon the brow of night ; and also because it leads us to think what a much more glorious thing God's great palace in Heaven must be, if a starlight night upon earth is so very glorious. But to have told us whether there are people living in the

Gen. i. 16.

stars would have done us no good, because, even if there are, it cannot be any concern of ours, nor can we have any duties towards them. And God's Word, being perfect, while it tells us *all* that is necessary, does not tell us *more* than is necessary for its purpose.

But, secondly, you can take away nothing from a thing that is perfect, without more or less spoiling it, and defeating its end. Perhaps you think there is no great use in some Chapters of the Bible, such Chapters, for instance, as Romans xvi., which is full of ancient names—"Salute so and so," "Greet so and so"—names which never occur again, and of the persons bearing which we know nothing. But you are much mistaken, if you think there is no good to be got out of these greetings. We learn from them that it is our duty to keep up those forms of courtesy and civility, which make Society graceful. It is good and proper when we write letters, for instance, to send

our friends "kind remembrances," "kind regards," "best love," "good wishes for the new year," and so forth. It is good and proper not only to feel, but to show that we feel, lively interest in friends and relations.—But now to take another and a stronger example. Let us suppose that these twelve verses of S. Luke's Gospel had been left out, and that therefore, though we knew a great deal about the Lord Jesus when He was grown up, we could form no idea of what He was like when He was a boy. Would there not in that case have been something wanting in the Bible? Where would be the perfect example for children, if these twelve precious verses were cut out? Children might have been told (as they are told in other parts of the Bible) how they ought to feel and act, in order to please God. But the mere telling them how they ought to behave could not have had the same force as the Saviour's example. For only think with what tremendous force that

example binds children to be subject to their parents and teachers in all things. For our Saviour is perfect God, as well as perfect Man. And one might perhaps have thought, unless we had been told otherwise, that, being God, the Maker of all things, He would (even as a child) have exercised authority over his parents and teachers, would have ordered them about instead of being ordered by them, would have taught them instead of submitting to be taught. But when we read that even He was subject to his parents, and asked questions of the doctors, in order to learn from them, we then see that any want of submission on the part of a common child must be indeed a most grievous sin in the sight of God.

My first advice, then, to you is, that you should thank God from the bottom of your heart for giving you a part of the Gospel all to yourself—twelve verses for your special instruction and comfort. And my second

advice is, that you should turn this goodness of God to the best account, by attentively reading over those twelve verses once every week of your lives, and trying to make out what they are meant to teach you. Our Lord is our model,—a perfect model for children as well as for grown-up people. And if you make a model from a bust, or a copy from a picture, you must have the bust or the picture under your eyes very often, and guide your hand by the eye, as you lay on the plaster or the colour. It will never do to keep the bust or the picture in a cupboard, while you are modelling or drawing from it. Study, then, every week of your lives this likeness of our Blessed Saviour in Childhood; perhaps it would be well to read over one or two verses of it every day, and to think what they teach. And, when you study it, say this little prayer; "O Heavenly Father, I bless Thee for having given me Thy Son to atone by His goodness in childhood for

all my faults and sins; and I pray Thee to help me by Thy Grace to follow the blessed steps of His most Holy Childhood, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

CHAPTER III.

Of the holy courage and piety shown by S. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.—S. LUKE ii. 41.

THREE times every year, "in the feast of unleavened bread" (called the Passover), "and in the feast of weeks" (or Pentecost), "and in the feast of tabernacles," all the men of Israel, and even the boys when they had reached a certain age, were commanded by the Law of Moses to appear before the Lord in the place which He should choose. This was a trial of faith; because, of course, in those parts of the Holy Land which were far off from the Tabernacle or Temple, when the

Deut. xvi. 16.

men and boys were away, some enemy—a bordering Arab tribe, for example—might sweep down upon the country, carry off the crops, plunder the houses and tents, and make the women and children prisoners. God promised, however, that, if they would obey His commandment, He would secure them against this danger, and would not allow any one to set eyes of envy on their country at times when the men and boys were absent on their religious duties. Thus ran the promise; "Neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year."

Exod. xxxiv. 24.

The chief of the three festivals was the Passover (corresponding to our Easter); and to this festival we read that, not only S. Joseph, our Lord's supposed father, but also His mother, was in the habit of going up. Probably there was more than usual risk in *their* going up to Jerusalem. It was some-

thing like thrusting their head into the lion's mouth. For we are told by S. Matthew that at this period "Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod." It was likely enough that Archelaus, who, like his father, was a cruel and tyrannical man, might hear something about their having come back in safety with the Holy Child from Egypt, and that by going up to the feast they might put themselves in his power. But the blessed Virgin and S. Joseph felt that, when God commanded, nothing must be allowed to stand in the way. So they cheerfully incurred a double risk—the risk of leaving the Holy Child (while yet quite a child) behind them at Nazareth, in the charge perhaps of some neighbour (could not God protect Him in their absence, and would He not certainly do so, while they were in the way of duty?), and the risk of falling into the hands of Archelaus, and being required to produce their sacred treasure. And it should be remembered

S. Matt. ii. 22.

that, though S. Joseph was bound to attend the three feasts, the blessed Virgin was under no obligation at all to do so. Women were not bound to go up to any of the feasts, though pious women did often come up with their husbands to the Passover as a free-will act of devotion. Thus we read in the Old Testament that Hannah, before the birth of her son Samuel, went up year by year to the house of the Lord with her husband Elkanah, to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh. And the Virgin Mary acted like Hannah, always accompanying her husband once a year to the Passover. And this is the more remarkable, because there is another point of resemblance between Hannah and S. Mary the Virgin. S. Mary's Song, which we call the "Magnificat," and which we sing daily after the First Lesson at Evening Prayer, is very like the song which Hannah sung, when she brought up Samuel for the first time (then just weaned) to the house of the

See 1 Sam. i. 3, 7.

Compare S. Luke i. 46—56 with 1 Sam. ii. 1—11.

Lord in Shiloh—so like that S. Mary's song seems to have been copied from Hannah's, and might be written side by side with it in parallel columns.

Here, then, in this little verse, are two facts from which we may draw very useful and important lessons; first, that our Lord's parents did not let the dread of King Archelaus frighten them out of keeping God's commandments; secondly, that the Virgin Mary did more in God's service than she was actually bound by His commandment to do. Let us copy them in both these respects.

Never be frightened by the fear of man out of what you know and feel to be right; for is not God's anger, which you must incur if you do wrong, more to be dreaded than man's? Man, if he is ever so angry, can do nothing worse than kill the body. But God, as our Saviour says, "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." How many a school-

S. Matt. x. 28.

boy is there, who has been frightened, by being laughed at and annoyed, out of saying his prayers and reading his Bible, that is, out of acknowledging God by worshipping Him in private! He has given up his prayers, or his Bible, and has done as others do—a cowardly as well as a wrong action. For a really brave boy would do right and face the consequences; and to run away from a plain duty because we are sneered at or teased, is the very opposite of that manliness, which most boys wish to have credit for.

See Acts v. 29.

I have said that we should fear God rather than man. But to fear Him is not enough,

See S. Mark xii. 30.

except we "love Him also with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength." And the best proof we can give of loving Him thus will be this, that we shall not inquire, when He gives us any commandment, how little we may safely do for Him, but rather how *much*

we can do in the direction He points out. Women were expressly excused from coming long distances at the Passover to worship God in His house. Yet the Virgin would come with her husband, though she might have stayed away, because she loved God's Law and delighted in it. This is the true spirit in which we all ought to serve God. And if we served Him in this spirit, how very different would our conduct be! Consider only what would be the difference in one point, the money which people would then give for good objects. "Charge them that are rich in this world," says God, by the mouth of His Apostle, "that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." But most people, although they have more than they need for their own wants, consider only what is the least sum they can give towards good objects, consistently with obeying God at all, and keeping up a proper appearance. They do not like

1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

parting with their money, and therefore satisfy their consciences with the smallest contribution they can make. How different would be their conduct, if they said to themselves, "God has pointed out this good work to me as a means of serving Him and advancing His cause; and, therefore, by way of pleasing Him, I shall do my utmost towards it, and retrench some of my expenditure on myself, for the purpose of helping it forward!"—

See S. Matt. xviii. 20.

Again; Christ has told us that "He is in the midst of the two or three gathered together in His name." And yet people calling themselves Christians are quite content with going to Church once on a Sunday, and never on a week-day; their going once being just enough to enable them to say that they do not neglect the duty. Alas! God requires not only that duties shall not be neglected,

See S. Matt. vi. 10.

but that they shall be done, as holy angels do them, with cheerfulness, alacrity, zeal, and love. And those are His *true* children, of

whom He knows that He can say, when He gives them a command, what the Apostle says to his friend Philemon: "Having confidence in thy obedience, I" speak "unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say."

Phile. 21.

CHAPTER IV.

Of the piety and devotion of our Lord Jesus Christ in early childhood.

And when he was twelve years old.—S. LUKE ii. 42.

BUT what was our Blessed Lord doing *till* He was twelve years old?

A child may show a great deal of character, before he has reached the age of twelve; and we should like to know something about our Lord's character and conduct, while He was *quite* a child. We are told several things about Him, when He was an *infant.* The shepherds came to visit Him immediately after His birth, as He lay in the manger. When He was eight days old, He received the sacrament of circumcision, and was named, as

the angel who announced His birth to His mother directed that He should be, Jesus. When He was forty days old (i.e., five weeks and five days) He was brought into the Temple by His parents, and presented to the Lord. A few days after that, the wise men came from the East to worship Him and offer their gold and spices. And then He was carried in haste, and by night, into Egypt, where His parents stayed for a short time, supposed by some to be about a fortnight. But all these things happened to Him in infancy, before He could speak or give any signs of character. And what we are desirous to know is not so much what was done *with* Him, as what He did and said while yet very young.

And this is just what God does not allow us to know, and what there is no means whatever of finding out. But because God has given us no particulars about this period of our Lord's life, men very early in the history

of the Christian Church invented a great number of stories about it, some of them very foolish, and almost profane; others rather picturesque, but not in the least trustworthy. The Childhood of Christ was considered so curious a subject, that they could not keep their fancy off it; and so they made up a heap of fables about it, partly out of uncertain traditions, partly out of the real Gospels, but chiefly out of their own brain. I will tell you one of these fables, found in the apocryphal Gospel of S. Thomas; and you will see how very unlike it is to the solemn, grave, weighty sentence, in which the inspired Evangelist S. Luke sums up all that it has pleased God to tell us about our Lord's early Childhood. Our Lord, the story says, when five years old, was playing by a stream with several other children; and having made some soft clay, He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows; and it was the Sabbath when He did these things. One of the Jews, who saw what

He had done, went and told S. Joseph that the Child Jesus had broken the Sabbath. And Joseph went to the place, and reproved Jesus for doing on the Sabbath what it was not lawful to do. But Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows: "Go ye; fly away; and be mindful of Me, while ye enjoy life." And the sparrows flew away, and departed, twittering. And the Jews were exceedingly amazed. This is a very good specimen of the sort of story, of which the apocryphal Gospels are full. You see that the ideas are partly borrowed from the real Gospels; for the author of this story evidently had in his mind the account in S. John ix. of our Lord's making clay, and working a miracle with the clay on the eyes of a blind man. Perhaps he was thinking also of the account in the Book of Genesis of man's body being made out of the clay, and having the breath of life breathed into it by God after it was made; this being one of the miracles which our Lord

did as God, before He took our nature upon Him. But the story that he makes up out of all this must of course be false, because we are told in the Bible that the turning of water into wine at the marriage in Cana was the first miracle our Lord wrought; and therefore, while He was a child, He could have wrought none.

Now see what God tells us, and what is all we can know for certain, of the Childhood of Jesus (v. 40): "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit." Observe that this very same thing had been said in ch. i. 80, of S. John the Baptist, whose childhood was, in this respect, like that of his Divine Master. Our Lord grew like other children. He grew in stature, and became taller day by day. He grew also in intelligence, His human mind opening day by day, and taking in new ideas. (How this could be I will explain on a future occasion, when we come to the words, "Jesus increased in wisdom.") And this, be-

cause His condescension was so great that He determined to be made like us in everything, sin only excepted.

"And waxed strong in *spirit.*" There are three parts of our nature mentioned in the Bible,—the body, the soul, the spirit. "The body" is what the animals have in common with us; it is the part of us in which we feel hunger, thirst, and weariness—the part which is fed by food and rested by sleep. "The soul" means the feelings and affections; it is the part of us which feels pity for distress, fear of danger, anger at an insult, and so forth. "The spirit" is that higher part of our nature, which makes us reasonable beings; it is by the action of our spirit that we think of God, set Him before us, pray to Him, fear Him, worship Him. It is, then, a great thing to say of any child, and it could only be said of a good and holy child, that he "waxes strong in *spirit.*" It means not that he becomes taller, nimbler, cleverer, but

See 1 Thess. v. 23.

that his conscience becomes more and more formed as he grows up, his will more steady in doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong, his prayers to God more earnest, his sense of God's Presence more keen, his dread of sin stronger. Alas! it is the very opposite with children in general. Their conscience, which was once tender, becomes hardened as they get to know more; they soon shake off any dread of sin and the fear of God; their will weakly yields to temptation, until it becomes easy and natural to yield.

S. Luke ii. 40.

And it is added, "He was filled with wisdom." The words imply that wisdom kept on flowing, like a running stream, into His human soul; there were, in His case, none of those thoughts of levity and folly, by which childhood is commonly marked.

"And the grace of God" (meaning both the favour of God, and the precious influence of His Holy Spirit) "was upon Him," or "upon *it*;" for the word here translated

"child" is a neuter word—a child, while it is rather a thing than a person—a very young child. When the sun shines out upon the dew-drops that cover the tender grass of spring in the early morning, how beautiful is each spangled bead of dew, glistening with all the colours of the rainbow! Such was the Childhood of the Holy Child! The dews of God's Spirit rested upon Him without measure. And the sunshine of God's favour beamed out upon Him, as "the Child of Children," in whom—and in whom alone of all children that had ever been born—God the Father was well pleased.

How early can a child love God, yearn towards God, hope in God, trust in God? I cannot say. Probably much earlier than we suppose. Do not the youngest infants stretch their tiny arms, and smile graciously when their mother comes into the room? They are not too young to show that they love and trust their parents; I do not know why it

should be impossible for them to love and trust their Heavenly Father, especially if He should give His grace to them "without measure," as was the case with our Lord. Perhaps you say, "It is impossible for a child in arms to understand or know anything about God." How can anyone be sure of that? People who cannot read and write, when their hearts are touched with the love of Christ, learn all about Religion wonderfully fast. Might it not be so with children? If their hearts can love an object, why should not their minds know something about it? But I go to the Bible, in preference to reasoning. It was foretold of John the Baptist, that he should be "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb;" and if this was the case with *him*, how much more must it have been the case with the Lord Jesus! And accordingly you read in the Psalms, surprising as it may seem, that Christ hoped and trusted in God from the very first dawn of life. For

See S. John iii. 34.

See S. Luke i. 15.

the twenty-second Psalm is spoken in the Person of our Lord—it applies to Him in every part; and there the Psalmist says; "Thou art he that took me out of my mother's womb: Thou wast my hope, when I hanged yet upon my mother's breasts. I have been left unto thee ever since I was born: Thou art my God, even from my mother's womb." What a lovely picture is this of a very young child yearning towards God, feeling perfectly happy and secure in the thought that God supports it, looks with favour upon it—a picture which was seen in the early Childhood of Jesus, and by the side of which it seems profane to place a foolish tale, the invention of man's fancy! My child, have you one single feeling of affection and trust towards your Heavenly Father, as He had? Do you even wish to have some such feeling? The wish is something, nay, it is much; let it lead you to pray for the feeling, and in due time the feeling will come. If your

See S. Luke xi. 13.

earthly parents would deny you nothing that is good for you, which they had it in their power to give, "how *much more* shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

CHAPTER V.

Of the Education received by Our Blessed Lord.

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently (*whet* or *sharpen them—Heb.*) *unto thy children.*—DEUT. vi. 6, 7.

THERE are two sorts of education. A child may be brought up at home among his brothers and sisters. Or he may be sent to school by his parents, to be taught by a master with other boys. The Jews at the time of our Saviour had boys' schools in most of their cities; in Jerusalem we are told there were as many as three hundred and ninety-four schools, in connection with the various synagogues. The teachers were called Rabbis.

They taught the children the Law of God, but too often did not teach it simply enough, and overlaid it with a number of precepts and traditions, which took away from its force. When a youth had attained a certain proficiency, the Rabbis laid hands on him, and admitted him to what we should call in our universities a degree. The Rabbis sat on a high bench in the school; the more advanced scholars, who had taken their degree, sat on a lower form; but the pupils sat on the ground at the feet of the teachers. This explains to us what S. Paul says about himself in Acts xxii.; "I am a man which am a Jew . . . . brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel." Gamaliel was a famous schoolmaster or Rabbi; and S. Paul, when young, had been his pupil, and in that character had sat on the ground under Gamaliel's chair, listening to the Rabbi's expositions of the Law of Moses. One other particular about their schools may interest you. Their scholars, like all scholars,

Acts xxii. 3.

were of different capacities; and they used to divide them into four classes. Some, they said, were in the condition of a sponge; they sucked in every thing they heard—good, bad, grave, foolish. Others were in the condition of a wine-strainer, which lets out the wine, and keeps only the lees; they remembered all the foolish things they heard, and dropped all the wise ones. Others resembled the hour glass; they let out at one ear all that they took in at another. Finally, there were some few who were like the sieve, which lets out the chaff, and keeps in the wheat; they dropped all the foolish things they heard, and remembered all the wise ones. Happy Rabbi, who had several of this last kind in his school!

