

## SERMONS PREACHED BEFORE THE QUEEN AT BALMORAL.

### V.—CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.

"And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."—MARK x. 13—16.

**I**N this touching narrative two aspects of truth are revealed; first, the love of the Saviour to children; and, secondly, the response which is due to that love, by our becoming as little children, and thereby entering the kingdom of God.

"*They brought little children unto Him that He should touch them.*" We are not informed who those were who brought the children to Jesus, whether they were their parents, relations, or kind friends. Nor is any hint given as to their social position or moral character, whether they had come from homes poor or rich, or belonged to the most wicked or most pious families in Jerusalem. Neither have we much information as to the real nature of their motives in bringing them. Both St. Mark and St. Luke tell us that they wished Jesus to "touch" them; and St. Matthew says, "that He should put his hands on them and pray." There was probably in their thoughts a mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of faith and superstition; but in their hearts a real desire that the children should get good in some way, they might not know how, from this man who they felt to be so good Himself and so loving to all. They were persuaded that he surely knew God, and that his prayers as a righteous man would prevail; for from his hands and lips wondrous blessings flowed every day to the souls and bodies of all who sought Him. But whatever forms of thought their longings for the good of those children took, they brought them to Jesus; and in doing so they made no mistake. Their hearts' feelings directed them aright; and their faith could not be put to shame. In their experience they would soon find that He whom they trusted would assuredly do for them "exceeding abundantly above all they could ask or think."

"*His disciples rebuked those that brought them.*" "Why should such people interrupt the heavenly teaching to which disciples were listening? Why should such mean and unworthy thoughts be entertained regarding the great Messias, or this great 'prophet sent by God,' as to suppose it possible that

He could attend to feeble, insignificant little children, or be troubled with and touch or pray for them!" Such were the disciples' thoughts; but alas! they were not yet receiving this heavenly teaching as little children. The hearts of those earnest petitioners read the heart of the Lord more truly than did those who were hearing so much about Him and his kingdom, but had not yet fully admitted into their souls the King in his beauty; whose memories were full of his words, but whose hearts were not yet full of his spirit.

"*But when Jesus saw it, He was sore displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. . . . And He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*" The love of God the Father was revealed in that love which made Jesus "much displeased" at the ignorance and want of sympathy at this time manifested by his disciples; which said, "Suffer the little children to come to me;" and which was also expressed when "He took them up in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them." What parent does not bless the Father in heaven and the Saviour for such a revelation of tenderness and love to children! But it reveals to us more than this. Surely we are taught by it what ought greatly to strengthen our faith in Jesus. For here we see his love to those young brothers and sisters of his, who could not as yet realise it, or return it;—a love altogether irrespective of their own character, or, as far as we know, of the character of their parents, or of anything which made them an exception to other children, in Jerusalem or elsewhere. But let us remember that as truly as He loved them so truly does He love all his brethren, whether old or young. He does not *pity* them merely, but He *loves* them, inasmuch as they are beings made after his own image, and therefore capable of fulfilling the grand end of glorifying God and of enjoying Him for ever. Nor did the fact of these children receiving his blessing necessitate or insure their growing up as became the recipients of that blessing. His "touch" did not possess the "magic"

power which those who sought it for the young probably attributed to it. For aught we know, these children may by their own free choice have refused afterwards to occupy their place as children of God. "I have," said God to Israel, "nourished and brought you up as children, but ye have rebelled against me." But this did not invalidate the fact of the reality and sincerity of the love of Jesus towards them, any more than the rejection in after years of their parents' love which had rested on them before they were conscious of it or could return it, could alter the fact of that human love which would survive their enmity, and never become cold, except in the grave—if even then.

This same love, therefore, has rested upon ourselves when children. It shone upon us like light when our eyes were too feeble to see it. If we have been baptized in infancy, the Holy Sacrament, although it did not originate this love, nor create our relationship to the Holy Trinity, yet witnessed to both—to the love of our God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. But, if this love was real on the part of Jesus, our elder Brother, towards us, when we were "little children" irrespective of our knowing it or responding to it, it has never changed. To us, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and this glorious fact is the ground on which He demands that we, in return, should give Him our love and confidence in order to our receiving the kingdom of heaven. Let us consider what this implies.

*"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in nowise enter therein."* As far as the soul of each of us is concerned, our entering the kingdom of God is one with the kingdom of God entering us. It consists in God reigning over our inner world of being, our will becoming subject to his will, and He thereby gradually subduing us to himself; bringing every thought, feeling, and passion under willing captivity to his righteous government. Thus "the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Accordingly, when the kingdom of God comes, "sin no longer reigns in our mortal body, that we should obey its lusts," but we become "servants of righteousness."

Now, in order that the kingdom of God should enter the soul, one thing is essential, that we should accept of it, consent to it, and freely choose the King to reign over us, by "yielding ourselves unto God." This does not imply any conscious good on our part as a

