



FINDING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.—From Painting by Holman Hunt.

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS.

FROM HENRY VAN DYKE IN 'HARPER'S MAGAZINE.'

There are some who find it difficult to think that Jesus ever had a real and true childhood. They cannot see how one who appeared before the world with such Divine authority and fulfilled his mission so sublimely could ever have been

'A simple child
That lightly draws its breath.'

But the evangelist Luke, who must surely have thought as reverently and devoutly of Christ's supremacy as any man could think, does not seem to have felt this difficulty; for he says, 'And the child grew, and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.'

This is a very brief record to cover such an important period of life as that which lies between infancy and the twelfth year; and yet, brief as it is, how clearly it illuminates the vital truth? Growth is the key-word of the passage. Growth is the wonder and the glory of all childhood. Growth was the beautiful secret of the childhood of Jesus.

There does not appear to have been anything sudden or startling in the development of his personality. It went forward gradually and imperceptibly. The evangelist suggests this by the solitary incident which he relates of Christ's early years.

NAZARETH.

The legends gathered in the apocryphal books are tedious and tawdry inventions; they give us no real help in filling out the outline of Christ's childhood; but the interpretations of art are rich and full of meaning. No part of the gospel history has been more abundantly and beautifully illustrated in art than this single verse of St. Luke, which tells us in a word how quietly the life of Jesus unfolded in the home at Nazareth.

For this sacred instinct of art there is abundant historical justification. I do not suppose that the painters thought of seeking for it; but if they had, they would have found good ground for believing that the child Jesus, living in a devout Hebrew household in the little town of Nazareth, must have enjoyed the four great blessings of childhood:

• A pure and peaceful home, ruled by love and piety.

• A fresh and simple life, in close contact with nature.

• A joyous fellowship with other children.

• A patient and reverent education.

The Jewish people have always been distinguished for their loving care of child life, and for the strength of their family feeling.

It was a happy circumstance that this home was in Galilee. For although that

northern province was despised by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as being rude in speech and rustic in manners, life there was far more free and natural than it was in Judea, where the yoke of ceremonialism pressed heavily upon the people, and their spirit seemed to reflect something of the sombreness of the landscape. Galilee was fair and smiling. The vine and the olive flourished there; the rabbis said 'it was easier to rear a forest of olive-trees in Galilee than one child in Judea.' The little town of Nazareth lies in a high valley. 'Fifteen gently rounded hills,' says a modern traveller, 'seem as if they met to form an enclosure for this peaceful basin.' They rise round it like the edge of a shell to guard it from intrusion. It is a rich and beautiful field, abounding in gay flowers, in fig-trees, small gardens, hedges of the prickly-pear, and the dense rich grass affords an abundant pasture. The well of water which tradition points out at the scene of the angel's visit to the Virgin Mary still flows in the open green space at the end of the town, and the women, fairer than the other daughters of Palestine, come thither to draw, and the children in their bright robes play around it. There can be little doubt that the child Jesus found innocent joys beside that fountain and in those verdant pastures. The intimacy with the world out-of-doors shown in his later teaching, his love for birds and flowers, his close observation of natural objects, the fondness with which he turned for rest to the lonely hill-sides and the waters of the lake, all speak of one of those deep and sincere friendships with nature which can only be begun in their lasting perfection by a child.

HIS EDUCATION.

But we may be sure that the education of the child was not neglected, for on this point the Jewish law was strict. Religion was the chief factor in education, and doubtless it was begun by the mother, who would explain to her son the meaning of the many pious rites and customs which were observed in the household, like the lighting of the Sabbath lamp, and the touching, by every one who passed in or out of the house, of the parchment on the door-post with the Divine Name written on it. The fascinating stories of the Old Testament would be the charms by which she would hold him listening in her arms. She would teach him passages of Scripture to recite from memory. From the same sacred pages he would learn his letters. When he was five or six years old he would be sent to school, to sit on the floor with the other boys around the teacher and receive instruction, the Scriptures remaining his only text-book until he was ten years old. Whether there was a school in Nazareth at the time of Christ we do not know, for the introduction of universal and compulsory education throughout the land did

not occur until a later period. But, however that may have been, it is certain that the devotion of such parents as Mary and Joseph would not neglect the duties of instruction; and we may confidently say of Jesus, as St. Paul said of his disciple Timothy, that 'from a child he knew the Holy Scriptures.'

Let us see, then, how these four golden threads of home life, and intercourse with nature, and happy companionship, and holy instruction, have been woven by the artists into their thought of the childhood of Christ.

The works of art which depict the subject are almost innumerable.

FINDING CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE.