Our Blessed Lord did not go to any of these schools, and so never learned the lore which was taught at them. And because this was the case, the Jews were much surprised, when they heard Him teaching other people

so beautifully, and saying so many wise things in the Temple about God and God's Law. "The Jews marvelled," S. John tells us, "saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" But, although our Lord was not educated at a school under a Rabbi, as S. Paul was, we may be quite sure that He received such a home education as His mother and supposed father were able to give Him. First; because it was part of His mysterious and gracious condescension to humble Himself to the condition of a child in every respect. And one necessary part of the condition of a child is that its parents teach it, give it its earliest notions of God, Heaven, Hell, right, wrong; make it learn words of prayer, and say them over every night and morning at its mother's knee. And our Lord, in stooping to become a child, stooped no doubt to receive lessons of this sort. Secondly; we feel sure our Lord was educated thus, because His parents were good and holy people, and would not have

S. John vii. 15.

failed in any part of their duty to Him. The indispensable duties which every Jewish father was bound to do for his son were, to circumcise him, to redeem him, to instruct him in the Law, and to teach him a trade. Now we know that our Lord was circumcised (although He did not need that sacrament) when He was eight days old.—No doubt, also, as by the Law of Moses all first-born sons were to be looked upon as the Lord's property, and redeemed or bought back again from God by their parents, when they were a month old, this was done for our Lord; and the five shekels of the Sanctuary, which were the redemption-money, were duly paid for Him.—Then we may be sure also that S. Joseph, His supposed father, taught Him a trade; for every Jewish boy, however highly born, was wisely taught a trade, in order that he might have the means of supporting himself when he grew up. Thus we find that S. Paul had learned a trade in his youth, by which he

supported himself when he became an apostle. There were many goats in the province of Cilicia, where S. Paul was born; and the skins of these animals were used, as canvas is with us, to make tents with. St. Paul had learned to make these goats'-hair tents; and when he was at Corinth, in the year A.D. 54, he joined Aquila and Priscilla in this sort of work. Now our Blessed Lord is called in S. Mark's Gospel "the carpenter." "Is not this," said the Jews in the synagogue of Capernaum, "the carpenter, the son of Mary?" There can be little doubt, then, that S. Joseph taught our Lord his own trade, which was that of a carpenter; and that our Lord worked at it till He was thirty years old, when His ministry began. Justin (a writer of the second century, who suffered martyrdom for Christ) tells us that our Lord made ploughs and yokes for oxen. This circumstance had been handed down to Justin, and, as it is so early a tradition, and agrees so well with

S. Mark vi. 3.

what we read in the Gospels about our Lord being a carpenter, we may well believe it.—But if S. Joseph would teach our Lord a trade, much more, we may be sure, would he teach Him the Law of God. Timothy, S. Paul tells us, had known the Holy Scriptures from a child; and in another passage he explains to us how this came to pass, because Timothy had a good mother and a good grandmother, who, as far back as he could remember anything, had instilled the knowledge of the Old Testament into his mind. Would not the blessed Virgin and S. Joseph be sure to do the same for our Lord?—But of course our Lord had a far better and higher teaching than what His human parents gave Him. He Himself says, explaining how He came to be so very wise, and to teach such beautiful truths:—"My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me." And S. John the Baptist said of Him, "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the

See 2 Tim. iii. 15.

2 Tim. i. 5, and iii. 14.

S. John vii. 16.

S. John iii. 34.

Spirit by measure unto him." To all of us sinful creatures God gives the Spirit "by measure," to one person a larger, to another a lesser supply. But our Lord's human soul received the Spirit without any stint; God, in bestowing it, was limited by nothing but the capacity of the soul itself And this, we may be sure, was as much the case in our Lord's childhood as when He was grown up to man's estate. He even then received as much of the Holy Spirit as a child's soul could hold, and was taught many beautiful and wonderful things by His Heavenly Father, long before He reached the age of twelve.

Learn from what has been said to set a right value upon a humble religious education, which teaches a child little or nothing but the knowledge of his Bible and Prayer Book, and the way to earn his bread. Such an education is looked down upon in these days, when everybody in all classes is trying to rise above that state of life, to which it has pleased God

to call him, and seeks much greater things for himself than merely to gain an honest livelihood, and serve God faithfully in his calling. But such was the only education the Saviour of the world received. Such an education, if the grace of God's good Spirit accompany it, is enough to make us holy here and happy hereafter, and to train the soul (could it have a higher training?) for "the inheritance of the saints in light."

See Col. i. 12.

CHAPTER VI.

Of the silence and secresy with which the most important things are done.

When he was twelve years old.—S. LUKE ii. 42.

YOU have perhaps seen a beautiful rose, soon after it has unfolded its blossom. You looked at it yesterday, as you passed it in the garden, or watered it in the window, and it was only a rosebud, a little knot of fragrant petals, wrapped up together and clinging to one another. You visit it to-day, and you find that during the night a change has taken place. The knot has untied itself, the petals have separated from one another, and now form not a knot, but a little cup, in which are some drops of the morning dew, a cup more delicately tinted than the finest porcelain, and

breathing forth delicious odours. The rose has just opened its breast to the sun. But how long a time it has taken to bring about this result! First, there was the planting the root, which lay under the soil all the winter, and showed no sign of life. But though it showed no *sign* of life, it was not dead. Nursed for a time by the warmth and moisture of the earth, it was bursting underground; and in the spring it pushed up a little green sprout, which very gradually became a stem, and the stem grew taller every day, and at length a bud formed as the crown of it. And the bud swelled and swelled day by day, and at length one morning you found it with its breast open as I have described. And all this was done quite secretly, without any noise to call attention to it. Now, in the Song of Solomon, our Lord, speaking of Himself by the mouth of the prophet, calls Himself the "rose of Sharon." And in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah it is foretold of Christ, "He shall grow

Song. ii. 1.

Isai. liii. 2.

up before him" (that is, before God) "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." And this opening of the rose is something like the opening of our Blessed Lord's human soul, when He reached the age of twelve. Up to that period the Gospel history is quite silent as to anything thought, or said, or done by Him. No doubt much was going on in His human mind; no doubt He had many thoughts and feelings, all of them holy, pure, and beautiful, the exact model of what a child's thoughts and feelings ought to be; but God has screened them from us, and not been pleased to tell us what they were. At twelve years old, however, the bud unfolds itself; our Blessed Lord becomes fully conscious who He is; and we hear Him speaking and calling God His Father, and are allowed a glimpse into His mind and thoughts. And what beautiful fragrant thoughts they are!

"When he was twelve years old." Why, when He was *twelve?* We might have ex-

pected rather, "when he was thirteen." For not until a child had completed his thirteenth year did the Jews consider him fully responsible for keeping the Law of Moses, and call him a "son of the commandment." Very possibly our Lord, having shown extraordinary signs of piety and depth of character, was thought by His parents fit to accompany them on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem a year before the usual time; just as in ordinary cases a child who showed great intelligence and devotion might be thought fit for Confirmation at an earlier age than his schoolfellows. Very possibly, also, the Holy Child may have felt drawn to the house of His Heavenly Father by an attraction quite peculiar to Himself as the Son of God, and may have petitioned His earthly parents to take Him thither.—We may observe also that "twelve" is a sacred number, which, perhaps, has in it (like seven) a notion of fulness or completeness. There were twelve tribes of Israel; twelve stones in the high

priest's breastplate; twelve loaves on the table of shewbread; and afterwards twelve Apostles. Perhaps the reason why twelve is in the Bible considered a complete number is, that it is made up of three multiplied into four; three stands for God, because there are three Persons in the Holy Trinity; and four stands for the world, because there are four corners of the earth. And God and His world comprise everything that exist. (So the number seven, which is also a complete number, is made up of three *added to* four.)

We have spoken of our Saviour's growing up to the age of twelve in perfect silence, without making any noise in the world; nay, we may well believe, shunning observation. It is a very wonderful thought; for I need not say that what was going on in that quiet home at Nazareth was, beyond all comparison, the most important thing going on in the world at that time. No doubt Angels were looking down upon this extraordinary

Child, and guarding Him, and watching His career with intense interest. The world's Salvation was being reared in that carpenter's shop,—He without whom not a ray of light or hope could have broken forth upon our fallen race. And yet the world went its way as usual, and talked a great deal and thought a great deal about its wars, and its politics, and its business; but gave no heed at all to that Divine Treasure which was under Joseph's roof at Nazareth. What was the great world doing when Jesus was twelve years old? By the great world, I do not mean the Jews; they were the people of a province of the Roman Empire, distant from the seat of government, and quite looked down upon. What were the people of the metropolis doing and thinking about when the Lord was twelve years old? I will tell you one thing which occupied their thoughts; they were thinking about a triumph. Tiberius, the adopted son of the Emperor Augustus, had won great victories over the

Germans and the Dalmatians; so he was to have the honour of a triumph; that is, he was to be brought into the city of Rome in a chariot drawn by four white horses, preceded by the captives and the spoils which he had taken in the wars, and followed by his troops in full armour, and with all their standards displayed. He was magnificently dressed for the occasion in a flowered inner vest, and a flowing robe thrown over it, embroidered with gold; and he carried in his hand a bough, and on his head a wreath of laurel. The whole population of the city turned out in holiday attire to see the show, and crowded the steps of public buildings, or stood on scaffolds erected for the purpose, that they might catch a sight of the conquering hero, and throw nosegays towards him, and shout their greetings. And so he passed on, with music and songs of praise, to the Capitol, to offer sacrifice in the temple of Jupiter. This was one thing which was going on at Rome in the year of our Lord 12; and

a very poor, and mean, and even contemptible affair it was, compared with what was going on far away in the holy home of Nazareth.

Do not estimate the importance of events, then, by the noise they make in the world. The events which startle us most are not always those of greatest consequence. Men often stare and gaze at that which is the least worthy of attention. What is it, think you, which interests the holy Angels most? a great battle? a great triumph? the fall of a great city or of a great empire? Rather it is the growth and progress of God's kingdom in the hearts of single persons—the battle against sin which this man is fighting in Christ's strength, the triumph over sin which that man is winning by Christ's grace; in a word, the inner life of men, the life of the immortal spirit—not that life which is acted in history, and related by historians. And the better and holier we become, the more shall we be interested in what interests God and holy Angels.

CHAPTER VII.

The Pilgrimage of the Holy Family to the Holy City.

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.—S. LUKE ii. 42.

IN most countries of Europe persons can at the present day travel with perfect safety alone. But it was not so in the Holy Land at the time when our Lord's earthly parents went up every year to keep the feast of the Passover at Jerusalem. In those days and lands it was not safe to travel alone. First, there were deserts, which had no roads running through them, and no way-posts, so that people who were not well acquainted with the country might easily lose the way. Then,

again, the country was not cleared of wild beasts; lions and hyænas prowled about at night. And then there were banditti or robbers (some of them outlawed Jews, others belonging to marauding tribes of Arabs), who were always on the watch for peaceful and honest travellers, and lived by the plunder which they took from them. Two such robbers, you remember, were crucified at our Blessed Lord's side; and Barabbas, who was released by Pilate at the request of the Jews, in preference to our Lord, was another, who had not hesitated to murder as well as to rob. Accordingly, people in those times and countries travelled for the most part in company, especially when they had a common object in their journey, like that of attending the Passover. All those who lived in the same district would start together, some on foot, with a staff in their hand and a scrip over their shoulder containing provisions; some upon asses, which carried some of their furniture, as well as

themselves; while the richer folks, perhaps, rode upon camels. They would journey together during the day, and at night pitch their tents and light their watchfires in the same spot, and form a little camp, to be a mutual defence to one another against the wild beasts and the robbers.

In the spring which followed our Lord's twelfth birthday, S. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary joined a large party of their relations, friends, and neighbours, who were going, like themselves, to the Passover, and took the Divine Child (perhaps at His own request) with them. Nazareth was a very secluded town, situated in a green grassy basin, decked with gay flowers and trees, and quite shut in by hills, which, on the outside, are steep and chalky. From one of these steep chalky hills, some eighteen years afterwards, the people of Nazareth proposed to throw our Lord down headlong. On the present occasion, the travelling party climbed up

the inner green slope of one of the hills, and casting a glance round them when they reached the crest of it at the snowy summit of Hermon in the far north, at the dome-shaped Tabor on the north-east, and at Carmel running out into the blue sea on the west, dropped below the summit, and quickly lost sight of their home.

The straight way from Galilee to Judæa lay through Samaria. But you will remember what a bitter feeling existed between the Samaritans and the Jews in our Lord's time, and how, when He was going up to the feast in this direct way, the people of one Samaritan village would not receive Him, "because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem." Bands of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem to keep the feast were not unfrequently molested and attacked by the Samaritans, with the view of driving them back. So it was usual for the Galilæans who came to the feast to avoid the direct road and make a circuit, crossing the

See S. Luke ix. 53.

Jordan and travelling along its eastern bank till they came opposite to Jerusalem, and then crossing the river again, and so approaching the Holy City from the east side. Jerusalem, it is said, and the whole of Palestine, is seen to the very best advantage from the line of hills on the east. But the country seems to have been less civilised, and the route more difficult, than that on the west. Travellers would have to cross both the Jabbok and the Arnon streams, which fall into the Jordan from the east.

On these journeys, it seems, the Jews made use of the Psalms to encourage and comfort them, and to quicken their feelings of devotion. The fifteen Psalms which come immediately after the one hundred and nineteenth are called Songs of degrees, or songs of "the going up," probably because they were used at the different halting-places of the journey, when the pilgrims were going up to Jerusalem. Some of them lived on the borders of heathen

countries, where Arab tribes would molest them. These would sing with great appropriateness, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Then, as the hills which rise around Jerusalem came in sight, they would exclaim, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Imagine how the holy heart of the Child Jesus went along with the strain, when He heard them singing, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord" (why this was just what He and His parents were doing), "unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." The party have a narrow escape from robbers or the Arab tribes; and then they sing, "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken,

Psalm cxx. 5.

Psalm cxxi. 1.

Psalm cxxii. 1—5.

Psalm cxxiv. 7.

and we are escaped." When they come *quite* near the city, those beautiful words are on their lips, "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." Man's heart may well find rest in the Holy City, seeing that God does so. And last of all comes the expression of thankfulness for the company of kinsfolks and friends in which they have travelled—people who had the same devout hopes and purposes, and had run the same risks with themselves—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" While common sinful children would soon weary of all this singing of Psalms, and be thinking and questioning about the new objects which met their eye in the journey, we may be sure that our Lord's human heart would make an echo to everything that was sung, and take great delight in it.

Psalm cxxxii. 13, 14.

Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

If true Christians, we are all of us bound

upon a pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem, to that house of our heavenly Father in which are many mansions. Our way lies through a dangerous country, in which there are many broad paths leading to destruction, and only one strait and narrow path leading unto life. Our "adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," and his angels are like those banditti we have been speaking of, who of old robbed and spoiled the travellers to Jerusalem. But notwithstanding all the dangers of the road, even a child may reach the end of it in safety if he will but be guided by the Word and Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who Himself, as a child, went up to Jerusalem, with strong desire to look upon the city of God's solemnities. How may you know whether you are really going towards the heavenly Jerusalem? You may know it partly by the pleasure you take in the services of God's Church on earth. The praises and thanksgivings which are offered here are a sort

See S. John xiv. 2.

1 Peter v. 8.

of echo of the adoration which the holy Angels are constantly offering in heaven. Then what are the real feelings of your heart towards these services? Are you drawn to them? Do you take pleasure in them? Would you attend them of your own accord, even if you were not obliged to do so? Or are they irksome and tedious to you, so that you are glad of any excuse to stay away from them? Ask yourself these questions honestly, and you will be able to see whether or not you have anything of your Saviour's mind and disposition. And remember that "if any man" (or child) "have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

Rom. viii. 9.

CHAPTER VIII.

On day-dreams and castle-building in youth.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned.—LUKE ii. 43.

"AND when they had *fulfilled* the days," S. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin did not only attend the Passover, which was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month at even, but stayed in Jerusalem also all the days of the feast of unleavened bread; and thus did not leave the city to return home till the afternoon of the eighth day after their arrival. They were not in duty bound to stay so long; they might have gone back sooner without doing anything wrong, provided that, for all the days of the feast which followed

the Passover, they had been careful not to eat any leavened bread at their own home. But devout people, as they were, do not consider how little of their time they can give to God without doing wrong, but give Him as much as ever they can, and delight in worshipping Him. Think of this, when you are tempted to shorten your prayers, or to drop for the day your reading of Holy Scripture, or to feel the hours of Sunday a restraint and a weariness, and to long that they would fly faster. Prayer, and Scripture, and Sunday are only dull because your heart is not in them, because you do not try to throw your mind into them, and so to create for yourself an interest in them. If your heart *were* in them, be sure you would find them the purest of all pleasures, and wish you had a longer time to give to them, not a shorter.

But it will be interesting to know how S. Joseph and S. Mary spent the days which they are here said to have "fulfilled," especially

when we remember that they had the Holy Child with them, whose human mind, we may be sure, would drink in eagerly everything which He saw in the Temple worship. Where then, in the first place, did they live during these days? Some of the country people who came up to keep the Passover were accommodated in private houses. This was the case with our Lord and His disciples, who ate together His last Passover in a private house, to which He directed them by the token of a man carrying a pitcher of water, who should enter into it. It was usual in these cases for the guests to leave behind them, as a kind of payment for their accommodation, the skin of the lamb, and the utensils employed in cooking it. But very often such accommodation was not to be found; every inn and private house in Jerusalem was quite full; and in this case people from the country were obliged to lodge without the walls in a tent which they brought with them. Perhaps S. Joseph and S. Mary

See S. Luke xxii. 10, 11, 12.

may have been all the more ready to do this, because, having the Holy Child with them, whose life had already been sought by those in power, they may have thought it prudent not to be seen in the city more than was absolutely necessary. S. Joseph would have to go to the Temple on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Abib to kill his Passover lamb, and probably he would take our Lord with him. The Holy Child watched the slaughter of the lamb, as the blood gushed forth from the wound into the golden cup held by one of the priests to receive it, and was then splashed out in one jet at the foot of the altar of burnt offering. Then they returned to their tent, carrying the carcase of the lamb with them, and prepared the supper, of which, probably, as their household must have been too small for the lamb, and as ten people at least were required to make a Passover company, some of S. Joseph's family or neighbours partook with them. The first thing would be to roast

See S. Matt. ii. 22.

See Exodus xii. 9.

the lamb, which was usually done by running two skewers of pomegranate wood, one lengthwise through the body of the creature, and another crossing it through the breast and fore-legs, so that the lamb had the appearance of being crucified, and then placing it carefully in the midst of an oven, the bricks of which were made red hot, but not allowing it to touch the sides. Then they would spread the table, and place on the sideboard, ready at hand, a plate of unleavened bread (large thin biscuits), another of bitter herbs, such as endive or wild lettuce, and a vessel containing a thick sauce, made of the consistency of clay, to remind them of the brick-making in Egypt, into which sauce everything eaten at the supper was to be dipped. Last would come the partaking of the supper. S. Joseph, as head of the family, would take a cup of red wine in his hand, and, after saying a grace, taste it and pass it round. Then the herbs were placed on the table and partaken of;

See Exodus xii. 8.

then the unleavened bread ; and, that being done, the roasted lamb was brought in and placed before the head of the family. But before it was eaten, a second cup of wine was filled ; and then it was customary for some child (perhaps in this case it may have been our Lord Himself) to ask the head of the house, "What meaneth this service?" In reply, the reason of keeping the Passover, as commemorating the Lord's passing over the houses of their fathers in Egypt, was recited, and the meaning also of the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread, the one putting them in mind of the bitter bondage in Egypt, the other of the haste in which they were thrust out of it. After which the one hundred and thirteenth and one hundred and fourteenth Psalms were sung, the latter of which begins, "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language." Then the lamb was carved and eaten ; a third and a fourth cup of wine succeeded ; and then

all was concluded by singing the one hundred and fifteenth, and three following Psalms, in the last of which occur those famous words, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." All this took place on the fourteenth of Abib. On the fifteenth were offered certain extra sacrifices, which were voluntary, and according to what each man could afford. On the purchase of these some of the money was spent, which all were obliged to bring up to the feast; for it was a rule that none should appear before the Lord empty. The remaining days of unleavened bread were not marked by anything very special.

Psalm cxviii. 22.

See Exodus xxiii. 15; xxxiv. 20; and Deut. xvi. 16, 17.

Was it taught to the Child Jesus by the Holy Spirit that all these sacred rites had a wonderful connexion with Himself—that He should be the true Paschal Lamb without blemish, as having no sin; and that as, at the first Passover, the lamb was slain, and its blood shed, in order that the destroying angel

See 1 Cor. v. 7.

