

THE SAVIOUR'S BOYHOOD

A Sermon by Dr. Talmage on the Boy Jesus.

The Grand Natural Scenery Where He Passed His Early Life—The Boy in the Carpenter's Shop and in the Temple—His Simplicity.

In a recent sermon at Brooklyn Dr. Talmage's subject was "Christ, the Village Lad." He took for his text Luke 10: 40: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." The preacher said:

About Christ as a village lad I speak. There is for the most part a silence more than eighteen centuries long about Christ between infancy and manhood. What kind of a boy was He? Was He a genuine boy at all, or did there settle upon Him from the start all the intensities of martyrdom? We have on this subject only a little guessing, a few surmises, and here and there an unimportant "perhaps."

Concerning what bounded that boyhood on both sides we have whole libraries of books and whole galleries of canvas and sculpture. Before the infant child in Mary's arms, or taking His first sleep in the rough crèche, all the painters have, and we have Paul Veronese's "Holy Family," and Perugino's "Nativity," and Angelico da Fiesole's "Infant Christ," and Rubens' "Adoration of the Magi," and Tintoret's "Adoration of the Magi," and Carlandino's "Adoration of the Magi," and Raphael's "Madonna," and Orcagna's "Madonna," and Murillo's "Madonna," and Madonna by all the schools of painting in all lights and shades and with all styles of attractive feature and impressive surroundings, but pen and pencil and chisel have with few exceptions passed by Christ the village lad. Yet by three confined evidences I think we can come to an accurate idea of what Christ was as a boy as we can of what Christ was as a man.

First, we have the brief Bible account. Then we have the prolonged account of what Christ was at thirty years of age. Now you have only to mify that account somewhat and you find what He was at ten years of age. Temperaments never change. A sanguine temperament never becomes a phlegmatic temperament. A nervous temperament never becomes a lymphatic temperament. Religion changes one's affections and ambitions, but it is the same old temperament acting in a different direction. As Christ had no religious change, He was at a lad what He was as a man, only on not so large a scale. When all tradition and all art and all history represent Him as a blonde with golden hair I know He was in boyhood a blonde.

We have, beside, an uninspired book that was for the first three or four centuries after Christ's appearance received by many as inspired and which gives prolonged account of Christ's boyhood. Some of it may be true, most of it may be true, none of it may be true. It may be partly built on facts, or by the passage of the ages, some real facts may have been distorted. But because a book is not divinely inspired we are not therefore to conclude that it does not tell true things in it. Prescott's "Conquest of Mexico" was not inspired, but we believe it, although it may contain mistakes. Macaulay's "History of England" was not inspired, but we believe it, although it may have been marred with many errors. The so-called apocryphal gospel in which the boyhood of Christ is dwelt upon I do not believe to be divinely inspired, and yet it may present facts worthy of consideration. Because it represents the boy Christ as performing miracles some have overthrown the whole apocryphal book. But what rights have you to say that Christ did not perform miracles at ten years of age as well as at thirty? He was in boyhood as certainly divine as in manhood.

While I do not believe that any of the so-called apocryphal New Testament is inspired, I believe much of it is true; just as I believe a thousand books, none of which are divinely inspired. Much of it was just like Christ. Just as certain as the man Christ was the most of the time getting the men out of trouble, I think that the boy Christ was the most of the time getting boys out of trouble. I have decided to you this day a boy's Christ. And the world means such a one. He did not sit around moping over what was to be or what was. From the way in which natural objects overtook themselves into His sermons after He had become a man, I conclude there was not a rock or a hill or a cavern or a tree for miles around that He was not familiar with in childhood. He had cautiously felt his way down into the caves and had with lithic and agile limb gained a poise on many a high tree top. His boyhood was passed among grand scenery, as most all the great natures have passed early life among the mountains. They may live now on the flats, but they passed the receptive days of ladhood among the hills, among the mountains of New Hampshire or the mountains of Virginia or the mountains of Kentucky or the mountains of Switzerland or Italy or Austria or Scotland. On mountains as high and rugged as these, many of the world's thrilling biographies began. Our Lord's boyhood was passed in a neighborhood twelve hundred feet above the level of the sea and surrounded by mountains five or six hundred feet still higher. Before it could shine on the village where this boy slept the sun had to climb far enough up to look over the hills that held their heads far aloft. Authors have often said that Christ was not affected by these surroundings, and that He from within lived outward and independent of circumstances. So far from that being true, He was the most sensitive being that ever walked the earth, and if a pale invalid's weak finger could not touch His robe without strength going out from Him these mountains and seas could not have touched His eye without irradiating His entire nature with their magnificence. I warrant that He had gazed and explored all the fifteen hills around Nazareth, among these Hermon with its crystal coronet of perpetual snow, and Carmel and Tabor and Gilboa, and they all had their sublime echo in after time from the Olivet pulpit.

