

Jesus as a Child.

BY THE DEAN OF WESTMINSTER.

WHAT we read from the Gospel of St. Luke is almost the only thing which we know about our Saviour's childhood. He tells us that when He was twelve years old—that is, when He had reached the age at which amongst the Jews children were first taught to learn some trade, and first became subject to what the law required, His parents took Him with them on their yearly journey to the great feast of the passover. It was the bright season of spring. The ground was covered with flowers. The bright green leaves of the fig tree were coming out; the voice of the turtle-dove was heard amongst the trees, and thousands of people were going up from hill and valley to the great service in the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem—some on horses, some on asses, some on camels, and among these thousands were Joseph and Mary, and the little boy Jesus. They stayed for some days in the holy city, and there it was for the first time He saw the splendid temple, just as you see this beautiful abbey to-day. When the time of their stay was over, again the great caravans or companies began to move towards their distant homes. They advanced on their first day's march, and at evening they reached their halting-place. It is thought to have been a village on the wild hills about fifteen miles from Jerusalem, where there are some wells cut in the rock, a place called from that the well of Beira. Tents were pitched, horses, camels, and mules were fastened around for the evening, when Joseph and Mary found that the child came not as usual back to His mother's arms at the close of the day. They had imagined, as might well be the case, that He was with some of their kinsfolk or acquaintances, with His mother's friends, or the uncle Cleopas, or with the many who would be glad to befriend the child of such a house. He came not, and they sought Him from tent to tent and found Him not, and returned to Jerusalem, and for three days to and from house to house, from inn to inn, they sought Him in great distress, till at last

they found Him in the cloisters of the temple, with the great teachers of Jerusalem gathered around Him, the little boy sitting in the midst of them.

Sometimes it has been thought that He went there to teach the teachers in the temple. There is a sense in which this is true. All parents know that even in the case of their own children they can hardly hear them learn without learning something from them in return. The simplicity of their questions and answers, the innocence of their eager and inquiring faces, are full of instruction.

The chief lesson of the story is what it teaches us; what it teaches children, and learners, and scholars everywhere, as to the way in which they ought to learn. First, you see that He was determined to get the knowledge which might the better enable Him to fulfil the great purpose which His heavenly Father had placed before Him. "How is it," he says, "that ye sought for Me? do you not know that I must be about My Father's business in My Father's house?" He knew that His Father's business—His heavenly Father's business—began thus early; that it was as truly His Father's business to try to get knowledge when He was a child as it would be His Father's business when He grew up to heal the sick and teach the ignorant, as it would be His Father's business at last to die for man upon the cross. And so it should be with us, as soon as our reason begins to open. Yes, even at twelve years old and before, so soon must we remember we are about our Father's business. You who have the advantage of good schools and careful teachers, make the best use of them whilst they are yours. The lessons which you now learn at school or at home, the hymns which you repeat, the good stories which you are taught to read, all these are your heavenly Father's business. Don't neglect them or leave them on one side. See that they are properly learnt now, and they will help you to do your duty wherever you go hereafter.

Our Lord shows us what was the particular way in which He went about His Father's business, and prepared Himself for after life. He was in the temple, but He had not been content simply with the

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