See Exodus xii. 21—24.

See Ephesians v. 2; 1 Cor. v. 7; and Isaiah liii. 4, 5.

See S. Matt. xxi. 42; Psalm cxviii. 22.

might pass over the houses of the Israelites, so He must offer Himself a sacrifice to His Father, and shed His blood to turn away God's anger from guilty sinners; also that He should be the stone which the builders should reject, but which should become the head of the corner—the foundation stone of the Universal Church?

Such prospects as these may have been suggested to His mind—thoughts of great grandeur and royalty to be reached hereafter, but only to be reached through a life of hardship and suffering, and a death of the most cruel pain. And we can well conceive that, even as a child, He embraced the hardship, and suffering, and pain, out of love, as being His Father's will and appointment for the salvation of a fallen world.

Now, I suppose all young people—at least all who are intelligent and imaginative—indulge sometimes in what is called castle-building, that is, conjure up the fancy that in

after-life they will become great, rich, or distinguished—that they will make themselves a name, and get others to admire and look up to them. And some boys and girls dream away a great deal of time in this manner, when they might be working and improving their minds. When you are next tempted to do so, put aside the temptation thus. Remember that your God and Saviour, when a child, may possibly have looked forward to His own glory, and to God's giving Him a name above every name that is named. But then He looked forward also to the steep, difficult, trying steps by which alone He could mount up to this height of glory. He looked forward to the cross as the only means of gaining the crown. And the same obligation under which He was laid is laid also upon His humblest followers. It is impossible, I do not say to win mere worldly renown (that garland may be won by very bad men, and will wither away as soon as they are laid in their coffins), but

See Phil. ii. 9.

to be really great—great in the sight of God and holy Angels—nay, it is impossible to be very widely useful, and to exercise a large influence for good, without hard work, much self-denial, many trials, and great discipline of character. Do not shrink from these trials; our Saviour did not. Do not think of a Paradise without toil and endurance; it is the vainest of all vain dreams. Say within yourself oftentimes, "No cross, no crown;" and thus think soberly of what lies before you. None but those who suffer with Christ shall be glorified together with Him.

See Romans viii. 17; Acts xiv. 22.

CHAPTER IX.

The attraction to the Temple.

As they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.—S. LUKE ii. 43.

EVERY child is a treasure to the heart of an affectionate parent; but the Holy Child Jesus must have been so sacred and precious a treasure to His mother and her husband that one wonders how they could ever have lost sight of Him. Perhaps it may have happened in this way: when they were about to return, they would doubtless give Him notice that they were going home, and would expect Him to follow. But in the hurry of packing and starting they would necessarily take their eyes off from Him for

some time, and then He would find His opportunity to withdraw to the Temple. It must be remembered that hundreds of other pilgrims would be on the move homeward at the same moment. All those who lived north of Jerusalem, forming an immense caravan, would start with Joseph and Mary, and go by the same road. This would create great confusion; and, amidst a general lading of mules and asses, and a general preparation for the day's journey, a single child might be easily missed. Moreover, we are told by some writers that it was the custom in these pilgrimages for all the men to travel in one company by themselves, and all the women in another, the boys travelling, as it might happen, either with their father or their mother. If this was the case, it is easy to understand how neither our Lord's mother nor her husband were made uneasy by missing Him. S. Joseph would say, "He is with His mother, no doubt;" and the Blessed Virgin would say,

"Doubtless Joseph is taking care of Him." Anyhow, their search for Him, and the words which He spake to them when they found Him, must have served to show them in a very impressive way who He was—even the only-begotten Son of God. But it may be asked, "Did they not know this already? Had not S. Mary been assured of it by the angel Gabriel at the time of the Annunciation? Had not S. Joseph also been assured of it by an angel, who appeared to him in a dream? Had they not both heard the great things, which Simeon and Anna had said about Him, when He was presented in the Temple as an infant?" They had; but since that time He had grown up, like ordinary children, wonderfully intelligent, we must believe, and most deeply devout, but doing no miracle and showing no outward sign of His greatness. And the many little common things which they had to do for Him, and His entire dependence upon them for support and parental

S. Luke i. 31, 32. S. Matt. i. 20, 21.

S. Luke ii. 25—39.

care, must have necessarily made them feel a certain familiarity and ease with Him. And perhaps it was to correct this, and to call to their remembrance once more who He really was, that the incident we are now reading about was allowed to happen.

But why did He stay behind in Jerusalem, when He must have known that they were going home? This is not a difficult question to answer. It is easy to understand that the Temple must have had a wonderful attraction for Him, so that He found it very difficult to tear Himself away from it. Our Lord, having now ceased to be an infant, and become a child, was fully conscious who He was. He was now able to look back to His former state of existence, when He lay in His Father's bosom from all eternity, and was worshipped as a Person in the Blessed Trinity by the holy Angels. He shows us that He was constantly mindful of this period by the prayer which He utters in S. John: "And now, O Father,

S. John xvii. 5. S. John i. 18. Isaiah vi. 1, 2, 3, with S. John xii. 41.

glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." As His faculties opened, like blossoms to the sun, it would dawn upon His memory for the first time what He had been. Now therefore mark the effect upon Him, when He sees for the first time the services of the Temple. The Temple was a little figure or model of Heaven; the Temple music of the praises of God continually sung in Heaven; the Temple services of the pure and holy worship which the Angels continually offer in Heaven. S. Paul tells us that the Jewish priests served "unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." And our Lord Himself called Heaven His Father's house ("In my Father's house are many mansions"), and the Temple His Father's house

Hebrews viii. 5.

S. John xiv. 2.

S. John ii. 16.

See Hebrews ix. 24.

also ("Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise"), showing that there was a close connexion between the two, "the holy places made with hands" being "a figure of the true." When our Lord as a child saw the Temple services for the first time, they struck a chord in His memory, which vibrated sweetly and solemnly. The priests and Levites, offering their sacrifices and their incense, and singing their Psalms, reminded Him of the blessed Angels paying their homage to God and chanting His praises in Heaven. He had never seen the like upon earth before; and it is quite probable that, in a world of sin and sorrow, the Blessed Jesus (even as a child) felt out of place, and away from His true home. Can you not imagine a person who had passed his early childhood in a southern clime, where there were birds of rich plumage, lovely flowers, fair landscapes, and clusters of bright stars at night, being suddenly banished to the North Pole, where his eye rests upon

nothing but ice and snow, and all the beauties of Nature seem to be locked up by a perpetual winter? Suddenly a bunch of bright flowers, or a bird of beautiful plumage, is brought to him as a gift from the south. It reminds him of his native country, and brings back in a moment the flowers, birds, and landscapes of that happy land. Something of this sort may have been our Blessed Lord's memories, on seeing in early childhood the services of the Temple. He would feel that the Temple gave a true idea of His Father's house in Heaven—*was* His Father's house on earth. Now a Father's house is a home; and what dutiful child is there who does not love home; who is not drawn towards home, when away from it; who does not feel it to be a place of shelter, security, happiness, and peace, and cling to it accordingly?

All of us, young and old, may find out whether we have anything of the mind of Christ, by asking ourselves how we feel to-

wards our Churches, and to the holy services of prayer and praise which are carried on there? Do the Church services ever lead us to think of Heaven, and make us long for a higher and purer life than we are now leading? Do we love these services so much that we should come to them of our own accord without any forcing? Are we right-glad to get back to them when we have been for any time away? Do we feel towards the house of prayer as a home, where we may hold communion with our heavenly Father, through the merits and intercession of our Redeemer, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit —a home where we may be always happy, peaceful, secure? To feel thus is to feel as the Psalmist felt; "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" It is to feel as the Lord Himself felt, who in early boyhood could not be kept away from God's sanctuary, but stole back thither, as to His better home, where everything reminded Him of His Father.

Ps. lxxxiv. 1.

CHAPTER X.

The Sociability of the Holy Child.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.—S. LUKE ii. 44.

THE first stage at which caravans going northward from Jerusalem halt at the present day is called 'el-Bireh. The reason of the place being chosen for a halt is that there is a beautiful flowing spring there, which serves to give drink to man and beast. El-Bireh is supposed to be the Beeroth of Holy Scripture, one of the four towns which at first belonged to the Gibeonites, but were afterwards allotted by Joshua to the tribe of Benjamin. It was very probably here that

Joshua xviii. 21, 25.

the caravan with which S. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin travelled halted in going back; and there is a tradition which says so. Our Lord was not by their side; but He might well be in the caravan (or company) without their coming across Him. Pilgrimages in the East are always scenes of great confusion. "In a crowd of this motley description" (says one account of them), "not the slightest regard is paid to regularity or order, and every one takes the place or mingles with the group that pleases him. The separation of the nearest friends for a whole day must, in such circumstances, be a common and unavoidable occurrence; and yet anxiety is never felt, unless the missing one fail to appear at the appointed rendezvous of the family." Our Lord would know the spot where his parents had pitched their tent, and rested for the night, when they came up to Jerusalem eight days ago; and He was so thoughtful, so considerate, so careful to give them no uneasiness, that, though

they did not see Him anywhere among the large moving throng, they might be sure He would join them at the halting-place. His early intelligence and devotion had doubtless fascinated some of their neighbours at Nazareth. Friends, they thought, are keeping Him with them, and He is telling them the impressions which He has carried away from Jerusalem, and the Temple, and the Passover. But they have now pitched their tent, lit their little camp-fire (for it is getting dark), and prepared their evening meal; and yet the Holy Child comes not. They rise in some disquietude to make inquiries for him, and reproach themselves that they ever lost sight of Him. They remember that an attempt was made upon His life when He was an infant; and perhaps it might have come to the ears of the government that He had escaped from that plot, and they might have been on the watch for Him and seized Him. Made thoroughly uncomfortable by this thought,

they go to the tents of their friends and neighbours, anxiously asking, "Have you seen Him?" "Has He been with you?" but can find no trace of Him anywhere.

Here are the reflections upon this part of the narrative, made by good Dr. Joseph Hall, who was appointed Bishop of Norwich just two hundred and thirty years ago, died in the time of the Commonwealth, and lies buried in the chancel of Heigham Church, where you may see a monument to his memory. It is a very choice passage. "The parents of Christ knew Him well to be of a disposition not strange, nor sullen and stoical, but sweet and sociable; and therefore they supposed He had spent the time and the way, in company of their friends and neighbours. They do not suspect Him wandered into the solitary fields; but when evening came, they go to seek Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. If He had not wonted to converse formerly with them, He had not now been

sought amongst them. Neither as God nor man doth He take pleasure in a stern, froward austerity and wild retiredness, but in a mild affableness and amiable conversation."

Very beautiful, and no doubt perfectly true, is this description of one part of our Saviour's character in boyhood. His kinsman, S. John the Baptist, was reared in the desert until the day of his showing unto Israel, away from human dwellings and homes. He looked on the sweet face of Nature; he heard the raving of the wind, the rushing of the torrent, the murmur of the brook; but he was banished from man, and alone with God. But the Son of God was not to be a hermit or ascetic; He was nursed and reared in a home; sat night after night by the hearth of His parents, learning how to work at S. Joseph's trade; helped His mother, doubtless, in managing the house; went on messages when she sent Him; knew the neighbours, and talked with them, and wound Himself in some strange

See S. Luke i. 36, 80.

way into their confidence and affection; was, in short, as Bishop Hall says, "sweet and sociable." And you find Him in after-life mixing with all societies, invited to weddings, attending funerals, sitting down as a guest at people's tables, passing through crowded thoroughfares, walking across the fields. And yet you also find Him often by Himself, making seasons in which He could withdraw to pour out His soul before His Heavenly Father, and spending long nights in prayer. And we cannot doubt that He was like this when a child. We cannot doubt that, while He was most gracious, winning, and sociable, He was also deeply devout. What else drew Him to the Temple but His love for devotion, His thirst after God's presence, His feeling that, where prayer and praise were being offered, there He was at home?

Then there is a twofold lesson here for all the young.

I have known young people who do not

join in the games and sports natural to their age, who cannot be easily brought to mix with others, who are reserved and sullen, and when spoken to kindly, ungracious. And, again, there are others so universally liked, so cheerful and fond of company, that they cannot bear to be alone, and have no resources in themselves to fall back upon when they are forced to be quiet. They do not like reading; and thinking is insufferable; and because praying cannot be done without collecting the mind and thinking, they have no mind for *praying*, though *they say their prayers* with regularity. And thus they become frivolous, and nothing goes deep with them. Oh! set before you as your model the Holy Child Jesus. Be amiable, gracious, and open-hearted on the one hand. Let no foolish pride or secret disdain make you unwilling to mix with others of your own age, and share their interests. But do not live outside yourself all day long. Do not allow

yourselves to feel that a quiet evening at home without company or diversions hangs heavy. Get into the habit of amusing yourself with useful occupations. And, above all, ask God to teach you how really to pray. Ask Him for grace to feel perfectly happy, safe, and peaceful, when you are quite alone with Him. Ask Him for grace to obey His Son's precept, "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

S. Matt. vi. 6.

And remember that the door to be shut is not only the chamber-door, but that of the heart also, which must be resolutely closed upon all vain thoughts and worldly things before you can pray aright.

CHAPTER XI.

The anxious search, and the finding of the Holy Child.

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple.—LUKE ii. 45, 46.

WHERE did they find our Lord? *Not* "among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." Their "kinsfolk" were also His. Christ is not to be found among those who are related to Him by nature. Many of His nearest relations did not receive Him as Christ. S. John tells us that "neither did His brethren" (meaning probably His first cousins) "believe in him." It must have been a great honour to have been related to Christ by blood. The

See v. 44, 45.

S. John vii. 5.

Virgin Mary, who was His chief earthly relation, was called by the angel Gabriel, and ought to be called by us, "blessed among women." But He Himself has told us that we may stand to Him in a relation, which He esteems more than a relation of blood. When His mother and His brethren sent in to call Him away from the disciples, whom He was instructing, "He looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother"—"my brother, and my sister;" I feel towards him as to one reared in the same home, and having the same Heavenly Father as myself; "and mother;" I will honour that man as if he were a parent. This relationship to Christ is open to every one of us by simply listening to God's word, and then putting it in practice.

S. Luke i. 26, 28.

S. Mark iii. 34, 35.

Where did they find our Lord? In Jerusalem and in the Temple. You will not find

See S. Luke ii. 45, 46.

Christ in the world. The world is too busy with its own affairs, or its own amusements, to think of Him. Those pilgrims, who had come up to the feast in His company, and now were returning, were longing to get back to their homes again, and see whether everything was right there as they had left it. And it was with them as with Israel of old. "The angel of God" (our Lord, the messenger of God's covenant), "which went before the camp of Israel" (who had gone with the caravan, as it journeyed up), "removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud" (this pillar was the symbol of God's Presence, and Christ was Emmanuel, "God with us") "went from before their face, and stood behind them." *They* might turn their backs on Jerusalem; Christ could not. You shall find Him in the Church, which is the true Jerusalem, and in the house of prayer, which is the Christian Temple. For this is the trysting-place, where He has appointed to meet His people; and when He

Mal. iii. 1.

Exodus xiv. 19.

S. Matt. i. 23.

has made an appointment, He fails not to keep it. "Where two or three," says He, "are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He is in the midst of His assembled worshippers, although He cannot be seen, as really and truly as He was of old in the midst of the doctors in one of the chambers attached to the Temple. Are you seeking Him here, and looking for His presence, and putting your prayers into His hand, that He may offer them for you?

S. Matt. xviii. 20.

Perhaps our Lord's parents had been a little to blame in ever taking their eyes off Him. Perhaps they had been too eager and careful about their homeward journey, and not mindful enough of the Holy Child. It seems to me that His own words imply that there had been some little fault on their part; "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

See v. 49.

If so, they were *punished* by the dreadful anxiety which they must have felt in looking

for Him, and by the still more painful void which His absence would make in their family circle. When people are not careful to keep the Lord with them, He easily escapes. A little heedlessness, a little want of watchfulness, a little more eagerness and hurry about worldly things than there is any necessity for, —and the Divine Presence slips away. We may have really spoken to Him in our prayers or in church, and have been comforted by the thought that we have done so. And then we may dismiss altogether the thought of His presence, and make no effort to call it back. We may forget that His eye is upon us, and do and say things in a fit of temper and excitement which we could not do and say if we felt He was looking on. And then we shall be punished by having to search for Him with labour and dryness of spirit. We must try to *live* in His presence, to be always conscious of it, even when not directly thinking of Him. This is the great secret of per-

Genesis xvii. 1.

fection. "I am the Almighty God," said God to Abraham; "walk before me, and be thou perfect." Great peace and quietness of heart is to be found in always having our eye upon Christ.

But the parents of our Lord were *taught*, as well as punished, by losing Him for a time. I have said before that on this occasion Christ was manifested to His parents; their eyes were opened to see, more clearly than they had ever done before, who He was. He had hitherto been as entirely dependent upon their fostering care as any ordinary child. But now He shows that He has no actual need of their protection; He can dispense with it. We are not told how He procured food and shelter during the three days, which elapsed between their losing Him and finding Him again. By natural means possibly. But very possibly also by supernatural means. Angels may have come, as we know they did after the temptation, and ministered to Him

heavenly viands, and have led Him to a place of repose, and watched round Him as He slept. But, however it was, His parents must have learned this lesson, that, though so very young, and having had so little experience of human life, He could do without their care. Thus God taught them, while He punished them; and from all His punishments there are lessons to be learned, if we are only docile enough to learn them.

"After three days they found him." v. 46
It might be made a motto for the story of His resurrection. "Coming events cast their shadows before;" and this mourning for the loss of the Saviour, and finding Him again after three days, may perhaps have been a shadow of the mourning of His disciples for Him, when He was lost in the shades of death, and of the joyful finding of Him by S. Mary Magdalene and others on Easter morning. And their not finding Him until "after three days" may also teach that we

must persevere in our search for Him, when we have lost Him,—must not only ask, but seek, not only seek, but knock, until Heaven's gate is opened, and He appears once more to our longing eyes.

See S. Luke xi. 9.

CHAPTER XII.

Of the Doctors, or Jewish Scribes.

In the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors. —S. LUKE ii. 46.

IT was not in the more sacred parts of the Temple, not in the Holy Place, nor even in the court of the Altar of Burnt Offering, that our Lord was found. There were chambers in the precincts of the Temple, which were used sometimes for the meetings of the Sanhedrin (or council), sometimes as schools, where the doctors might teach. This last was a very proper arrangement; for the training of young persons in God's law is a work of piety most acceptable to God, and may be fitly carried on in the house of prayer. Perhaps our Lord, during the eight days of His

parents' stay at Jerusalem, may have been attracted by the schools in the Temple, and have liked to linger there and to hear what was going on. And so His parents may have thought of seeking Him in these schools, feeling that, if in Jerusalem at all, He was sure to be there. Let us observe that what drew Him to the Temple was not only the beautiful and solemn worship which went on in it, but the teaching which was given there. He loved not only prayer and praise, but learning also. Oh, that there were more children like Him! while there are some who like the Church service well enough, if it is conducted with stateliness and music, how very few are there who show a desire for religious instruction, who take great pleasure in their preparation for Confirmation, and listen to sermons eagerly, trying to get what good they can out of them.