The Finding of Christ in the Temple is the culmination of his childhood. If our reading of the gospel story thus far has been true, we must interpret this incident in harmony with it. We feel therefore that art was astray in its earlier reading of 'Christ among the Doctors.' All the artists, from the time when they first began to treat the subject, which was certainly as early as the date of the mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome, placed Jesus in an elevated position, and represented him as instructing the rabbis.

But this idea is hardly true to the gospel narrative. For St. Luke makes us feel that Jesus appeared in the Temple not as a teacher, but as a learner, one who was preparing for his life work by coming into close contact with the religious life of the people whom he was to deliver from the yoke of the law and lead into the true rest of souls.

But questions from a child are often messages from God. And questions from such a child as Jesus must have been like illuminations piercing through the dry and flimsy web of rabbinic subtleties. It was at this that the listeners were astonished, not with the hostile surprise which would be excited by the sight of a boy of twelve teaching his elders, but with a pleasant wonder at the simplicity, the directness, the searching intelligence of his inquiries, and the discretion of his replies.

This conception of 'Christ among the Doctors' has been expressed in modern art by two most admirable pictures, significant in the deepest sense of the intense interest which the best minds of this century have taken in the real life of Christ. One of them is Mr. Holman Hunt's brilliant painting of 'The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple.' The other is the picture by Professor Heinrich Hofmann at Dresden.

THE TRUE HOME.

There is surely a vital truth for our own lives to be gathered from this interpretation of the childhood of Jesus. It gives us a deeper sense of the sacredness and the power of the home.

The perfect manhood of him whom all Christendom adores as the Son of God was

matured and moulded in the tender shelter of the home. It was there that he felt the influences of truth and grace. To that source we may trace some of the noblest qualities of his human character. And yet, if there is anything which Christendom appears to be in danger of losing, it is the possibility of such a home as that in which Jesus grew to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Is it not true?

'The world is too much with us, late and soon; Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.'

The false and cruel conditions of industrial competition, and the morbid overgrowth of great cities, where human lives are crowded together to the point of physical and moral suffocation, have raised an enormous barrier between great masses of mankind and the home which their natural instincts desire and seek. The favored classes, on the other hand, are too much alienated by false standards of happiness, by the mania of publicity, by the insane rivalries of wealth, to keep their reverence for the pure and lowly ideals of domestic life. A new aristocracy is formed which lives in mammoth hotels, and a new democracy which exists in gigantic tenements. Public amusements increase in splendor and frequency, but private joys grow rare and difficult, and even the capacity for them seems to be withering, at least in the two extremes of human society where the home wears a vanishing aspect.

And yet—so runs my simple and grateful creed—this appearance is only transient and superficial. Deep in the heart of humanity lies the domestic passion, which will survive the mistakes of a civilization not yet fully enlightened, and prove the truth of the saying, 'Before the fall, Paradise was man's home; since the fall, home has been his Paradise.'

For the MESSENGER.

OUR FIRST ANNIVERSARY.

Yes, our teachers and our parents call it 'anniversary.'

But like a birthday party it really seems to be! Our Sunday-school is one-year-old—we come to a merry meeting

To celebrate its happy growth, in song and social greeting:

Then, welcome friends, to share with us, this innocent delight;

So many beaming faces, sure bespeak a joyful night!

We know that you will also join in this, the children's prayer—

That He who keeps the sparrows e'er within His watchful care,

May bless the faithful teachers here, who, by the Bible rule,

Of 'Suffer little ones to come,' first laid our Sabbath-school.

They seek no praise of men, but labor in their Master's name;

May His 'well done' be theirs, at last—an all-sufficient fame.

No risk investing in His work—the bonds are all secure,

The drafts are honored without fail, and every promise sure.

So, blessing on our Sunday-school! 'Tis one more service-band

'Mid myriads now flourishing throughout each waken'd land!

'Tis one more bud, expanding towards the Sun's life-giving search—

With God's own smile upon it, may it bloom into His church!

'Tis one more link of love, that helps to loop the circling chain,

Engirdling earth for Jesus, ere He shall come to reign!

'Tis one more banner to the breeze, all mottoed for the fight—

Where'er it waves, behold the leagues of Evil put to flight!

'Tis one more gathering, to the call of, 'Love ye one another,'

From Christ, who gives the royal right to claim Him, 'Elder Brother,'

And a group, with Him, in heaven, may our Sabbath-school yet be!

None missing, old or young, at that grand Anniversary!

GRANT MACINTYRE.

POSSESSING ALL THINGS.

'Depths of lowliness! Heights of holiness! More, oh, more, of each heavenly thing!'

Oh, how to gain them? how to retain them? 'They are all thine own in Christ thy King.'

R. BALL RUTTER.