And then it was not uncultivated grandeur. These hills carried in their arms or on their backs gardens, groves, orchards, terraces, vineyards, coxas, sycamores. These outcropping foliage did not have to wait for the floods before their silence was broken, for through them and over them and in circles round them and under them all the fifteen hills that were sparrows were nightingales, were larks, were quails, were blackbirds, were partridges, were bulbuls. Yonder the white slopes of sheep snowed down over the pasture lands. And yonder the brook returned to the pebbles its adventures down the rocky shelving. Yonder are

the oriental homes, the housewife with pitcher on the shoulder entering the door, down the lawn in front children revelling among the flaming ferns. And all this spring and song and grass and sunshine and shadow woven into the most exquisite nature that ever breathed or wept or sung or suffered. Through studying the sky between the hills Christ had noticed the weather signs, and that a crimson sky at night meant dry weather next day, and that a crimson sky in the morning meant wet weather before night. And how beautifully He made use of it in after years as He drove down upon the pestiferous Pharisee and Sadducee by crying out: "When it is evening ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red; and in the morning it will be foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering. O, ye hypocrites, ye can discern the signs of the times." By day, as every boy has done, He watched the barnyard fowl at sight of overwinging hawk, cluck her chickens under wing, and in after years He said: "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing!" By night He had noticed His mother by the plain candlelight, which, as ever and anon it was snuffed and the removed wick put down on the candlestick, beamed brightly through all the family sitting-room as His mother was mending His garments that had been torn during the day's wanderings among the rocks or bushes, and years afterward it all came out in the simile of the greatest sermon ever preached: "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but in a candlestick and it giveth light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine."

Yes, from the naturalness, the simplicity, the freshness of His parables and similes and metaphors in manhood discourse, I know that He had been a boy of the fields and had bathed in the streams and heard the nightingale's call, broken through the flowery hedges and looked out of the casements of the fortress, and drank from the wells and chased the butterflies, which travelers say have always been one of the fitting beauties of that landscape, and talked with the strange people from Damascus and Egypt and Sapphoris and Syria, who in caravans or on foot passed through His neighborhood, the dogs barking at their approach at sundown. As afterward He was a perfect man, in the time of which I speak He was a perfect boy, with the spring of a boy's foot, the sparkle of a boy's eye, the rebound of a boy's life and just the opposite of those juveniles who sit around morbid and unelastic, old men at ten. I warrant He was able to take His own part and to take the part of others.

Let the world look out how it treads on a boy, for that very moment it treads on Christ. You strike a boy, you strike Christ; you cheat a boy, you cheat Christ. It is an awful and infinite mistake to come as far as manhood without a Christ when here is a boy Christ. That was one reason, I suppose, that Jonathan Edwards, afterward the greatest American logician and preacher of his time, became a Christian at seven years of age; and Robert Hall, who afterward shook Christendom with his sacred eloquence became a Christian at twelve years of age; and Isaac Watts, who divided with Charles Wesley the dominion of holy song, became a Christian at nine years of age; and if in any large religious assemblage it were asked that all the men and women who learned to love Christ before they were fifteen years of age would please lift their right hand, there would be enough hands lifted to wave a coronation. What is true in a religious sense is true in a secular sense. The disciples amazed his school fellows with talents which in after years made the world stare. Isaac Newton, the boy, by driving pegs in the side of a house to mark the declivity of the sun, evidenced a disposition toward the experiments which afterward showed the nations how the world was put together. Robert Boyle, the boy, with his kite on the commons experimented with electric currents and propounded work which should yet make him immortal. "Get out of my way!" said a rough man to a boy. "Get out of my way! what are you good for, anyhow?" They boy answered: "They make men out of such things as we are."

But having shown you the divine lad in the fields, I must show you Him in the mechanic's shop. Joseph, His father, died very early, immediately after the famous trip to the temple, and this lad had not only to support Himself, but to support His mother, and what that is some of you know. There is a boy named Benjamin, who on earth now doing the same thing. They wear no crowns. They have no purple robe adroop from their shoulders. The plain chair on which they sit is as much unlike a throne as any thing you can imagine, but God knows what they are doing and through what sacrifices they go, and through all eternity God will keep paying them for their filial behavior. They shall get full measure of reward, the measure pressed down, shaken together and running over. They have their example in this toy Christ taking care of His mother.

But having seen Christ, the boy of the field and the boy in the mechanic's shop, I show you a more marvelous scene, Christ, the smooth-browed lad among the long-bearded, white-haired, high-foreheaded ecclesiastics of the temple. Hundreds of thousands of strangers had come to Jerusalem to keep a great religious festival. After the hospitable homes were crowded with visitors, the tents were spread all around the city to shelter immense throngs of strangers. It was very easy among the vast throngs coming and going to lose a child. More than two million people have been known to gather at Jerusalem for that national feast. You must not think of those regions as sparsely settled. The ancient historian, Josephus, says there were in Galilee two hundred cities, the smallest of them containing 15,000 people. No wonder that amid the crowds at the time spoken of Jesus, the boy, was lost. His parents, knowing that He was mature enough and agile enough to take care of Himself, are on their way home without any anxiety, supposing that their boy is coming with some of the groups. But after awhile they suspect He is lost and with flushed cheek and a terrified look they rush this way and that, saying: "Have you seen any thing of my boy? He is twelve years of age, of fair complexion, and has blue eyes and sunburnt hair. Have you seen Him since we left the city?" Back they go in hot haste, in and out the streets, in and out the private houses and among the surrounding hills. For three days they search and inquire, wondering if He has been trampled under foot of some of the throngs or has ventured on the cliffs or fallen off a precipice. Send through all the streets and lanes of the city and among the surrounding hills that most of fair complexion, and has blue eyes and sunburnt hair. Have you seen Him since we left the city?" 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