"In the midst of the doctors." Another very common name for these doctors in the

New Testament is "Scribes." The Scribes were the religious teachers of the Jewish people. Boys were educated for the office of scribe, just as among ourselves they are educated to become clergymen. There was in every village a schoolmaster called "a teacher of babes," whose office it was to instruct the children in the law. At the age of thirteen the boy intended for a scribe was brought to Jerusalem, and applied for admission to the school of one of the Rabbis. He was examined upon entrance, and, if found to have sufficient knowledge of the law, admitted. He was then called a "chosen" or selected one—a college term among the Jews, which may have been in our Lord's thoughts when He said to His disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." When first admitted, he sat on the ground in the school, older pupils sitting on a form, and the headmaster, or Rabbi, on a high chair. One of the assistant-masters acted as a crier, and when

See Romans ii. 20.

S. John xv. 16.

anything dropped from the Rabbi in a low voice, it was his part to cry it out aloud; to which custom also our Lord may perhaps refer when He says, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops." When his education for the office of scribe was completed, the Rabbi admitted him to be a scribe. He laid his hands on his head, saying these words, "I admit thee, and thou art admitted, to the chair of the scribe," and giving him a tablet, or memorandum-book, to write down wise sayings in, and a key, representing the key of knowledge, with which he was to open the treasures of Divine wisdom. You remember how our Lord reproves the lawyers for making the delivery of this key to them an empty form, for never really unlocking to the people the treasures of Divine wisdom: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves,

S. Matt. x. 27.

S. Luke xi. 52.

and them that were entering in ye hindered." —You will be interested in hearing something about the doctors who lived in the time of Christ, and whom possibly He may have met on this occasion in the Temple. The most famous of them, and one who ought to be mentioned first, because our Lord condescended to take one of his maxims as a precept of the Christian Religion, was called Hillel. He was born more than a hundred years before our Lord, but lived to the age of one hundred and twenty, so that it is possible he may have been one of the doctors mentioned by S. Luke, though he must have been then in extreme old age. He showed in his youth a wonderful desire for learning. He came all the way from Babylonia to Jerusalem to attend the school of two learned proselytes, who had become Rabbis, Shemaiah and Abtalion. In those days a daily fee had to be paid for attending the lessons of Rabbis, and the fee was half as much as a

man could make in the day by his labour. Young Hillel worked hard when he was out of school, kept himself on half his wages, and gave the other half as a fee for his schooling. One day, however, he could not get work; and as on that day he appeared at school without a fee, the porter would not let him in. Resolved, however, not to be baffled in his pursuit of knowledge, the boy stood outside by the window of the school, to catch some of the words which fell from the scribes within. It was winter, and the snow fell in large white flakes, for hours together; but he still continued standing there till the snow covered him and reached above his head. Then the Rabbis, noticing something dark against the window, sent out to ascertain what it was. Hillel was brought in, and told his story, and was admitted to the lecture without a fee. He grew up to be a very great Rabbi, and in some of his maxims there is a good deal of the spirit of the Gospel. He was a kind man,

liberal and tolerant, and very different in character, as well as in the style of his teaching, from other scribes. A proselyte once came to him, imploring him for a little instruction in the Law, even if it should last only for such a time as the hearer could stand upon one leg. He had made the same petition to another scribe, and had met with a rude rebuff. Hillel gave him this precept; "Do nothing to thy neighbour which thou wouldest not that he should do to thee; and so thou shalt fulfil both the law and the prophets." You will remember that our Lord gives His disciples a precept very much the same as this in the Sermon on the Mount, only turning it into a positive form, and telling Christians how they *are* to behave to their neighbours, as Hillel had told the Jews how they were *not*. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

S. Matt. vii. 12.

I will mention one more saying of Hillel's, which it would be well indeed if all young people would attend to in the pursuit of knowledge: "Leave nothing dark and obscure, saying to thyself, 'I will explain it, when I have time;' for how knowest thou whether the time will come?"

How much the young might learn, if they had but a spirit of enquiry such as Hillel recommended, and set an example of! And let us remember that, whereas he had only Moses and the Prophets as his lesson-books in religion, we have also the Apostles and Evangelists of our Lord Jesus Christ, who record the sacred words of Him, who spake as never man spake, and of whom God the Father said at His transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son; hear him."

See S. John vii. 46.

S. Mark ix. 7.

CHAPTER XIII.

Rabban Gamaliel.

Sitting in the midst of the doctors.—S. LUKE ii. 46.

IN the last Chapter we mentioned some particulars about the Jewish scribes or doctors in the time of Christ, especially about one of them named Hillel, who, though he must have been then a very old man, might have been one of those in whose company our Lord was found. We will now speak about a younger doctor, who is mentioned in the New Testament, and who may well have been present on the remarkable occasion we are now considering—Gamaliel. Gamaliel was a grandson of the great Hillel, about whom we spoke last time. Hillel had a son, named Simeon (sup-

posed by some to have been the venerable and holy man, who took our Lord up in his arms when He was presented in the Temple), and Simeon was the father of Gamaliel.

S. Luke ii. 25, 28.

This Gamaliel, as we are told in Acts v., was "a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people." So great was his reputation, both for learning and character, that he was one of the seven doctors, to whom the Jews gave the honourable title of *Rabban.* To explain this title, I must tell you that the Hebrew word *Rab* is an adjective meaning *great;* and that about the period of our Lord's birth it came to be applied, as a mark of distinction to the teachers or doctors of the law, whom all the people looked up to with great respect. Then the simple adjective was lengthened out to express more than common respect. *Rabbi* was thought to be a higher title than *Rab;* and *Rabban* higher than *Rabbi.* This highest title, *Rabban,* S. Mary Magdalene gave to our Blessed Lord after

Acts v. 34.

His resurrection, when, on recognising Him in the garden, she called him *Rabboni*, to show her profound respect for Him. *Rabboni* is only another form of the word *Rabban*, just as Noe is another form of the name Noah, and Esaias another form of the name Isaiah. Now there were only seven of their doctors to whom the Jews gave the title Rabban, and Rabban Gamaliel was one of these seven. We are told two things about him in the Acts. One is that he was the tutor of S. Paul, who speaks of himself, in his defence, as having been brought up in Jerusalem "at the feet of Gamaliel." That is, S. Paul, when a young boy, sat on the ground in Gamaliel's school under the master's chair, and took notes of what the Rabbi said, and asked him questions when a difficulty occurred. Another thing is, that, when the Jewish council were debating how they should kill Peter, and John, and the other Apostles, and so suppress the bold testimony they were bearing to their

Acts xxii. 1, 3.

Acts v. 33, 34, 35, 40.

Master, Gamaliel made a speech, which had the effect of preventing them from going to such extremities. In this speech he does not say anything positively in favour of Christianity. He only advises the Jews to let the Apostles alone—to allow the new movement to work itself out without endeavouring to suppress it. His argument is this. "Either Christianity is of God, or it is not. If it is not of God, if it is a mere device of man, all experience shows that it will come to nothing in the end, though it may create a little momentary enthusiasm. In that case you *need not* suppress it; it will suppress itself. And if, on the other hand, it *is* of God, do what you may, you *cannot* suppress it—nay more—you *must* not; for by attempting any such thing you would be opposing God and drawing down His displeasure." The argument is not conclusive, because we certainly cannot gather from the mere fact of a religion having succeeded to a great extent and prevailed

Acts v. 38.

See Acts v. 35—40.

very widely, that it is divine. (At this rate Mahometanism might claim to be of God.) But it shows Gamaliel to have been a man of worldly wisdom, cool judgment, and self-control, not liable to be carried away by impulse or the excitement of the moment. More we cannot say in his favour, especially when we consider that he was a *Pharisee*, and that the party by whom the Apostles had been seized and put in prison are expressly said to have been the *sect of the Sadducees*. That sect was grieved because Peter and John had "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead," the very doctrine which the Sadducees denied. So that it is quite possible that Gamaliel, in his candid and sensible speech, was more or less influenced by the desire of supporting the doctrine of the Resurrection, which was insisted on by his own party, and had not any real care for Christianity, except so far as it taught that doctrine. At all events, even if this speech is supposed

Acts v. 34.

Acts v. 17, 18.

Acts iv. 1, 2.

S. Matt. xxii. 23.

to be in his favour, it does not look well for him that S. Paul was his pupil. For young people are very apt to take their tone from their tutors, especially if those tutors are men of any weight of character, and we know that S. Paul, before his conversion, was the bitterest enemy and the cruellest persecutor that the Christians had. And a prayer against the Christians, which Gamaliel either drew up or sanctioned the use of, seems to show that he was by no means free from that bitterness against them which his pupil exhibited. It begins thus: "Let there be no hope to them that apostatise from the true religion; and let heretics, how many soever they be, all perish as in a moment." This exactly represents the spirit of Saul of Tarsus, when, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," he "went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men

Acts ix. 1, 2.

or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." That Gamaliel was held in high esteem among his pupils may be gathered from the fact, that at his death one of them raised to him a funeral-pile of such costliness and magnificence as never had been raised before in the memory of man, except for a king. This great master of Israel was buried with royal honours.

Imagine the Divine Child standing in all the beautiful artlessness of spotless innocence, in all the quick intelligence of a mind to which the Holy Spirit was given without measure, before such an one as this great, dignified, worldly-wise, wary, bigoted Rabban. With all Gamaliel's experience, and prudence, and knowledge, and sage maxims, how much more wisdom, insight, penetration, had the Holy Child than he! With reason might that Child say of Himself, in the fullest sense which the words will bear, "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for *thy*

Ps. cxix. 99, 100.

testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because *I keep thy precepts.*"

But there is a lower sense in which these words may apply to ordinary children. Worldly wisdom, gained, as Gamaliel's was, by the experience of life and by knowledge and observation of human character, is in its way a valuable thing, and not to be looked down upon. But it cannot give us that insight into the meaning of God's Word, which is the highest of all kinds of wisdom. A very young child may get this highest kind of wisdom by studying God's testimonies, with earnest prayer for the light of the Holy Spirit. And not by studying only. He must not read his Bible only, but act it also. There is nothing which more brightens and sharpens our understanding of Divine things than the turning of knowledge into practice. Let the young keep the commandments as well as study them, and they

shall become wiser than the aged who keep them not—wise with the wisdom which is thus described;

"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

S. James iii. 17.

CHAPTER XIV.

Rabbi Nicodemus.

Sitting in the midst of the doctors.—S. LUKE ii. 46.

I HAVE spoken in former Chapters about the Jewish doctors generally, and about two of them in particular, Hillel and Gamaliel. I am now going to speak about another of them, Nicodemus. He, like the former two, may very likely have been present, when our Lord at the age of twelve astonished the masters of Israel by His understanding and answers. And several things are told us about him by the Evangelist S. John, which are very instructive.

S. John iii. 1, 2. The first thing we read about him is, that he came to our Lord by night, and had a very

important conversation with Him. His faith and his courage were both weak at that time. The miracles which our Lord did had led Nicodemus to believe that He was a teacher come from God; but more than this he did not believe. He did not acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of God, nor even to be the Son of David, the Messiah or Christ whom the people expected; and thus his faith was weak. His courage, too, was weak; for he was afraid of avowing boldly even the little he believed. He came to Jesus under cover of the dark, fearing, if he came by day, that the other doctors, who took a strong part against our Lord, might hear of his coming and laugh at him, or perhaps act spitefully to him, and turn him out of their body. And our Lord seems to have given him a hint that he must be braver, and not disguise the good impressions which had been made upon his mind. For He speaks to him about "doing the truth" (that is, acting sincerely), and "coming

S. John iii. 2.

S. John iii. 2.

S. John iii. 20, 21.

S. John iii. 5.

to the light," and also about being "born of water and of the Spirit," which means being baptized. As much as to say: "If you wish to be taught by me the truths which God has sent me to teach, you must first join my Church, and let it be known, by being baptized in my Name, that you belong to the kingdom which I am setting up on earth."

We next hear of Nicodemus in the seventh chapter of S. John's Gospel, when he seems to have grown a little braver. The rulers of the Jews, of which he was one, alarmed by the spread of our Lord's influence among the people, had tried to stop His preaching by sending constables to take Him. The constables, however, came back to those who sent them, with the confession that they found their hands tied by the wonderful words which our Lord had spoken in their hearing. At this the rulers grew very angry, and no doubt meditated taking some stronger step against our Lord. But here Nicodemus said

S. John vii. 32.

S. John vii. 45, 46.

vv. 47, 48, 49.

v. 50.

a word, which, as his colleagues were very angry and (like most angry people) very unreasonable, it must have required some courage to say. He did not indeed profess openly that he himself believed in Jesus, which would have brought down on his head a storm of contempt and persecution; but he pleaded that our Lord ought to have a hearing—should not be condemned without an opportunity of explaining Himself and speaking in His own defence. "Doth our law judge any man," said he, "before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" S. John vii. 51.

They sneered at this, and asked him whether he too was a Galilæan—came from that despised district where the new Prophet had sprung up; but, notwithstanding their sneer, they broke up on that occasion without doing anything further against our Lord, which seems to show that Nicodemus, by merely putting in a word for fair dealing, had stopped their malice for a little time. v. 52. v. 53.

S. John xix. 38, 39.

The last occasion on which Nicodemus appears in Holy Scripture is the burial of our Lord, in which most solemn and devout action he assisted Joseph of Arimathæa, and "brought" with him "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight;" partly for the purpose of embalming the body by putting these spices in the linen wrapper which was swathed round it; partly also, perhaps, to make a fragrant burning in honour of the dead, as the Jews used to do in the case of their kings and great men. Now this action showed Nicodemus to have grown considerably both in faith and courage. In faith; because he could believe in our Lord, notwithstanding that He had just died a very painful and disgraceful death, a death which had shocked even His own disciples, and had led them to forsake Him. In courage; because, by paying funeral honours to Christ, Nicodemus confessed Him before men, and owned himself bravely to be a believer, which

he had hesitated to do on the two former occasions. No doubt he was much encouraged in this course by Joseph of Arimathæa's taking part with him. He, too, had hitherto been a disciple "secretly, for fear of the Jews." But now, when many people thought and hoped that the cause of Jesus was at an end, and that after His death no more would be heard of Him, these two timid souls came boldly forward, and acknowledged their faith. We hear no more of Nicodemus in the Bible; but tradition tells us about him that, after our Lord's resurrection, he was baptized by S. Peter and S. John; and that, in consequence, the Jews deprived him of his office, beat him cruelly, and drove him away from Jerusalem. It is also recorded of a Nicodemus of that day, though it possibly may not have been the same person, that his family was reduced from great wealth to the most abject poverty. Nicodemus, it seems, though timid at first, yet at last inherited the

S. John xix. 38.

blessing of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

The story is full of instruction for all, but especially for the young. Boys at school, for example, often shrink from owning their convictions on religious subjects; they are afraid of ridicule and petty persecution. Others will see them reading their Bibles, or saying their prayers; and, as they cannot do these things quite privately, they are tempted either not to do them at all, or to slur and hurry them over, and do them as slightly and rapidly as possible. Now, those young people who feel temptations of this kind ought to learn three things from the story of Nicodemus.

First, *a lesson of consolation.* Our Lord does not reject timid people who come to Him. He did not reject Nicodemus, but, on the contrary, talked to him graciously about the crucifixion, and the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Sacrament of Baptism,

S. John iii. 14.
S. John iii. 5, 6, 8.

and such-like important truths. If you feel timid, come to Him, and ask Him to make you brave, and to give you grace to act up to your convictions. Then He will lead you on step by step, and you will come to fear Him more, and men less. But everything depends on your sincerely coming to Him. If Nicodemus had not come to Him, he would never have been set in the right way, would never have become (as we find he did) braver and braver. Is it not His own word; "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"?

Secondly; *a lesson of moral courage.* Nicodemus (though he did well in coming) would have done better to come by day than by night. Our Lord told him so, or at least implied as much, when He said to him, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Remember that God will not have us wrap up in our own hearts our

S. John iii. 21.

S. Matt. v. 16.

belief in Christ. We are to "let" our "light so shine before men, that they may see" our "good works, and glorify" our "Father which is in heaven." We must confess Christ, as well as believe in Him, if we would be saved.

Romans x. 9.

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Finally; *a lesson respecting the company we keep.* Try to make friends of the good. It is wonderful how this will strengthen you in following after that which is good. Perhaps neither Nicodemus nor Joseph of Arimathæa would have had courage to pay funeral honours to our Saviour, if they had stood alone; but one encouraged the other by his example and sympathy. Two may often make an effectual stand for good, where one would fall. "Two are better than one,"

Ecclesias. iv. 9.

says the wise king; and why? because one can succour the other in the hour of danger;

"For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." Ecclesias. iv. 10.

CHAPTER XV.

The spirit and method in which to learn.

Both hearing them, and asking them questions.—S. LUKE ii. 46.

THE first thing which our Lord did, when He found Himself in the midst of the doctors, was to hear them, i. e., to listen to their instructions. Indeed, this was the reason why He sought their company. He desired to be taught by them in God's Law. What they said suggested to Him questions—questions which He put to them, partly with the view of drawing forth from them an explanation; but partly also, no doubt, in order to suggest to them new views of the meaning of their own Scriptures, and to set their minds working in some profitable direction. Perhaps

we may judge of what the Holy Child's questions were like, by considering one of the questions which, when grown up, He asked of the Pharisees: "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit" (i. e., speaking by inspiration) "call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" This question was no doubt meant to lead the Pharisees to the conclusion that Christ is both God and man; as man, a son or descendant of David; as God, David's Lord. There is no other way but this out of the difficulty which our Lord suggested to them. So we see that He tried by His question to open their eyes to one of the most important doctrines of Christianity, the doctrine which is the foundation of every other — that God was "manifest in the flesh,"

S. Matt. xxii. 42—46.

Rev. xxii. 16.

1 Tim. iii. 16.

i. e., showed Himself upon earth in human nature. And it is very likely that the questions which He put to the doctors in His childhood were of the same sort.

How precious are the lessons wrapped up in this very small fragment of S. Luke's Gospel! Our Lord was to be a perfect example, not for grown-up people only, but also for the young. And here we see, first, that the young should be *eager* to learn, as He was in His boyhood. We know that it is commonly the contrary. Children naturally shun instruction, instead of seeking it. And, perhaps, of all other lessons, those which are the most important—those which are meant to convey the knowledge of God's Word and will—are regarded by the young as the most irksome, and shunned the most. It may seem a stern thing to say, but this is all wrong; it is part of the evil which is in every child's nature, and which it inherited from its parents. Our Lord showed a thirst for the knowledge of

God's Law, when He was but twelve years old ; and how are we to judge of what is wrong in us, but by taking Him as our model, and asking what there is in us, which does not match with His example ? As a ruler applied to a line, which we have drawn with our hand, shows that it is not straight, so our Lord's example, applied to any particular piece of human conduct, shows at once how far it is from being what it ought to be.

