

I. "Little Children."—We know what little children are, their limited knowledge, their facile receptiveness of impression good or bad, their liability to be mistaken, to be deceived, and led by allurements to their hurt, their exuberant joy in anticipation of frolic or prize, and in the acquisition of a trifle to be valueless in a week; we know how their undisguised selfishness will appear, and then again their readiness to share with young companions, their childish fallings out about nothing, and again their easy reconciliations. We bear with them. We pity and soothe them in their sorrows, tho' the grief may arise from nothing more serious than a broken doll, or a lost piece of silver, or the thwarting of some foolish or impossible whim.

We think of their future—what we call the stern realities, the work and the trials of life that await them, forgetting that their future, this after life of theirs, is just the broader stage whereon these children, grown to men and women, shall meet nothing more joyous, more vexing, more pleasurable or painful, or even more helpful or detrimental to their moral nature, than they are meeting now in the earlier stage of childhood—forgetful, too, that we grown-up children have yet our toys, our trifles looming large and important like, our foolish and hurtful desires, our selfishness, and our contentions about insignificances, just as we had when we were little children about matters we smile at now.

By "little children" so frequently used in his epistles, the old, old Christian disciple meant the Christian people of all ages who could read or hear; read the letter he sent them. It was his kindly affectionate way of speaking to and of the people he knew and loved—an endearing way of speaking—fatherly, tender, and withal so down-setting to self sufficiency.

The title is as applicable to us, Both as it respects our place and relation in existence, and as it respects our knowledge of God and relations to God, we are in the state of childhood—"little children.

(1.) As denizens of earth we are only appearing in the opening act of an endless series, entering and passing across the stage of present life to scenes from which the curtain has not been drawn.

Holding by the "three score years and ten" life the oldest living man is but a child in the beginnings of man's immortal destiny.

Our thoughts more commonly run upon the progress made towards the manhood of the race within the confines of the "life that now is." Man has subdued nature, has advanced in knowledge of all kinds, has traversed earth and sea, gathering the products of all climes and transforming them by manufacturing skill into textures and forms of use and beauty. We have a vast and varied literature, the accumulation of learning, research, profound thought and fitful fancy, placed within the reach of ordinary intelligence. We have the results of inventive and constructive art and of scientific study: in astronomy, giving account of the starry heavens; in geology, describing the physical structure and history of the earth during periods interminable; in physiology, laying open to our view in their order and relations the organs upon which life acts in man "fearfully and wonderfully made." We have results in another order—in steamships, railways, electric telegraph, great cities with their all providing economies, settled and cultivated continents with their teeming industries, and government and laws giving cohesion, system, order; ministering to the welfare of all, the least instructed and the most helpless partaking of the benefits the gifted and the strong have originated by genius enterprise and toil. Surely ours is an old, matured, richly-endowed manhood. So have our little children in their circumscribed world, in their lesser range of thought, their industries, their important affairs, their marvels, their admirable achievements in learning and work, and their little great gifted ones. And our real life lying forward in the future to which this present life is leading, transcends present life infinitely more than does completest manhood surpass the child life of the veriest infant. Earthly life is but the childhood stage of the life that is to be, to be passed we know not how or where forever.

Can it be a question that Death, which sunders the bonds that link us to the seen and temporal, does aught but carry on our life into the wider area of its being and becoming in the unseen and