

## LITTLE CHILDREN.

A CHILDLIKE character does not necessarily belong to those who are children in years, although it is quite consistent with what is most manly in mature life. A child may be anything but childlike, for it may be childish and worse than childish, it may be so badly trained as to be full of selfishness, vanity, and self-consciousness, self-willed and unspeakably disagreeable. It is one of the saddest sights when a child has been literally spoiled, and its childlike beauty destroyed by foolish and unprincipled training; and yet it is this type of childish weakness and petulance instead of true child-likeness, which is sometimes adopted as a model by persons who wish to be considered pious. The simpering tones of voice; the puling sentimentalism; the over-weening vanity, and self-willed dogmatism, combined with bitterness which are frequently discovered among certain religionists, arises from a blunder of imitating what is *childish* in the *spoilt child*, instead of what is *childlike* in the *true child*; for the charm of childhood is its self-forgetfulness, its teachableness, its loving confidence, and its thorough candour.

It was indeed a sweet model which Christ put before us when he placed that child in the midst and told us all to be childlike. Who does not, in recalling the years of his own childhood, feel them like the memory of an other world where all was bright and pure? Amid the cares and disappointments of life, it does one good even to think of that past when the fresh breezes and the clear streams and innumerable simple delights filled every hour with joy. Then we had no lost confidences or perplexing doubts, the dear names of Father and Mother were our continual shelter. What a guileless faith and pure love were then ours. It is no wonder that Christ took a child to represent His kingdom, for who ever looked on the stainless purity of his own child without feeling himself drawn nearer a better and purer world, and nearer to God? Every child is a revelation to us of things ineffably good and holy. What poets and idealists they are; see them in the nursery, where, like born dramatists, they invest each common object with human interest and play their little parts as emperors, while any stick or chair serves in their eyes as subject or rebel. You see them, too, in the most wretched city courts in rags begrimed with filth, yet clothing that sunless alley with an ideal glory where they mimic the pagentry of state; are kings or warriors, and drive in their brilliant equipage or navigate the stormiest sea, and behold visions of splendour and romance that exalt them far above their surroundings.

"There's a proper masher!" said a little scare-crow in the hearing of a friend of mine, as the child watched his companion tricked out in a castaway hat that almost extinguished his head, and strutted about, his thin bare legs and chapped heels appearing under a thin drapery of rags. For the moment these children were in the great world of fashion. Or look at such children, with their rickety and

bent limbs as you may sometimes see them in a public park in summer, and watch them wander among the daisies and other flowers, their hunger and suffering forgotten, rejoicing like true poets in God's own lovely earth. There is surely a Gospel in such lives. The word of Christ is infinitely beautiful: "Except ye be converted and become as that child," except you give up your pride and self-seeking, and come back to the grand simplicities of character and be a child before your Father in heaven, and amid the grandeur and beauty of His universe, ye cannot enter that kingdom where all is simple, because all there forget themselves and dwell in confidence and holy love. It is well to remember that it was to His disciples Christ said: "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." His disciples in modern times sometimes forgot this by reversing the Master's saying, and telling the little children that, except they be converted and become imitators of them in their experiences and feelings as pietists and revivalists, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. I never like to utter a disparaging word regarding the efforts made by sincere people to make others better and to bring them to God, even when the methods they employ may be in many respects uncongenial to my own tastes and convictions; but there is one kind of religious meeting, not uncommon in recent years, for which I acknowledge that I have no patience. I allude to revival meetings for children, at which the attempt is made to "convert" God's own little children by making them pass through certain convictions of sin and attain certain feelings of peace. This is all the worse when we recollect how easily their feelings are excited in early life, and how imitative children are. Fancy it—destroying their beautiful self-unconsciousness and producing an unnatural effort at introspection. Fancy it—addressing a dear sweet infant as if it were a child of the devil, unless it becomes "converted" according to a prescribed process of experience. Fancy it—asking a little child if it has "found Christ," as if Christ had not found it, and was rejoicing over its childlike and holy beauty. Christ did not put questions like these to that child whom he placed in the midst of His disciples; it was a child, God's own child, and that was enough for Him. It was His disciples He questioned. He did not tell the child that he must become like the disciples; but he commanded the disciples to be delivered from their ambition and vanity, and to become like the child. There is undoubtedly much that a wise parent can do in the way of fostering religious life even in his youngest child. But it ought always to be on the lines of what is childlike. The earthly father or mother in their love should be witnesses for the heavenly Father. The little hand that is given to them should be raised and directed so that in a similar confidence it may be given to God. Parents should not crave too much for results. Their natural anxiety to have words from the lips of those they love, or to perceive fruits which indicate the quicken-

ing of higher life, ought to be restrained by many obvious considerations. The husbandman who has sown good seed in his field does not see any change at first. He has to wait many days, during which his field appears as barren as if no seed had been ever scattered on the surface. He would do more harm than good, if by his fussy interference he disturbed the grain in order to see whether it was likely to sprout. It is the wiser part to leave it alone, and to wait patiently for the time of the blade appearing. Its growth might indeed be hastened by exposing it to the heats of the forcing-house, but it would not be a healthy growth. What is premature seldom ripens. It is better to let every stage have its full development; and there is a stage in life where the best result is the sweet beauty of the blossoms, useless for the practical ends of the farmer, but infinitely valuable as a gospel of grace and promise.

What if all the light, and purity, and cloudless loveliness we behold in the countenance of our little children are but the reflection of a radiance to us unseen, and that there is a sense in which Wordsworth's famous lines are literally true:—

"Trailing clouds of glory do they come,  
From God—Who is their home!"

## TAKING UP THE CROSS.

IT cannot be too often repeated, in days when the profession of Christianity is fashionable, and the path which multitudes regard as the way to heaven, is made so wide, and smooth, and easy, by the skill of theological engineers, that it resembles the "Broad Road" in everything but the name; It cannot be too often repeated that now, as of old, strait is the gate and narrow is the way [that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Strange as it may seem, it is not surprising, that the Master should tell His disciples that if they mean in deed and in truth to follow Him, they must not shrink from partaking of the shame and humiliation to which He stooped for their sakes. "The disciple is not," must not expect to be, "above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord." "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." The persecutors of Jesus of Nazareth were the religious world of His day. The chief priests of the living and true God, and the scribes, versed in His holy law, were the men who reviled the crucified. So, when taking up the cross, the followers of the Lamb generally find that those who possess the form of godliness without the power are more embittered against them than the openly wicked. Satan adopted this plan early in the world's history. Abel suffered at the hand of Cain, who worshipped the same God as he did. Joseph suffered at the hands of his brethren. The prophets of old were persecuted by those who were God's chosen people, and nominally worshipped the true God. Christ's murderers were His fellow-countrymen, who professed to be actuated by religious motives. The tortures of the Inquisition, the rack, and the cruelties inflicted on Protestant martyrs, which all the malignity