Secondly ; Our Lord *submitted* to learn of the appointed teachers of His nation. His condescension in doing so (when we consider that, as God, He was and is the fountain of all wisdom) is perfectly amazing. But He would not make any duty binding upon His people, which He had not practised Himself. And He expressly told His disciples that, hypocritical and bad as the Scribes and Pharisees were, they were to listen to them respectfully, and attend to their expositions of God's Law, because they were in a position

S. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

of authority; "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." If *He* condescended to seek instruction from those who sat in Moses' seat, it is not surely very much for Him to require of *us* that we should "submit ourselves to all our governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters," and try to profit by their instructions, even when they do not practise what they preach.

Then, again, we see here that quite the best way of learning is for the pupil to ask questions of the teacher. Only let them be thoughtful questions. The words are, "hearing them, and asking them questions." Our Lord listened first to what the doctors had to say, before He put any questions to them. Nothing will more open the mind of the taught than the explanation of a difficulty, which has been raised in his mind by something his teacher has told him. And very

often the question will be useful to the teacher as well as to the pupil, and lead him into some new and interesting train of thought upon an old and well-worn subject. There is this great use in questions generally, whether put by the teacher or by the taught, that they force us to think, in order that we may arrive at the answer. Whereas we may listen to what another person says to us, if there is no interchange of question and answer, without any exercise of the mind. How much it is to be desired that our young people would question their teachers more than they do! How much might both master and scholar gain from such a course! You bring your Bible to church, and follow as the lesson is read. But too often you follow with your eyes only, not with your mind, and do not seek to understand what is read. How well would it be, if you marked in every lesson a text or two which was hard, and which you could not understand, and asked a question about it after-

wards from those set over you! How rapidly, by adopting this plan, would you grow in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures! And this is no barren, useless knowledge; no knowledge which is of service only in this life, and ceases to have any value beyond the grave. "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures," says S. Paul, "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

2 Tim. iii. 15.

CHAPTER XVI.

Of the power of Christ's words.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.—S. LUKE ii. 47.

OUR English Testaments are only a translation from the Greek, in which language the New Testament was originally written. And it sometimes happens that the English word, which the translators use, is not so strong as the Greek word for which it is made to stand. This is the case here. We read that all who heard our Saviour conversing with the doctors were "astonished." But the word rendered "astonished" expresses very great astonishment. Perhaps our word "thunderstruck" would give the truer notion of it. The same word is used again to ex-

press the effect produced upon people's minds by miracles of the most startling character. When our Lord raised a dead girl to life, "her parents were *astonished.*" When the Apostles began to speak in other tongues at the day of Pentecost, every man who heard them speak in his own language was "*amazed*" at a circumstance so very extraordinary. When Simon Magus saw the miracles which S. Philip did—when he saw the lame and palsied healed, and the unclean spirits coming out with loud cries from those who were possessed, he "*wondered,* beholding the miracles and signs which were done." And when our Lord, after walking on the waves, came up into the fishing-boat, and the wind suddenly lulled, it is said that the disciples were "sore *amazed* in themselves . . . . and wondered." In all these cases the same Greek word is used. Now it is easy to imagine what a strong impression the sight of a dead girl being raised to life by a word, or the sight of a man walking

S. Luke viii. 56.

Acts ii. 7.

Acts viii. 7.

Acts viii. 13.

S. Mark vi. 51.

across a sheet of water as if it had been the floor of a room, or the hearing a foreigner suddenly speak in a language which he had never learned, would produce on anybody's mind. Such was the impression produced on the listeners by the extraordinary intelligence which our Lord showed in the questions put by Him to the doctors, and in the answers which he gave when they examined Him. "Coming events cast their shadows before." And this was a shadow cast before of the extraordinary power of our Lord's teaching when he grew up. It took hold of the minds of the people in a manner quite strange and unusual. "They were astonished at His doctrine; for his *word was with power*." S. Luke iv. 32.

"He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." S. Matt. vii. 29.

And when "the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him," these men felt a spell laid upon them by His words, which tied their arms to their sides as often as they tried to raise S. John vii. 32.

them. When they were asked why they had not brought Him, they could give no other account of the matter than that His words had dumb-founded them. "Never man," they said, "spake like this man."

S. John vii. 46.

We need not wonder at it, when we consider who He was. Though the doctors in the Temple, though the officers sent to take Him, did not know the secret of the power of His words, yet we know it. He is a Person in the Godhead; and, when God speaks with man, is it likely that man can hear it without being impressed, awed, subdued? When God talked with Israel from heaven, amidst thunderings and lightnings and the noise of the trumpet, the people were overwhelmed and prostrate; "Let not God speak with us," they cried, "lest we die." And when God talked with Job to bring him to a sense of his ignorance and weakness, Job too was overwhelmed and prostrate; "Wherefore I abhor myself," said he, "and repent in dust and ashes."

Exodus xx. 18, 19.

Job xlii. 6.

And when the risen and ascended Saviour appeared to Saul of Tarsus, on the way to Damascus, "he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And when the beloved disciple, who had lain on His breast at supper, saw the glorified form of his Master, and heard "his voice as the sound of many waters," he "fell at his feet as dead." It is true, indeed, that at the time we are now speaking of, the Son of God was in the flesh, and compassed about with the infirmities of our nature. It is true that at this time He was only a child of twelve years old, and humbled himself to grow, as other children grow, in wisdom and in stature. But from behind the infirmities of the flesh, and the weakness and ignorance of childhood, there struggled forth, even thus early, the rays of the Divine Wisdom, which could not be hid. You may have seen the sun wrapped in a garment of cloud and mist, as you have been standing on a hill-top. Suddenly a small slit

Acts ix. 6.

Rev. i. 13, 15, 17.

S. Luke ii. 52.

is made in the garment, and several pencils of rays break out, and you see the bosom of the hill beneath you, and the nibbling sheep that wander over it, basking in the sunlight. So, although the Saviour came among us in the form of a child, and really was a child in size, in weakness, and in simplicity, the glorious wisdom of the Son of God broke forth from Him, at the early age of twelve, to enlighten the world; and before He did any *work* of power (for our Lord wrought no miracle before he had come to man's estate), He said *words* of power,—words which overwhelmed the hearers with astonishment. He was even then the Word of God. And the words of the Word of God could not fall powerless or unimpressive upon man's ear. "All that heard him were astonished."

See S. John ii. 11.

Christ speaks to men now-a-days as of old, and gives them answers to guide them, if they consult Him in truth and heart's uprightness. Do you wish to hear His voice, and get an

answer from Him? You may hear His voice in your consciences. You may get an answer from Him in your Bibles. But then you must not always be giddy and frivolous. You must get the habit of thinking quietly, and of being quite alone sometimes with your thoughts.

> "Unthinking, idle, wild, and young,
> I talked, and laughed, and danced, and sung,"—

this is not the spirit in which you can hear your Saviour's voice. To live always thus, and always to drive away grave and serious thought, is to live as if you had no soul to be saved. And when you read your Bible, it should be with prayer that you may understand it, and that He would throw upon it the light of His Holy Spirit, without which light even the Bible will be of no more use to direct you, than a sun-dial will be of use to tell you the time, when the sun is not shining. Pray to Him to guide you, and to give you an answer through your Bible. And

be quite ready to receive the answer, and act upon it when it comes. And then you shall hear Him with the inward ear, and shall not only be able to repeat by heart many of His beautiful and wise words, but shall know and feel the power of them.

CHAPTER XVII.

How the Virgin did not disguise her own failures.

And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him——.—S. Luke ii. 48.

WE must suppose that our Lord's parents, as soon as they entered the Temple school, paused for a few moments to observe what was going on. As they listened to the conversation between the doctors and the Holy Child, the same surprise seized them which already had fastened on others. There was a power in His searching questions, and in His wonderfully pertinent answers, which produced much the same impression that a miracle would have done. Perhaps as they saw Him sitting there, opening up new

trains of thought in the minds of the wrinkled, gray-bearded listeners by His inquiries, and throwing a flood of light upon passages of the Old Testament, which had been hitherto dark, they, who knew their Bibles so well, called to mind the words of the 119th Psalm and bethought themselves that this was the first time they had seen them altogether fulfilled; "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." And there is a passage of the New Testament, not written for many years afterwards, which, with the change of a few words, makes an admirable description of the scene. The Holy Child Jesus was, as we are told in the Acts, anointed by God "with the Holy Ghost and with power;" and the name Christ (or Messiah) means *Anointed.* How well, then, would these words of S. John suit the scene of the Holy Child showing forth His divine understanding

Psalm cxix. 99, 100.

Acts x. 38.

among the doctors; "The anointing which" Thou hast "received of" God "abideth in" Thee, and Thou needest "not that any man teach" Thee: "but the same anointing teacheth" Thee "of all things, and is truth, and is no lie." 1 John ii. 27.

As soon as our Lord perceived His parents, He, doubtless, came towards them as a child naturally would; "and unto him his mother said." Such is the order of the words in the original, though in our English translation it is, "and his mother said unto him." There must be some reason for "unto him" being put first in the original. Probably, by adopting this order of words, S. Luke meant to convey to his readers that what the Virgin said was addressed to our Lord alone, said in a low voice, when He came up close to her, and not meant to be heard by others —"unto him" (apart from all others) "his mother said." His mother! and why not S. Joseph, His supposed father? The words

of the mother convey a gentle reproof, or, at all events, a gentle expostulation; they are at least a remonstrance, and insinuate that He had behaved thoughtlessly, and without due consideration of them. Now, this would come more naturally from the father than from the mother of a child; the father would be the more likely parent of the two to speak in accents of censure, and to find fault; the mother would rather smooth over the offence, and plead for the offender. But S. Joseph must have known that he was not the real father of the Holy Child. An angel of God had told him in a dream that Mary's Son was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and that His name should be called Emmanuel, or God with us. And therefore with great propriety S. Joseph does not venture to find any fault or say any word, and leaves it to S. Mary, who alone had any part in the Holy Child, to remonstrate with Him. Supposing the circumstances to have been what Holy

S. Matt. i. 20, 23.

Scripture tells us they were, this was most natural.

But if on this occasion the mother of our Lord spoke to Him softly and privately words which were intended for no other ears than His own, whence is it that S. Luke got a knowledge of what passed? It is likely—perhaps more than likely,—probable—that he received an account of it from the Blessed Virgin herself. At all events, he records a great deal at the beginning of his Gospel which might very easily and naturally have come to him from that source. Thus he tells us about the Annunciation, at which only the Virgin herself and the angel Gabriel were present. He gives us the very words of the Virgin's song, which we call "the Magnificat;" and, after relating the visit of the shepherds to the manger at Bethlehem, informs us that these things sunk into her soul, and made a deep impression there: "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

S. Luke i. 26, 30, 31.

S. Luke i. 46—56.

S. Luke ii. 18, 19.

Surely there is something specially interesting in supposing, as we very reasonably may, that the Evangelist heard all these things from the Virgin-mother herself; that in later days, when she and he were both confirmed Christians, established in the Faith, she loved to talk to S. Luke and other friends of the early times in which her Son's glory and Godhead were first revealed to her, of the wonderful things which had happened to Him when He was a babe, and of the surprise which had filled her soul, and the marvellous answer He had given her, when He was a boy of twelve. It was hard for her, we may well imagine, notwithstanding the convincing evidence she had received of the fact, to believe that her Son, whom she had watched over in the cradle, nursed at her own breast, and reared in her own cottage, was also her God; but she had come firmly to believe it at last, and she looked back with fond and devout yearning to those passages of His early life, which shed

a light on His Divine origin and character. And in telling these to the Evangelist she did not hide from him any of her own shortcomings, the weakness of her own faith at the Annunciation, her shrinking from the searching trial wherewith the aged Simeon said that God would sift her, and her presumption in remonstrating with the Holy Child at the age of twelve. She told him her story, for the instruction of the Church in all ages, with the utmost candour and simplicity, as the Holy Ghost brought it to her remembrance, and shed a light upon it. Her aim was to magnify her Saviour, and not herself; and this was best done by putting on record how she had doubted and had been perplexed, and had sometimes presumed too much on her relation to Him according to the flesh, but had been led through all to a firm, and joyful, and well-established faith in Him as the Son of the Highest. And while she had this established faith, she must have had also such

S. Luke i. 34.
S. Luke ii. 35.
S. Luke ii. 48.

a feeling of his kinship to her, and consequent sympathy with her, as one would think scarcely any person not in a similar position could have had.

Let us bear in mind, for our great consolation, that we, too, as well as she, are most nearly allied to Him, as being partakers of that human nature, which He took from her; that, according to His own words, if we acquaint ourselves with the will of God and do it, we, too, shall be His mother and His brethren, joined to Him in the closest bond of spiritual relationship—"members," as S. Paul says, "of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" and that yet at the same time He is "the everlasting Father," "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," as able to save to the uttermost as to sympathise tenderly and deeply, "in all time of our tribulation; in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment."

S. Luke viii. 21.

Ephesians v. 30.

Isaiah ix. 6.

Nicene Creed.

Litany.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Virgin's remonstrance with the Holy Child.

Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.—S. LUKE ii. 48.

VERY few are the recorded sayings of the Blessed Virgin, and very short; but, like most other sayings which the Holy Spirit has preserved, they give us an insight into the mind of the speaker. This is the language of a sorrow-stricken mother, who had undergone great trouble and anxiety of mind for the three past days. For the word translated "sorrowing" is a very strong word. It is used in one of our Lord's Parables of the sufferings which the rich man underwent in hell; "I am

S. Luke xvi. 24, 25.

tormented in this flame;" "now he is comforted, and thou art *tormented*." And again, it is used of the burst of passionate sorrow with which the elders of the Church of Ephesus took leave of S. Paul, "*sorrowing* most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." "They all wept sore" on that occasion, we are told, "and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him." So that the very word used seems to show that the Virgin's trouble of mind during those three days had been by no means slight. Perhaps it was not only because the Holy Child was lost, but because she felt that she had not been quite free from blame in losing Him. She ought to have had her eyes upon Him more continually, and to have been less distracted by the preparations for her journey home. At all events, it is very observable how early Simeon's prophecy about her began to be fulfilled. He had said to her at the Purification (and the words are recorded

A xx. 38.

Acts xx. 37.

in this very Chapter only a few verses back), "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." The sword was the keen, searching sorrow and trial of faith, which she would have to go through in regard to her Divine Son. When she heard that Herod's executioners were in search of Him, and had to snatch Him up to her breast, and fold Him hurriedly in her robe, and to mount her mule, and flee into Egypt, this was the earliest piercing of the sword, the first keen trial and anxiety. From that time up to the present He had given her no uneasiness; for surely He had been the most docile, devout, obedient of children, and had shown not a single trace of temper, pride, or wilfulness. But now the sword is driven further home into her tender soul. Even ordinary children are treasures to a mother; but this, she must have known, was no ordinary child. Her desire was to keep so sacred a charge as the apple of her eye; but she had not done so, and He had slipped

S. Luke ii. 35.

S. Matt. ii. 14.

away; and great was her distress of mind and conscience, harassing her suspense, until she found Him. Perhaps we might take all that is told of us of the Virgin, elsewhere as well as here, as a fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy that "the sword should go through her soul."

But while she is sorrowful (as she might well be), and also slightly reproachful (as one feels she ought not to have been), she is at the same time tenderly affectionate. She addresses Him as "Son," a term of affection, the exact sense of which would perhaps be better conveyed by the words; "*My child*, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" The tenderness of her heart for the sacred treasure God had entrusted to her comes out in the word she employs; but at the same time she clearly implies that He had wounded her feelings. And not hers only. With beautiful delicacy and unselfishness she does not put her own grief foremost. He, whom she was bound by her marriage vow to love and

reverence, had been as anxious and distressed as herself. And she would have the Holy Child feel for *him* in the first place; "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Hitherto she had always called Joseph the father of Jesus. The Child Himself had always called Joseph His father. And the Holy Scripture justifies this language by speaking of Joseph and Mary as both of them "his parents." For man and wife are by the ordinance of Matrimony "one flesh," so that the son of the woman is, in virtue of that ordinance alone, the son of the man also. But upon the Holy Child had now dawned (as we shall see in our next Chapter) the amazing consciousness of His being really the Son of the most High, and of Joseph's having no part in Him. Meanwhile, how beautiful is this mind of the Virgin, as expressed in her words—a sorrowful mind, a loving mind, an unselfish mind! She was a sinner, no doubt, and saved, like the rest of

S. Luke ii. 41. S. Matt. xix. 5, and Ephesians v. 31.

us, only by grace and her Son's merit; but one would expect to find in her, and we do find, a lovely natural character.

"Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" The words may usefully remind us that the dealings of the Lord Jesus with those who sincerely love and serve Him are often very strange. Not only does He try them by ordinary troubles, such as loss of health and loss of friends, but sometimes He takes away from them all spiritual comfort, and leaves their souls dark and disconsolate. Once they had joy and peace in believing, but they have it no longer now. Perhaps it is that they have grown lukewarm and self-sufficient, and He withdraws Himself from them for a time, to make them seek Him with greater earnestness. Where this is the case, people must go on seeking Him till they find. The dryness and hardness of our minds in prayer may be a sore distress to us, but we must not give over praying; we must be content to

seek Him sorrowing. Where we cannot pray as we would, we must pray as we can. We must "not faint," but determine to make ourselves heard at heaven's gate. And then it will be "but a little" . . . , and we shall find Him whom our "soul loveth." And when we have found Him, we must be careful to hold Him, and "not let Him go." For what do we here read? "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee *sorrowing*." One who knows the Saviour's love, and lives in habits of holy intercourse with Him, must, as it were, keep his eye upon Him constantly by Christian watchfulness, and an effort to realise His presence everywhere. Let such an one lose Him by wilful disobedience, or careless self-indulgence, or by relaxing in prayer and in the effort to believe; and there will be nothing but "sorrowing," till He is found again. Most merciful is it of God, when we are living without Christ, to hedge up our way with thorns, to make conscience uneasy, worldly pleasures

S. Luke xviii. 1.

Canticles iii. 4.

Canticles iii. 4.

unsatisfactory, and even religious exercises disappointing and irksome. Anything is wholesome, however bitter, which drives us to His side, and keeps us there.

CHAPTER XIX.

Christ's words the same in Childhood as throughout His life.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?—S. LUKE ii. 49.

THESE are the earliest recorded words of our Lord Jesus Christ. All His words are of the utmost importance; but a special interest attaches to His earliest words. The water of the stream tastes like that of the spring. The flower is only the bud unfolded. From the light of the dawn we may guess what the light of noontide will be. And in like manner we shall be sure to find the sentiment, which is expressed in Christ's earliest words, repeated in His after

life. Our Lord's words were always consistent one with another, because His character was always the same. The characters of ordinary men change very much. Sometimes a person, who was giddy and thoughtless as a boy, becomes serious and earnest when he is grown up. Sometimes, alas! a boy who, before he went to school, was conscientious, tender-hearted, docile, and affectionate, becomes at school hard, and coarse, and self-willed, and profane. But even where there are no such decided changes as these, men's humours alter very much from day to day, almost from hour to hour. They are in a mood for quiet and study one day, for amusement and dissipation the next. This changeableness is really, though we little suspect it, an effect of the corruption of our nature. God never changes. "With" Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He says of Himself, "I am the LORD, I change not." But when sin came into man's nature, there came in with

S. James i. 17.

Malachi iii. 6.

it a certain restless fretfulness, which made change—change of pursuit, change of thoughts—more or less necessary to all. This would not be the case, if we were altogether spiritually sound—will not be the case in another and a better world. Men in perfect bodily health sleep motionless all night. But one who is not well turns from side to side, and shifts his position often in trying to get rest.

Our Lord, being not only God, but also a perfectly holy man, never changed; and therefore he is called "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Now let us endeavour to see an example of this fixedness of Christ's character in the words before us. They are the earliest words of His, which the Holy Spirit has preserved. And they are in beautiful consistency with His other words, and specially with those which fell from His lips when dying. These first words are a kind of key-note, which steals

Hebrews xiii. 8.

out upon the ear again and again, as we listen to the strain of His life. What is the sentiment they express? He assures His earthly parents that He must be—He is constrained by an urgent necessity to be—about His Father's business. But only consider how very young he was—only twelve years of age—a child—not yet a stripling. Was it necessary for Him to put His hand to His Father's business so very early? Could He not have spared three or four more years, before He girded Himself up for His great work? He did not think so. He seems devoured by the idea that His work is pressing upon Him—will fall into arrears, if He does not attack it betimes. Now, then, let us look at other words of His, spoken when He was grown up. How exactly is this the same sentiment; "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." Almost

S. John ix. 4.

like a labourer, who has a great piece of ground to dig before nightfall, and sees the sun sloping westward, and thinks he has only one or two more hours, and redoubles his exertions. Again, in the story of the Samaritan woman you read that He was both wearied and hungry; but His longing to do the Father's work in winning and saving souls was so strong that it prevailed over the claims of nature. "I have meat to eat," said He, when His disciples invited Him to partake of food, which they had bought, "that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

S. John iv. 32, 34.

And so we find that during the three years of His ministry every corner of His time was filled up and turned to account. He and His disciples had no leisure occasionally so much as to eat; for whole days He laboured down to the very evening in teaching and working

S. Mark vi. 31.

S. Mark vi. 46.

cures, and then retired, not to rest, but to pour out His soul in prayer to His Father. And not until the last Supper had been celebrated, and His parting counsels given to His disciples, did He say, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

S. John xvii. 4.

He speaks thus, however, in the anticipations of faith: for the work, which God had given Him to do, was not yet actually finished: He had not yet drunk the cup which His Father had given Him. It was not finished, till He exclaimed from the cross, "It is finished," and then laid his head down upon the Father's bosom, meekly commending His soul into the hands of Him, on whose business He had entered at twelve years of age, and which, now, at thirty-three, He had completed; "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." What a consistency there is throughout in His tone of mind and in His words!

S. John xix. 30.

S. Luke xxiii. 46.

What a lesson have we in the passage before us for all young people! You think you need not begin serving God just yet. You have plenty of years before you. It will be time enough to enter upon God's business, and the work of your salvation, when you are a year or two older. Ah! how can you be sure that you have many years before you? Do people never die young? Do they never die suddenly and without warning? But even if you could count for certain on living for many years, many years are not a long time, compared with the work you have to do in them. Oh! what a dreadful retrospect on a death-bed will be even one day wasted, as regards the work of our salvation! Who shall say how much might not have been done in that day to further us on the road to glory? Begin at once to redeem the time, to make the most of your opportunities, to do your daily tasks diligently as unto God, to pray earnestly, to study a text of the Bible every day. Say to

yourself each morning, before going to your work, and try to keep the thought on your mind all the day long :—

My soul, thou hast to day
A God to glorify,
A Christ to imitate,
A soul to save,
A body to keep under,
Time to redeem,
Temptation to overcome—

Verily, "I must be about my Father's business!"

CHAPTER XX.

Christ laying aside earthly relationships.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?—S. LUKE ii. 49.

OUR Blessed Lord, as a man, had certain natural relationships, like everybody else who is born into the world. He was the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and being her Son, He must have been first cousin to the children of her brothers and sisters. Moreover, because S. Joseph was married to the Blessed Virgin, and because man and wife are one flesh, so that the children of the one become by marriage the children of the other also, He was in a certain sense Joseph's Son; and, if Joseph had children by a former wife, as

many suppose, our Lord would be the brother of those children. This being the case, people knew Christ, in the first instance, and thought about Him, as a member of a human family. When they heard His wise and beautiful words, and saw the miracles He did, they asked in great surprise where He could have got these words and works; for He and the members of His family lived among them; and we do not think much of persons whom we come across every day, and who have just the same pursuits and means of livelihood as ourselves. "Is not this the carpenter," they said, "the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?"

S. Mark vi. 3.

But our Blessed Lord, though a member of a human family according to the flesh, was in His higher nature the Son of God Most High, begotten from everlasting of the Father, in whose bosom He had lain from all eternity. And by-and-bye, after His resurrection from

S. John i. 18.

the dead, all men were to acknowledge this, and to think of Him no more as connected with a single human family, but as the Saviour of the world, who took upon Him the nature common to all of us, and therefore is akin to every man. This is St. Paul's meaning, when he says, "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." And so, while He was upon earth, our Lord began to prepare men's minds for this acknowledgment of Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of all mankind, and to loosen and free Himself from the cords of human relationship. And you will find that He always does this in connexion with His mother, and for the best of reasons, because it was through His mother that all His human alliances came to Him; His relationship to her it was, which brought Him into relationship with other people.

2 Corinth. v. 16.

On the present occasion, His mother had gently and affectionately found fault with

Him for the anxiety, which He had caused to His father and herself by straying away from them. So far from expressing regret, however, and saying, "I am very sorry," as a sinful and merely human child ought to have done, He expostulates with His parents for their anxiety about Him, and for their having sought Him anywhere but in the Temple, where they might have been sure that He would be found: "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" or (as it would, perhaps, be better translated) "in my Father's courts?" As much as to say; "You have called Joseph my father; but you should have remembered that my real father is not Joseph, but Almighty God, and that His house has a claim upon me before my earthly home, and His business before my duty to you."

Now let us pass on to His first miracle, the turning water into wine at Cana of Galilee. The Blessed Virgin, who had long nourished

the hope of seeing some great work done by Him, suggested to Him that their friends, who had invited them, were in want of wine, and that it would be proper in Him to put forth His power to relieve that want. "The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine." What did He answer? "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." By His "hour" is probably meant the hour of His passion. He was to suffer in His human nature,—in the nature which He derived from the Virgin; and therefore what He means to imply is, that in the hour of His suffering He would be mindful of her, as we shall see presently that He was; but now the question was as to His working a miracle, in which He would have to put forth His Divine power as the Eternal Son of God; and she had no claim to control or make suggestions to Him in His higher nature, which He had from God; and accordingly He says to her in rather stern accents; "Woman, what have I to do

S. John ii. 3.

S. John ii. 4.

S. John ii. 4.

with thee?" As the Son of God, He had nothing to do with her.

Again, when, at a later period of His work, His mother and His brethren came to Him, as He was surrounded by a great throng of people whom He was teaching, and sent to summon Him away from His Father's business, He again intimated that He had a higher than any natural relationship, the demands of which upon Him must be met before the claims of His family. He asked, "Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."

S. Mark iii. 33, 34, 35.

Again, when, on hearing from Him words of solemn warning, a certain woman of the company exclaimed aloud, "What a happy woman is thy mother!" ("Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast

S. Luke xi. 27.

sucked!"), He expressly said that there was a blessedness higher than that of the Blessed Virgin; even the blessedness of those who are related to Him not according to the flesh, but by being made partakers of His Spirit, and by being engaged (like Him) in their Father's business;—"Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." S. Luke xi. 28.

Finally, when He was leaving the world, though He dutifully made provision for His mother, and thus fulfilled the law of God which says, "Honour thy mother," yet He seems, at the same time, to lay down for ever the relationship which He had borne to her, as a garment which it had pleased Him to wear, while He was here, but which He now pleases to lay aside for ever. Another is to do to her the duty of a son; and she is to stand to that other in the mother's place. "Woman," said He from His cross, when His "hour"—the hour of His passion—had come, "behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Exodus xx. 12. S. John xix. 26, 27.

Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." Some of you may have seen a balloon rise into the air. It is fastened down by cords to the earth, but struggles to be free. One by one the cords are cut; and when the last bond that held it to the earth is severed, it soars majestically upwards, far above the clouds, and fogs, and vapours. The Saviour condescended to be bound for a time, while working out our salvation, with the cords of human relationships. But now He has disentangled Himself one by one from those cords, and has freed Himself, not indeed from our human nature, which He wears for ever before the throne of grace, but from all mere earthly and natural ties. It is our great happiness to know that we are all equally, not one more than another, "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," and that, if we do but listen to God's Word devoutly, and practise it conscientiously, He regards us with the love of

brother for brother, of brother for sister; nay, of son for mother—a love, that is, of warm affection, of sensitive and delicate affection, nay, even of respectful attention. We could not dare to speak thus, if we were not echoing His own gracious words. But these *are* His own words, immeasurable in grace and condescension;

"Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." S. Mark iii. 35.

CHAPTER XXI.

How we may fail to understand the things that we know.

And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.—S. LUKE ii. 50.

BUT how could they fail to understand it? What our Lord had intimated to them was, that He had a Father in heaven, who had a stronger claim upon Him than they had, whose work He must be busied in, and whose house was His proper home. Knowing what they must have known about Him, what was there to puzzle them in this? To S. Mary it had been said by the angel Gabriel; "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing

S. Luke i. 26, 35.

which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." To S. Joseph also it had been said by an angel; "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Both Joseph and Mary, then, must have known and fully believed that her Son was the Son of the most high God, born into this world in a way entirely supernatural. How then could they find any difficulty in His speaking to them about the claims which His heavenly Father had upon him? We meet with something of the same kind in the eighteenth chapter of this Gospel. We there read that our Lord "took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall

S. Matt. i. 20.

S. Luke xviii. 31, 32, 33.

rise again." Nothing can be plainer than the meaning of these words; there is no difficulty in them; they speak for themselves. And

S. Luke xviii. 34.

yet it is added; "And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." Again we are disposed to ask; "But could they fail to understand, when our Lord spoke so very plainly?" The answer is, that we may and do know a great many things, which we do not realise, or (to use a plainer term), do not fully take in. I will give you an instance. You know well (for you have read

Jer. xvii. 9.

it in the Bible, and what the Bible says must be true) that "the heart" of man "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." If you were asked whether you believed this, you would say, "Of course I believe it; I find it in the Bible." But do you think that you take it in fully, that you at all realise how wicked your heart is? Nobody does so altogether; it is a piece of knowledge which we cannot

take in, except by experience, or, in other words, by being made to feel it. I will tell you how you may in some measure come to feel it. Try with all your might, even for a single day, to be as good, as holy and religious, as watchful, unselfish, industrious, and devout, as your conscience tells you you ought to be. You will find something always beating you back, something which makes it very hard for you (you will soon come to think it impossible for you) to be what you know very well you ought to be. What is this something? It is that you, like all the rest of us, have such a strong inclination to what is wrong; it is so pleasant, and easy, and natural to be idle, and selfish, and greedy, and careless; and so much against the grain to be the contrary. Ah! now you begin to take in the truth of the badness of the human heart, and to get a glimpse of it. Before, all that you could do was to repeat the text by rote, "The heart is deceitful above all things,

and desperately wicked," and not to dispute it or argue against it. But what a different thing it is to *feel* it—not merely to *accept it as true*, but to make trial of it, and *prove* it true!—Then in this sense it was that our Lord's parents did not "understand" that He was the Son of God—they did not fully take it in; they could not realise it. True, they had heard it some time back from the lips of angels; but that was twelve years ago, and the magnificent announcement had lost in that time some of its impressiveness. The extraordinary Child had grown up in all respects like other human children, except that there was not in Him one single trace of selfwill, or temper, or stubbornness, or greediness, or sloth, or insubordination. Mary had fed Him at her breast, while He was an infant, and had sung her lullaby, after she had cradled Him, until He went to sleep. I doubt not that, though perhaps with some measure of awe (as feeling that the Child must know

much more of that subject than she did), she taught Him little prayers, and that He lisped them at her knees. The development of His faculties was in all respects simple and natural; and during all these twelve years nothing happened out of the ordinary course. Is it so surprising that, seeing Him to be so completely human, and so subjected to all human infirmities, except such as are sinful, she found it difficult to take in that He was the Son of the most high God? She knew it; but she did not realise it; never realised it fully, I suppose, until she looked back upon His whole past career under the light which shone into her mind brilliantly at the day of Pentecost,—the light of the "Spirit of understanding." And so with the disciples. They whose minds were raised, by His extraordinary miracles, to expect that He would set up an earthly empire, were quite unable to understand what He said to them about His being mocked, and spitted on, and scourged, and

crucified; it was altogether a puzzle and a riddle to them, till they looked back upon it under the light of Pentecost; and then they saw very clearly that this contempt and suffering was really the pathway to His victory; for it was by undergoing contempt and suffering that He redeemed us, and effectually triumphed over the devil, and broke his power.

The lesson is (oh! lay it to heart), that it is quite possible to know all the truths of the Bible by rote; and yet not to understand, or have a real insight into, a single one of them. We must in some measure feel them, in order to understand them. And this feeling of them is to be gained in two ways. First; earnestly pray to God for the Spirit of understanding before you open your Bibles, using the words of the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, or, better still, some very simple words out of your own mind. Secondly; try very earnestly to put in practice everything

which your Bible tells you. This will necessarily bring with it a painful sense of failure and sinfulness. But never mind. Go on bravely. The sense of failure and sinfulness is a necessary element in Christian experience. One religious truth understood, taken in, realised, is worth a score of truths only repeated by heart. And let not those, who have attained to some measure of understanding in the truths of religion, suppose for a moment that they have exhausted them. Oh! how much have the wisest and holiest of us yet to learn! How much out of our depth are the truths of the Catechism—nay, the very petitions which we ourselves offer at the throne of grace! How little do we understand those petitions in all their bearings and relations! As says the Christian poet:—

"What are all prayers beneath
But cries of babes, that cannot know
Half the deep thought they breathe?

KEBLE'S *Christian Year.* (Catechism.)

In His own words we Christ adore,
But Angels, as we speak,
Higher above our meaning soar
Than we o'er children weak:
And yet His words mean more than they,
And yet He owns their praise:
Why should we think, He turns away
From infants' simple lays?"

CHAPTER XXII.

The submission and filial dutifulness of the Holy Child.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.—S. LUKE ii. 51.

THIS verse is closely connected in thought with what went before; "they" (His human parents) "understood not the saying which he spake unto them." If they did not understand what He said to them, it is clear that it was not *they* who had put it into His mind. No parents could teach a child a thing above themselves and beyond their own comprehension. No; a wonderful consciousness that He was indeed the Only Begotten Son of God, manifest in the flesh,

had recently burst into full blossom within His human soul; and this was the utterance of the new-born consciousness; "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

S. Luke ii. 49.

Our Lord, then, henceforth was fully aware that He was not really the son of Joseph, though generally accounted so to be. And He being fully aware of this, it might have been supposed that now He would no longer consent to be controlled by His parents. While quite young, He had been of necessity under their orders; but now, it might be thought, He would altogether free Himself from that yoke, and be subject to none but His heavenly Father. But persons thinking thus would be greatly mistaken. He had given to His human parents what He had obtained Himself—one bright glimpse into His Divine nature; but now the blossom of this glorious consciousness seems to fold itself up again; and He puts Himself once more under the yoke

of the Fifth Commandment. S. Paul tells us that Christ was "made of a woman, made under the law," i. e., in coming into the world He condescended to submit to the law of Moses; and here we find Him submitting to that commandment, which is for children the foremost of all; "Honour thy father and thy mother." He had come down from God's heavenly Temple originally to dwell among men; and now He goes down from God's *earthly* Temple (a sort of shadow of what He had done in His Incarnation) to dwell by a human fireside in an earthly home at Nazareth.—"He was subject unto them" is not quite an exact translation. The tense used in the Greek gives the notion of His submission to His parents, continuing up to the time of the opening of His ministry, for eighteen long years. We might translate it thus: "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and continued submitting Himself to them." Observe, "to *them*," not to "*her*;" to Joseph as well as to

Gal. iv. 4.

Exod. xx. 12.

Mary. S. Mary was His *real* mother; and perhaps one might have expected submission to be rendered to her, in acknowledgment of the fact. But Joseph was *not* His real father, and our Lord had just shown Himself to be acquainted with His higher parentage; and therefore it might be imagined that He would no longer yield to S. Joseph the submission of a dutiful son. But it appears that He submitted Himself to both of them equally, to Joseph as well as Mary. "He was subject," says the Evangelist, "unto *them*." Now, here we are taught that reverence and submission is due, not only to parents, but to all who stand in their place. The orphan child must submit himself to his guardians (or "governors"), though not literally his parents; the pupil to his "teachers;" the servant to his "masters;" the churchman to his "spiritual "pastors," the bishops and clergy, who are his fathers in God; the citizen to "the Queen, and all that are put in authority under

Church Catechism. ("Duty towards my neighbour.")

her." The habit of finding fault with our governors in Church and State, and even of resisting them, if they order anything we disapprove, is, unhappily, fast gaining ground in this country. While professing to be Christians or followers of Christ, persons are not at all afraid or ashamed to find grievous fault with their bishops, and even with the anointed sovereign herself, and to hold them up to ridicule and contempt in the public prints. It is a very unchristian practice, and one sure, sooner or later, to call down God's displeasure upon the nation. If we desire to check it, it can only be nipped in the bud. In this matter we are but reaping as we have sown. It is with the training of our children that the fault begins. If we throw the rein upon the neck of a child at home, never reprove, never punish, never insist upon being obeyed ; if we allow our young people freely to talk of the faults of superiors, instead of sharply requiring them to "order themselves

lowly and reverently to all their betters," we are just sowing a crop, which in after-life will spring up in insubordination and contempt of constituted authority, and perhaps in "sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion."

"He was subject"—He, the great God of heaven and earth, continually submitted Himself to His parents. In little things doubtless; for domestic life consists of little things; and submission could not otherwise have been shown. If they sent Him on a message to a neighbour, He, the great Sender of the Apostles, delivered the message faithfully. If they bade Him sweep the house, and search for a lost coin, He, "the wisdom of God," who seeks diligently for lost souls, did even as He was bade. If they taught Him joiner's work, and showed Him how to make a plough or a yoke for oxen, He, who lays on men an easy yoke and a light burden, learned cheerfully and gladly, and threw His mind into the trade. If they bade Him work in their little

S. John xx. 21.

1 Cor. i. 24, & S. Luke xv. 8.

S. Matt. xi. 30.

plot of garden ground, and train the creepers or water the flowers, He, the great dresser of the vineyard of His Church, who rears souls by the dews of His grace and the discipline of His providence, took in hand the water-pot and the gardening tools. And thus things went on for eighteen long years, during which the great ideas which He was to throw into the minds of mankind were ripening in His human soul, and taking ever deeper possession thereof. One sharp sorrow, it is probable, befel Him in these days. His soul, being perfectly pure from sin, was highly strung and susceptible to a degree of which we sinners can have no idea. What a pang, then, must the death of S. Joseph have caused Him, not only from the natural affection and gratitude which He entertained towards Him, but also from the sight of His mother's distress! And that S. Joseph *did* die, while the Lord Jesus was very young, we gather from the fact that He never appears again in the

S. Luke xiii. 7, 8, & S. John xx. 15.

sacred narrative, even in passages where we should expect to find Him. Thus we can hardly suppose that Joseph would not have been present with his wife at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, had he been alive. It is probable that, after this bereavement, our Lord pursued S. Joseph's trade, and thereby contributed to His mother's support; for He is called in S. Mark's Gospel "the carpenter, the son of Mary." So that His youth was a youth of anguish, and toil, and humiliation; and He came forth to the world, we may well imagine, to meet the more fiery trials of His ministry, prematurely aged already, though so young, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." "It is good for a man," says the prophet, "that he bear the yoke in his youth." And, though there was in Him none of that sin to be corrected, which makes the yoke *for us* so profitable, yet none the less did the Son of Man take upon Him the yoke of submission to every ordinance, human and

S. Mark vi. 3.

Isaiah liii. 3. Lam. iii. 27.

divine, and of humiliation under God's chastening hand. A great love, and a great lesson. A great love, inasmuch as He yielded this submission in our nature for our sakes; and we are freely welcome to all the benefits of it. A great lesson; for, if submission were the law of *His* life, how much more fitting is it that it should be the law of *ours!* Oh, that we may embrace the love! Oh, that we may learn the lesson! In doing both these things the Christian life consists.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Christ the righteousness of children.

He was subject unto them.
S. LUKE ii. part of ver. 51.

This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.
JEREM. xxiii. part of ver. 6.

THESE words, "He was subject unto them," put the finishing-stroke upon the picture of our Blessed Lord's boyhood, which S. Luke is here sketching. The mention of His subjection to His parents was necessary in order to show His righteousness, even as a child, to have been absolutely perfect. Righteousness means obedience to God's Law. And God's Law consists of two parts—our duty towards God, and our duty

towards our neighbour. Now, in the earlier part of this brief record of our Lord's childhood, He is shown to us fulfilling perfectly His duty towards God. When His parents had quitted God's house of prayer, and had begun their homeward journey, He had been drawn back to it for three days, and found it impossible to tear Himself away. He had been engaged there in His Father's business; He had been under the shadow of His Father's roof; and He intimates that His parents ought not to have expected Him to be elsewhere or otherwise engaged; "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Here is the love of God, the love of communion with God, the love of doing work for God, the love of being busied in the tasks which God had set Him, opening into full blossom in His heart at twelve years of age. I say the *love* of God, because it was His inclination, His sympathy with what went on in it, which

S. Luke ii. 49.

drew Him to the Temple, and kept Him there. Even at this tender age He might have said of Himself truly what His disciples at a later period remembered had been said of Him; "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." His human heart was a holy altar, upon which burned continually the pure flame of zeal and love, which aspired ever up to Heaven. Fervently and strongly did He set His affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

S. John ii. 17, & Ps. lxix. 9.

Col. iii. 2.

But the record of His obedience to God's Law extends further than this. He is shown to us fulfilling His duty also towards man. For it is said, "He was subject unto"—continually submitted Himself unto—His human parents. Now, the Fifth Commandment, which says, "Honour thy father and thy mother," is, as you know, the first commandment of the second Table of the Law. Nor is it only the first, but the most fundamental commandment; duty to parents is the founda-

tion of all social duty. So in like manner the first commandment of the first Table, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me," lays a foundation, upon which the three following commandments are built. To worship but one God, and Him the true God, is the first and most essential point of *religious* duty, just as to honour our parents is the first and most essential point of all *social* duty. And most especially is a *child's* duty towards his neighbour all wrapped up in the precept to honour father and mother. A child is not old enough to be a husband or wife; not old enough, strictly speaking, to be a citizen; his social duties are confined to the little circle of the family; they are towards his father and mother principally, and then towards those who stand in the same relation with himself to father and mother, his brothers and sisters.

But, though the words, "He was subject unto them," apply especially to the period of our Lord's youth, they would be a perfectly

true motto for His course in after years. His whole life was one of subjection and submission. He submitted Himself, and He taught submission, to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. He submitted to receive John's baptism, though He had no need of it. He submitted to pay the tax for the support of the Temple, though, as the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, whose house the Temple was, He was rightfully exempt from the tax. He bade the Jews submit themselves to the Romans who had conquered them, and render unto Cæsar the dues which were Cæsar's. He bade His disciples observe and do all that the Scribes and Pharisees enjoined, because they sat in Moses' chair, and held a position of authority. He submitted to be questioned at the High Priest's judgment-seat, and accepted the oath which was there tendered to Him. And finally He became obedient (or submissive) unto the sentence of death, which Pilate was urged to pronounce upon Him,

1 Pet. ii. 13.
S. Matt. iii. 14, 15.
S. Matt. xvii. 24—end.
S. Matt. xxii. 21.
S. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.
S. Matt. xxvi. 63,64.

meekly carrying the mock sceptre thrust into His hands, and the thorny crown placed around His brow, and drinking with the utmost meekness, even to the dregs, the cup of suffering which the Father had given Him. Thus His whole course, and not merely the first part of it, was one of submission, subjection, and consent, to all and every yoke laid on Him, either by God or man.

S. Matt. xxvii. 29.

S. John xviii. 11.

Now the love of Christ for His Father's house and business, and the submission of Christ to His human parents, is not only a model for all children to copy, but also a righteousness, of which all children, if they please, may have the benefit. The Son of God, in becoming incarnate, did not join Himself to any one particular person (in which case He could not have stood for, or represented, any person but Himself), but took *our nature* upon Him. And because all men and all children have this nature in common, He stood for (or represented) all men,

when He was a man, and all children, when He was a child. When the Lord Jesus showed such fervent love for God's house and God's business, it was exactly as if every child in the world had shown the same fervent love. When the Lord Jesus submitted Himself to His human parents, it was exactly as if every child in the world had yielded the same submission. When the Lord Jesus condescended to suffer as a child, sorrowing over S. Joseph's death, and toiling hard to support His widowed mother, it was exactly as if every child in the world had sorrowed and suffered with the same beautiful and holy resignation. Therefore now He is "the Lord our righteousness,"—that is, His righteousness or goodness is offered to us freely by God, if we like to have it. In ordinary cases, one person's righteousness or goodness cannot be of any use to another. It makes no matter to me how good my neighbour is, how fervently he loves God, how meekly he submits

himself to all that is laid upon him. I get no benefit from his goodness, for the plain reason that I am not he; he and I are different human persons. But Christ took upon Him *the nature* of man, of which nature I, and my neighbour, and every one else in the world has a share; and therefore His righteousness, His zeal, His love, His submission belong to me, and to my neighbour, and to every one else in the world, and God tells us in the Gospel that we may all and each have the benefit of it. Not good children only, but children who have been hitherto as bad as children can be—have lied, and pilfered, and have shown selfishness and greediness, and sullenness, and temper—may have the benefit of Christ's righteousness at once, if they will only take it and use it. Christ's righteousness was meant for that—to be the righteousness of sinners. Just as the sun was meant to give light to those who sit in darkness, and the rivers were meant for the thirsty to drink,

and the coals were meant to warm the body in winter, and medicinal herbs to make the sick whole, so Christ's obedience to the Law of God was meant to satisfy the Law for those who could not satisfy it for themselves. And neither young people nor old have to do any great or hard thing, in order to get the full benefit of this satisfaction. Just believe with all your heart that Christ has borne for you the curse and penalty of all your wrong-doing, and also that He has on your behalf, and in your name, obeyed God's Law perfectly. If you heartily believe this, it will make you unfeignedly sorry for your past sin, and so soften your heart that you shall throw it behind you with disgust, and try to do better. In a word, you will give yourself up, spirit, soul, and body, to the God who gave Himself up for you. And to give oneself up unreservedly to God is to be holy. And "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Heb. xii. 14.

CHAPTER XXIV.

S. Mary's meditation on the words of her Divine Son.

But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.—S. LUKE ii. part of ver. 51.

THE Patriarch Joseph was a remarkable type or figure of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope that you know some of the particulars, in which Joseph shadowed forth our Lord. Joseph, the favourite son of Jacob, was envied and hated of his brethren. So our Lord, the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased, was envied and hated by the Jews, His brethren according to the flesh. Joseph was sold by his brethren into the hands of the Ishmeelites. Our Lord was sold by one of His disciples to the chief priests, and by

Genesis xxxvii. 4.

S. John xv. 25, and S. Mark xv. 10.

Genesis xxxvii. 28.

S. Matt. xxvi. 15, & xxvii. 2.

them delivered to the heathen Romans to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified. Joseph found favour with Potiphar and Pharaoh, the heathens into whose hands he passed. Our Lord after a time found favour with the Gentiles, who flocked into His Church, when the Apostles preached salvation through His Name; while the Jews, His own brethren, still obstinately disowned and rejected Him. Joseph was made ruler, in Pharaoh's name, over all the land of Egypt, Pharaoh himself retiring from the administration. Christ now reigns over all the world, and orders all the affairs of Nature, Providence, and Grace, as the Representative of God the Father. Joseph, after he had dealt roughly with his brethren for a long time, without their suspecting who he was, was at length made known to them, and reconciled with them, and generously forgave them. So there shall be a time when the true Joseph, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be recognised by His brethren, the Jews,

Gen. xxxix. 4, & xli. 41, 42.

Acts xxviii. 28. 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

Gen. xli. 40, 41, 43.

1 Cor. xv. 25. 26. Heb. ii. 9.

Gen. xlii. 7.

Gen. xlv. 1, 2, 3.

as being God's Messiah; and their horrible sin in delivering Him up to be crucified, for which they have been so long and so fearfully punished, shall be repented of, and confessed, and freely forgiven. Rom. xi. 25, 26, 27. 2 Cor. iii. 15, 16.

And now to turn to a point of resemblance, which is not often noticed. Joseph in his youth had an inkling of his future greatness. In his dreams he saw himself binding sheaves with the rest of his family in the field, and his sheaf arose and stood upright, while the sheaves of his brethren stood round about and made obeisance unto it. And on a second occasion he had a dream that the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance unto him. And it is added that his father, though he rebuked him at first, "observed the saying." So upon our Lord there dawned, when He was a boy of twelve, the full consciousness that He was the Only Begotten Son of the Father, in whose courts He must needs be found, and in whose business He Genesis xxxvii. 5—12. Genesis xxxvii. 10, 11.

must needs be engaged. And His mother, we are told, though she did not fully understand them, "kept all these sayings in her heart"—the very same Greek word being used for "kept," which is used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament for Jacob's "observing the saying" of Joseph. It is a very expressive word, and means to watch over a thing closely or vigorously, lest it should escape and get away. It was thus that the Patriarch treasured up in his heart, and from time to time mused upon, the glimpses of future greatness with which Joseph had been favoured in his dreams. It was thus that S. Mary the Virgin made her inmost heart a seed-plot, where she deposited all the sayings of her Divine Son. She failed to understand many of them at first (that is, as I explained in a former Chapter, she failed to realise them, or take them in fully); but what happens to seed carefully nursed beneath the soil happened to the words of the Holy Child,

as they lay within her mind; they burst, and sprouted, and pushed up into the light, and there blossomed—unfolded themselves into a glorious meaning, which she had not at first dreamt of, when she received them. Thus, when long afterwards the Apostles returned from the mount called Olivet, and assured her that they had seen her Divine Son taken up into Heaven, she then understood as she had never done before—understood under a new light—what that mysterious attraction was, which had drawn Him in His boyhood to the Temple, and kept Him there. He had come from Heaven originally, and had condescended to wear a body which He took from her. He had gone back to Heaven, taking that body with Him. Could it be wondered at that the same attraction which drew Him up at last to the Father's house in Heaven, had drawn Him in His boyhood to the Father's house on earth?

Acts i. 12, 13, 14.

S. Mary the Virgin seems to have been not

a talker, but a thinker. In the earlier part of this Chapter, while the shepherds talked of the vision of angels which they had seen by night, and they that heard it wondered, and no doubt retailed it to others in conversation, Mary felt that there was a meaning in the words, which she must try by patient thought to fathom—"she kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

S. Luke ii. 19.

Our illustrious countryman, the Venerable Bede, has some beautiful remarks here to the effect that the Virgin's modesty extended even to her tongue; that she was ever slow to speak, but swift to hear; always apt to keep silence rather than to break it. Her example may have its use at a time like this, when so many women seem desirous of abandoning the quiet, thoughtful seclusion appropriate to their sex, and, forgetting the precept of S. Paul, "I suffer not a woman to teach," talk as long and as loud, and teach as authoritatively, as men.

1 Tim. ii. 12.

But it is not only for women that the Virgin's character is an example, in the point we are commenting upon. "Thy word have I hid within my heart," says the Psalmist, "that I might not sin against thee." There is no preservative against sin like the being well fortified by the Word of God. When the Bible is studied by any of us devoutly and with prayer, its beautiful words cannot fail occasionally to come home to our hearts with great force; and we then feel that, so long as we have a fast hold upon those words and the sentiments which they awaken, it is impossible for us to fall into sin. Then the way to keep from sin in our daily life is to treasure up these words in our hearts, so as to have them ready for use when they are wanted. Hence it is a great advantage to young people to commit to memory passages of the Bible. Not that those passages, when they are lodged in the memory, are lodged in the heart—by no means. But only that,

Ps. cxix. 11.

if you have the passage in your memory, you may recall it at pleasure, whenever the opportunity may arise, and your heart shall impel you. But though it is a good thing to have Scripture in your memory, that you may draw it into use, it is a much better thing, by drawing it into use, to work it into your memory. Try to do this. When you have said your morning prayer, take your New Testament, and, praying for the help of the Holy Spirit, read two or three verses of the sayings or doings of our Lord. Read them over and over again, till you have fastened them in your memory. Then ask yourself what you are meant to learn from them, how they may help you in your difficulties, strengthen you in your temptations, comfort you in your troubles. When your thoughts are quite at leisure during the day, recall the morning's verses, and think over them every now and then, and try to frame a few simple prayers upon them. Nursed thus

in the heart, and pondered in the mind, these little seeds of Divine Truth will soon swell into great principles, and blossom into fragrant thoughts,—yea, and bring forth golden fruit in temper, character, and conduct, to your exceeding comfort and God's glory.

CHAPTER XXV.

The growth of the Holy Child in wisdom.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature.
S. LUKE ii. part of ver. 52.

THIS verse wraps up all that we know of our Saviour's history for eighteen long years. His body grew in stature, so that, when He reached manhood, He had attained fair and comely proportions. And while the body grew, His human mind grew also; His human intelligence unfolded itself gradually into full blossom, in the same manner as the mind and intelligence of other children, only, doubtless, in a much greater degree, as we see from the narrative of His conversation with the Doctors.

Perhaps you cannot understand how this

could be. To grow in wisdom must imply that the person who grows is, at a more advanced age, wiser than when he was younger; knows something, understands something, which he did not know and understand before. But how could this be in His case? you may reasonably ask. Was He not God, you may say, even when He was quite a young child? And how can God be ignorant of anything, or fail to understand anything? God surely must know all things perfectly, and cannot increase in knowledge. And yet, you see, the same Scriptures which tell us that the Lord Jesus Christ is perfect God, tell us also that He increased in wisdom while He was a child, and show Him to us, even after He had grown up, ignorant of some things. Thus on one occasion, when He was hungry in a morning's walk, He went up to a fig-tree which He saw in the distance, thinking that perhaps He might find fruit upon it, though it had no fruit. And on another occasion, He expressly

S. Mark xi. 12, 13.

S. Mark xiii. 32.

told His disciples that He did not know the time of the last day. Here again the same difficulty meets us. If He was God, how could He do otherwise than know?

Now it is true, doubtless—absolutely true—that our Lord, even while He was a child, was the everlasting God. But it is true also

1 Tim. iii. 16.

that He was "God manifest in the flesh," God sinking Himself down to the low level of human nature. He became really and truly for our sakes an infant, a child, a youth, a man. He did not merely SEEM to be human, but He actually WAS human. Now in order that He might be really and truly a man, He consented, in His wonderful condescension, not to call into exercise those powers which He had as God. You can quite understand a person's having strength, but not using it. A man might have the strength of a giant, who might choose to exert himself very little, might never walk above a few yards, might not employ his hands in any

harder work than turning over the leaves of a book, or reeling off a skein of silk. And in like manner a man may have a perfectly strong and good eyesight; but he need not use it farther than he pleases. He may shut his eyes altogether, in which case he will see nothing. He may only half open them, in which case he will see but dimly and confusedly; or he may go and live in a dungeon, where only a few straggling rays of light pierce the gloom; and then, however good his eyesight may be, he will for the first few seconds be able to see nothing; but when the eye has adjusted itself to the circumstances in which it is placed, he will begin to make out the forms of things around him, but will not see their colours, or have any power at all of examining them closely. Now this may help you to understand how our Blessed Lord, while He had in His Divine Nature all power and all knowledge, yet, when He made His appearance among us as man, was igno-

rant of certain things, and unable to do certain things. In coming into the world, He, by His own free will and consent, limited Himself to do the things which a man could do, and to know the things which a man could know. He came into our poor, narrow, dark nature, just as a free man might come out of the light of day into a narrow, dark, prison-dungeon, and there consent to be shut up. Such an one might have the power of walking miles; but in the dungeon he can only walk a few paces: he might have a very keen eyesight, but in the dungeon he cannot even see to read. Christ took a nature which, till He took it, was not His own, and accommodated Himself to the feebleness and ignorance of that nature—limited Himself, if I may use the expression, to the walls of it. That we may have some faint idea of the truth, let us try to imagine a full-grown man, with all the powers and faculties of a man, taking upon him the nature and condition of a worm. If he is

really to take the worm's nature and condition, and not merely to appear to do so, he must limit himself to move as slowly as a worm, and to see only as far as a worm can see. If, while he had the body of a worm, he were to move as fast as a man moves, and to see as far as a man sees, this would not be taking the nature and condition of a worm, or rather, it would not be taking the *whole* of that nature and condition. For the outward form of a worm—its shape and size and colour—is only a small part of its nature and condition. Its powers of movement, its powers of sight, its habits, method of getting its food, abode in the earth, and so forth—all these things go to make up its nature and condition. Now let me say, in explaining this little parable of the man who took a worm's nature upon him, that our Blessed Lord took on Him not *only* a human body (that is a very small part of human nature) but a human soul, and all that is included in the name of soul—

human affections, human sympathies, a human mind, and a human conscience. Young people who think about the matter at all, are often in error here. They fancy that our Lord was merely God in a human body, that there was nothing human about Him, except His body. But the Scriptures say that He was touched with compassion, and once with anger, which shows that He had human *feelings*. The Scriptures say that He rejoiced in spirit, that He groaned in spirit, that he commended His spirit into the hands of God the Father; all which shows that He had a human *spirit*. And the Scriptures say that He grew in wisdom and intelligence, that He gained knowledge from experience, and that there were some things which He did not know—all which shows that He had a truly human mind. If it had not been a growing mind, it would not have been a *really* human mind; for the first property of the human mind is to grow. God's mind knows all

S. Luke vii. 13.
S. Mark iii. 5.
S. Luke x. 21.
S. John xi. 33, 38.
S. Luke xxiii. 46.

things by insight. The mind or intelligence of animals, which we call instinct (though it never goes wrong, yet) never makes any improvement or advance. "The bees," said Pascal, "made the cells of their honeycomb, and the beaver built his hut, and the bird her nest, just as accurately and as well in the days of Noah as they do now." But man's mind or intelligence—though it is only the limited mind of a creature—is for ever making advance, and from reasoning and experience gaining knowledge which it had not previously. And the Lord Jesus, in taking a human mind, submitted to this condition of it, without which His mind would not have been human.

"Jesus increased in wisdom." What an extraordinary supernatural Child, if this increase was never for a moment interrupted or checked! For what is the usual way with children? Solomon tells us; "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child" (tied fast there,

Prov. xxii. 15.

so that the child cannot get rid of it); "but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." Dislike of learning, dislike of religious exercises, indolence, falsehood, want of forethought, inconsiderateness, self-indulgence—how plentifully are all these symptoms of foolishness found in ordinary children! But in Him was none of these things; but simple, quiet, gradual "increase in wisdom." Earthly parents never had in His case to find fault or punish. True, the rod of chastisement
Lam. iii. 1. was laid upon Him heavily ("I am the man," says He in the Lamentations, "that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath"), but it was the chastisement of our sins, for which, in taking our nature, He had made himself responsible, which He took upon Him to answer for, though He had neither part nor
Isa. liii. 5. lot in them. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Holy Child's increase in favour with God and man.

And Jesus increased.....in favour with God and man.—S. Luke ii. 52.

"JESUS increased in favour with God." Almighty God was more and more pleased with Him, as He grew up to man's estate. And at length, when He was fully grown, and made ready in every way to begin His great work, His Heavenly Father found full and entire satisfaction in Him, and indicated this full and entire satisfaction at His Baptism by a voice from Heaven, which said, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." We may say, I think, that every day until His Baptism took place, Christ was growing

S. Luke iii. 22.

in wisdom, and in favour with God and man. And why should we fix His Baptism as the period when the growing was finished? Because the great work, which He had come into the world to do, began at His Baptism; He then entered upon His office, to which He was solemnly consecrated by the Holy Ghost descending upon Him in the form of a dove. All the years before His Baptism had been years of preparation. Those after His Baptism were years of work. And you know that He was not baptized till He began to be about thirty years of age—an age, according to our own way of thinking, long after a person is fully grown up. Perhaps this may have been meant to teach us that young men and women have a great deal to learn, even when what is commonly called their "education" is finished, and they have passed out of the hand of tutors and governors. They have still a great deal to learn of their own hearts, and a great deal to learn, which can only be

S. Luke iii. 22.

S. Luke iii. 23.

learned by mixing with society, and observing the ways and manners of men. And if a man is to be made uncommonly useful, and God designs him to be His instrument in doing a very great work, the period spent in preparation, in discipline, in training for the work, will probably have to be longer.

"Jesus increased in favour with God." This is of course spoken of the human nature, and only of the human nature, of our Lord. As the Son of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, who had lain in the Father's bosom "before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world," the Lord Jesus must have been always equally dear to the Father's heart, equally approved by Him. But the everlasting Son was now manifested in human nature; and this human nature became more and more perfect, richer in wisdom, riper in experience, more thoroughly moulded into conformity with God's will and image, as time

S. John i. 18.

Ps. xc. 2.

went on. Not that there ever was, even in the human nature of Christ, any particle of sin. He was "separate from sinners,"—His affections had no propensity to sin, His will no bias towards it. No doubt His affections and His will shrank, as ours do, from every form of pain and suffering; and therefore, when the right course could not be taken without undergoing pain and suffering, there arose a struggle and a trial. But the shrinking from suffering is not sin; it is part of the condition of human nature. We may compare our Lord's period of growth, during which He was prepared for His work, to the gradual execution of some great piece of sculpture, a bust or a statue. Let us say that the marble chosen for the work is a piece without flaw, spotless white, without a single vein running through it. Thus our Lord's human nature, unlike that which all of us inherit, was perfectly free from all tendency to evil; "holy, harmless, undefiled" at His very birth. But

Heb. vii. 26.

Heb. vii. 26.

a white block of marble, though white when it is drawn from the quarry, can be made a more perfectly beautiful thing by being chiselled into an exquisite form. And a human nature, which was originally sinless, may be made a more perfectly beautiful thing by being disciplined through grace, and through the experience of suffering, into the perfect likeness of God. And you can quite understand how a sculptor, who is daily at work upon a statue, has an increasing satisfaction in it, as the work becomes more and more perfect, views it with greater pleasure and complacency to-day, when it has received so many finishing touches, than he did some months ago, when it was a mere resemblance of the human form in outline. The work increases in favour with him daily; and when it is finished, he is then perfectly satisfied. Thus it was that Jesus, as a man, "increased in favour with God."

"Jesus increased in favour with man."

For as He had not yet commenced His active work, He had not yet run athwart the prejudices of men, nor borne His testimony against the evil which was in them. Israel in Egypt was, in the childhood of his national existence there, caressed and made much of; young Joseph was made governor over all the land and held in highest esteem, and his family well provided for; but afterwards a turn came in public feeling. "There arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph;" and Israel, God's Son, even His firstborn, was tyrannised over, and had his life made bitter with hard bondage, and was made to serve in the iron furnace. Even so He, of whom Israel was a shadow, and who in a far higher sense than Israel was God's own "Son, even His firstborn," found favour as a child with His own people; His docility and sweet gracious submissiveness won its way with every one, not excepting the hard and worldly minded; while the extraordinary

Gen. xlv. 8—12.

Ex. i. 8.

Ex. iv. 22.

Ex. i. 13, 14.

intelligence which sparkled in His eyes, lighted up His countenance, and found expression ever and anon from his lips, made those who witnessed it admire as well as love. The neighbours of the holy home at Nazareth envied and congratulated the Virgin upon having such a Child; or, in her own dignified and graceful phrase, "called her blessed." But let this public favourite leave the obscure shadow of the holy home, and make His entrance upon the stage of public life; and then the love and admiration shall be exchanged for malignant hatred. All God's saints had, in their turn, by their example and testimony, condemned the world; and He, the King of Saints, shall condemn it more emphatically than they all. In His own native town they would have hurled Him headlong from the brow of a precipice. "The world," said He to His brethren, "cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." And

S. Luke i. 48.

S. Luke iv. 28, 29.

S. John vii. 7.

S. John xix. 15.

this hatred found vent in the cry, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him," as well as in the taunts and gibes around the cross.

His followers must not expect to fare better than their Master. Christian children are, so long as they remain children, sheltered from the dislike and opposition of the world. If they are docile, modest, intelligent, and obedient, every one will have a good word for them. Often people will praise such children more than is good for them. But if you wish to be faithful servants of your Lord, you must not expect this to last, after you have grown up and gone out into life. You will have to protest against things that are wrong, against intemperance, dishonesty, impurity, bribery, always by your example, and often by words of warning and protest. And the people, whose conduct you condemn by your protest, cannot be expected to like you—often will show their dislike by sneers

or opposition. It will be a hard trial, when it does come; and until it comes, you must fortify yourselves to meet it. Do so, by seeking now to increase in the favour of God, by learning even now not to set too much value on men's opinion, and by coveting the praise that cometh from God only. Try to pray earnestly with your whole heart for the grace which you need. Try to do all things under God's eye. Try to look at Him as your reconciled Father in Christ, and to give Him your hand, that He may lead you along the thorny paths of life. Try in all things to rule yourself by His Word. And then the sense of *His* favour and smile shall make you independent of the favour and smile of man.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Holy Child's long preparation for His work.

When the fulness of the time was come.
GAL. iv. part of ver. 4.

WE have now gone through, verse by verse, the only notice of our Blessed Lord's childhood, which God has been pleased to give us in His Holy Word. After this we lose sight of Him altogether for a long period of His life, and hear no more of Him, until He begins to be "about *thirty* years of age." Now the incident of His being found among the Doctors in the Temple happened "when he was *twelve* years old." Take twelve from thirty, and eighteen is left. And thus we are not told anything about our Lord for eighteen long years. And, remember, His whole life

S. Luke iii. 23.

S. Luke ii. 42.

was a very short one; it did not last more than thirty-three years. Eighteen years out of thirty-three is a very large proportion; more than half. It had been foretold of Christ that He should be a Prophet like unto Moses. And accordingly we find that there is a large portion of the life of Moses, of which we know nothing at all. Moses lived one hundred and twenty years, a life divided into three periods of forty each. During the first period he was at Pharaoh's court, though we hear next to nothing of him after the time that he was drawn out of the water in his infancy. During the second period he was in the wilderness of Midian keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, having fled thither because he had killed the oppressive Egyptian, and was afraid of the king's wrath. And it was not until this second forty years had expired that he entered upon the great work of his life — the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt.

Deut. xviii. 15, 18. Acts iii. 22, 23.

Acts vii. 23, 30. Ex. vii. 7, & Deut. xxxiv. 7.

Ex. ii. 2—11.

Ex. ii. 15 —end.

Acts vii. 30.

Now it must needs strike us as strange that both Moses and Christ took such a long time in preparation for their work, and that in Christ's case the work itself was so very short, lasting only three years. Strange that in Moses' case the hour had not yet come for delivering Israel, when his spirit stirred him to avenge his oppressed brethren, but that he had still forty years to wait for it. Strange that in our Lord's case, He was not, when fully grown up—say at the age of twenty-one—prepared to enter at once upon His ministry, but had still nine years to wait, during which we are left to suppose that He pursued the trade of a carpenter, and made ploughs and yokes for oxen! Can we see any reason for this? Do we learn any lesson from it?

Probably we cannot see the reason fully. But thus much we may see, that works of great importance and interest cannot be done in a hurry, or on the spur of the moment, but

must be slowly and gradually prepared for. It is God's way to have a very long period of preparation for all His greatest works. Persons who study the structure of the earth tell us that it took millions upon millions of years, before it became fit to be the abode of man; that it was inhabited, long before our first parents were placed on it, by monstrous animals, of which the fossilized remains are still found, and that its surface underwent all manner of changes. Man was to be God's chief creature; God Himself meant to take upon Him man's nature; and so the stage, upon which man was to play his part, was to be built up very carefully, furnished beforehand with all sorts of articles for man's use, and provided with beautiful scenery.

Then, again, only consider how very long a time it took, after man fell and became a sinner, to make the world ready for the coming of the Redeemer. Probably, when Eve gave birth to her first child, she thought

Gen. iii. 15, & iv. 1.

that this was the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head. But how greatly was she mistaken! Child after child was born into the world; she and her husband both submitted to that sentence of death, which they had drawn down by their sin; and, when they had passed away, their posterity still grew and grew, and underwent all manner of strange reverses, before Abraham, the forefather of the Jews, was born into the world. Then a nation had to spring from Abraham; and, after his family had grown into a nation, they had to be trained, and disciplined, and made fit to become the religious teachers of the world, and then scattered among other nations, before "the fulness of the time came," and men were fitted to understand and appreciate the blessings of Redemption. The world was four thousand years preparing for Christ, and could not have been prepared earlier, we may be sure, or Christ's coming would not have been delayed so long

Again, look at God's ways in Nature. How long the seeds and roots, after being sown and planted, lie underground before they burst,—much more before they push upward a green sprout into the light of day. The sprout is prepared beneath the soil in darkness and silence, and until the spring comes round there is no token of it.

What may we learn from these ways of God? Surely this important lesson; that for every great and important work we should prepare beforehand. Young people are being prepared during childhood and youth for what lies before them in life. Their teachers are sowing in their minds wise and holy lessons. Their parents are doing what in them lies to discipline their hearts and characters, and to train them up to meet the trials which may await them. This period of preparation should not be shortened; rather the contrary. It is a cruelty and wrong to a child to send him out into life before he is fit for it; to make

him earn money when he ought to be at school, much more to make him drudge and toil, while his frame is tender and cannot bear hard labour. And those children, on whom this cruelty is not inflicted, who are sent to school and taught good things, and not made drudges of, ought to think that they must prepare *themselves* for life, if they are ever to be really ready for it; ought to look at their childhood and youth as the period when a great stock of good lessons has to be laid in, which may hereafter bring forth fruit; for hereafter, may be, they will have no time to improve their minds, but will find it necessary to rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, in order to earn a livelihood.

Ps. cxxvii. 2.

And again, God's ordinances and worship are a very solemn work, for which the more we prepare the greater will be the benefit we shall derive from them. "Before thy prayers," says the wise man, "prepare thyself." Our

Church teaches us to prepare our minds for keeping Christmas by appointing the previous season of Advent. And the same with Easter. The Church appoints Lent as a preparation for it. Let us act more or less, in all our devotions, on the plan thus pointed out. Before we pray in public, or in private, let us collect our thoughts ; let us try to set before us the Presence of God, let us shut the door of our minds as far as possible upon other subjects, let us breathe a prayer to be helped to ask aright. Before we come to Church, let us if possible read the Lessons over beforehand, and we shall find that we shall reap from them at least double profit. When we are to be confirmed, let us think of it as much as possible, and read about it as much as possible beforehand, and give great heed to the instruction which we receive, and pray daily for God's blessing on our Confirmation. And, above all, let us not venture to approach the Holy Communion without preparing our minds and

hearts carefully beforehand ; without searching our consciences, reconciling ourselves to those we may have offended, and praying earnestly for those dispositions which alone can make the holy Sacrament a strengthening and refreshing of the soul. The Lord did not enter upon His ministry, before S. John the Baptist had prepared the way before Him. And He does not come into any heart of man now, which is not humbled, softened, and fitted in some measure to receive Him.

S. Matt. iii. 3. Mal. iv. 5, 6.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The respective advantages of primitive and modern believers.

Neither did his brethren believe in him.

S. John vii. 5.

WE observed in our last Chapter that Holy Scripture tells us nothing about our Lord between the ages of twelve and thirty, maintains a perfect silence as to all that He said and did in the course of those eighteen years. This is disappointing to us. For how profoundly interesting would have been to us the slightest notice of the things He said and did during this period—any anecdote whatever like that, of which we have just finished the consideration, which might give us an insight into His character, and show us the

workings of His human mind as He grew in the experience of life. Can we at all see a reason why it should have pleased God to keep these things from us, which would certainly have been deeply interesting, and as we are apt to suppose, edifying? I believe we can. And in this, my last Chapter on our Lord's Childhood, I will endeavour to explain the reason. We are very apt to think that those people who lived in our Lord's time, and saw Him do miracles, and heard His beautiful discourses, had very great advantages for believing on Him; much more than we have, who live so long after His time, and only know about Him by reading the Gospels. And there is no doubt that these people had some great advantages for believing, which we do not possess. There is no doubt that, if we had seen Him heal with a word the man sick of a palsy, walk upon the waves, and call Lazarus out of his grave, it would have been a help to us in believing that He was what

He professed to be, the Son of the most high God. But we must remember that there were many persons, who had constant opportunities both of hearing our Lord's discourses and seeing His miracles, who, after all, did *not* believe in Him. And it is remarkable that among these unbelievers (as you read in the text) were His own brethren, *i. e.*, the members of His own family, whether literally His brethren, as some people suppose, or only, as I much prefer to think, His first cousins, or His half-brothers, the sons of one of the Virgin's sisters, or the sons of S. Joseph by a former marriage.

It is a law of our minds that persons and things, which we see every day, and which we are in the habit of making free with, do not much impress us. Sometimes very good persons live alongside of us, but we are so much mixed up with them that we do not know how good they are, and find it only when they are taken away from us. And so we

can quite understand how our Lord's brethren must have found it difficult to believe that He was the Messiah, the Eternal Son of God, for the very reason that they knew so much about Him in His early days. They had seen Him reared, and nursed, and taught very much like other children; He had never put forth any miraculous power till He attended the wedding in Cana of Galilee; and He was evidently subject to all the same bodily infirmities as themselves. And we may be quite sure that if God had allowed *us* to see Christ very constantly and very closely while He was on earth; if He had allowed us to see Him thirsty and travel-stained at Jacob's well, hungry on His morning's walk from Bethany, falling asleep in the fishing-boat, very much fatigued after a long day's work; if He had told us several particulars of His childhood and boyhood, instead of giving us only one very solemn and striking anecdote; if He had told us the remarks which He made as a

S. John iv. 6, 7.
S. Mark, xi. 12.
S. Mark iv. 38.

child, what His recreations were, what teaching His mother gave Him, and what little humble offices He used to do in the carpenter's shop, it would not have been so easy for us as it now is to believe in Him as our Saviour and our God. The little common details of a poor child's life would have dragged down our minds instead of raising them up. For indeed there was so much in what His disciples saw of Him to make it difficult for them to believe in Him as the Son of God, that it was necessary as a help to their faith, that He should be transfigured before them, that His body should stream forth with rays of visible light, and that a voice should fall from Heaven upon their ears, declaring Him to be the beloved Son, in whom the Father was well pleased.

S. Mark ix. 2, 3.

S. Matt. xvii. 5.

Then the lesson is, that we should be most thankful, not only for what God has told us in His Holy Word, but also for what He has kept back from us. We must not be curious

when reading our Bibles: where God keeps silence, be sure He has good reason for it; and to know what He has not been pleased to reveal, would be at best useless to us—sometimes it would be positively mischievous. We may be sure also that, if the early disciples had certain advantages which we have not, we have others which they had not. Looking back upon our Lord through the long vista of ages, and seeing Him surrounded with the veneration of mankind, worshipped in thousands of Churches, and adored by every true servant of God, we find it much more easy to regard Him as our God, than if we had seen Him in the weakness of childhood, and clothed with all the innocent infirmities of our nature. And if God had given to us in His Word too lively a picture of those infirmities, this might have been the same sort of stumbling-block to our faith, as if we had seen them with our eyes.

The truth is that the first disciples of Christ

had *their* difficulties in believing, which were of one kind; and we have *ours*, which are of another. But God's grace enabled *them* to believe firmly in spite of their difficulties; and the same grace can (and, if we seek it, will) enable *us* also to believe firmly in spite of *ours*. And true faith will lead us, as it led them, to throw ourselves at our Saviour's feet, crying out, "My Lord and my God!" and to give ourselves up, body, soul, and spirit, to His service. And this faith shall be yours, if you will ask it of God sincerely, fervently, and perseveringly for your Saviour's sake.

S. John xx. 28.
1 Thes. v. 23.
Rom. xii. 1, 2.

And now we have finished the consideration of the only recorded incident of our Lord's Childhood, which we began many months ago. I have purposely said some things in this little book, which are at present above some children, because I wish to lead the readers to exercise their minds, and not merely to listen, but, what is much more difficult, to

think. We are told that we ought to preach down, when we preach to young folks or simple folks. No doubt it is right to be plain and easy; but it is important to remember that the object of preaching down is to raise up the people who are preached to, not to leave them on their own level. I want you, my young readers, to read each Chapter over more than once, and to think it over, until you have

Heb. xii. 2. mastered it. The great rule of holy life for all of us, children and men, is "Looking unto Jesus." What I have aimed at in this Commentary is to lead you to look to Him in your childhood; to consider what God tells us about *His* Childhood, and to lay it to heart. And if I shall in any measure induce any of my readers to do this, I shall have an abundant reward.

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