qualification for our reception of the kingdom, or any preparation for the King. We reverse God's order, when, in order to receive the King, we seek any of those good things which the King brings with Him. We thus insist, as it were, on our possessing riches in order to be made rich, to see before He has opened our eyes, and to be healed before asking His help. This is the feeling common at first to every returning prodigal, who, having departed from the Father, through unbelief, has become "dead" and "lost," because dead and lost to that Father's love. His own heart is so corrupted that, looking at the Father's love, he cannot see or comprehend its utter unselfishness, its constant pity and its complete satisfaction in giving all it can give—yea, in giving itself! And so a plan is constructed whereby we can ease our consciences by offering something, promising something, as in the case of the prodigal who, to prove the honesty and reality of his repentance, desired to become a servant, in the hope that the condition of the servant might one day be exchanged for that of a son. We know the result as described in the life-story of the prodigal—how unbelief was put to shame—all its intended pleadings silenced, all dim hopes made bright, and bitter tears dried, all dark thoughts banished, and the whole soul filled with joy, as the heart of the outcast opened and received a father's love into its depths. The whole man was subdued by the love revealed in meeting him when a great way off, in the affectionate embrace, and in the cry of glad welcome, "My son was lost, but now is found!" That prodigal son became as "a little child," when in his nakedness and misery, the portion of his substance spent, his character lost, his peace of conscience gone, he discovered that there still remained one thing in the universe that was not lost to him—a father's love! As we behold him in that father's arms, giving nothing, but receiving all, do we not recognise a child receiving a blessing in the arms of the Saviour?

Without, then, dwelling longer on this characteristic of the spirit essential to our receiving the kingdom of God, let us try to realise it more, and to be assured of it for our eternal good. Let us be possessed by the conviction that we want nothing to bring to God, but that we want everything from Him; that He does not ask us to give to Him, but to receive what He gives to us; that He offers to reign over us, and desires that we should yield Him willing admission into our hearts, to reign as their rightful and

righteous King. Believing this, let us as little children say "Amen!" and receive Him with joy and thanksgiving, that He may in his own way, and in his own good time, evolve order out of confusion within us, destroy His and our enemies, and keep us in perfect peace. "When we are weak, then are we strong," "the least are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

But there is another aspect of the same childlike spirit, which I would have you notice, and that is its *unreservedness*. These little children yielded themselves into the arms of Jesus. They lay there in peace, next his heart. They asked no questions before committing themselves to his keeping, nor made any conditions. They had simple confidence in his love, which assured them by every look of his benign countenance, every touch of his gentle hand, every whisper of his soothing voice, that He *could* not injure them, that they were safe in his hands, and most safe when absolutely at his disposal. Such is the childlike spirit necessary to our receiving the same Christ to reign over us. There must not be a thought on our part of, what I may call, bargain-making, or of seeking to make compromises with Him who desires to enter our hearts to fill them with his glory, and who cannot possibly "deny himself" by asking less or by bestowing less upon us. His only terms are absolute submission, without reserve on our part. Any reserve is to reject the fulness of his love.

This consecration or simple yielding of ourselves to God, in itself occupies little time—no more necessarily than the uttering of an intelligent "Yes," or "No," whatever the preliminaries that may lead to this point, or the momentous consequences that may follow from it. But, however easy this choice may seem to those who never seriously tried to make it, it requires the greatest possible effort, unless by the grace that worketh when and how God willeth, the man has been so slowly educated into it, that at no period of his life has he experienced a great and conscious struggle between light and darkness, between God and his own soul. But most men have imperceptibly formed the mental habit of indifference to the claims of God. The growth of their inner being has been from the old nature, and essentially rooted in self; so that, when they are brought for the first time face to face, as it were, with the Father of their spirit, and are made to know that what they have been always uttering with their lips shall now be uttered

by their hearts as the very reality of life, there comes a sore struggle between the flesh and the spirit, between the "I" as independent of God, and the "I" as dependent upon Him, and henceforth to find its true liberty and life only in Him! But the decision to "offer ourselves living sacrifices unto God," may, as I have said, be rapid and may therefore appear to be as easy as opening the eye to the light, whereas it is, in fact, the greatest revolution in our history. No longer journey can we take than out of ourselves to God; unless it be the journey from God into ourselves. And yet, till this eye is opened, this journey taken, this choice made, this spirit of childhood professed, the kingdom of God cannot enter us; for we refuse to let the King enter. We desire either to have the whole kingdom to ourselves without Him, or to select some portions of it, willing perhaps, that He should share the throne along with us; and that He should defend us and save us from all the sufferings which might result from our own misrule! But such compromises are impossible on the part of God.

Whence arises this moral difficulty of out-and-out consecration? We are at no loss to discover its source, in that want of confidence towards God which is the one evil taint of our being! We do not believe in Him as being in very truth our Father; and therefore we refuse to be to Him as little children. We do not see Him in the light in which Jesus by his whole life has revealed Him—the One who in everything is absolutely trustworthy. On the contrary, we judge of Him by our own narrow and selfish hearts, and entertain suspicious thoughts of Him, as if He were a hard master, demanding from us unreasonable service. We think of Him as exercising authority, backed by irresistible power, and do not feel that His is righteous authority guided by what, but for our selfish hearts, should be realised to be irresistible love. We think of him either as one who is indifferent to our perfect well-being, or as one who knows us not, who grudges to give us all possible good, or in whose hands our interests, for Time at least, are not in such safe keeping as in our own; and we conclude that we can not only live independently of Him, but can have more liberty and greater possessions than by choosing to trust Him in all things, seeking only the one thing, "Thy will be done!" Can these, we ask with wonder, be the thoughts of a rational and accountable being towards his Creator and Preserver? of a child towards his Father, whose name

is love, whose mercies, unasked, have been new every morning and evening, and who gives us all things richly to enjoy? Dare any man trust his own wisdom, his own strength, his own resources, his love to himself, or the love of any other human being, rather than place unbounded confidence in the love of the infinite and glorious God? Dare any man question the supreme claims of God to his allegiance? Alas! it is too true of every man! The demon of self cries out even to the Lord, who in love is seeking to save, "What have I do with thee? art thou come to torment me!"

I have dwelt long on this point, for I am persuaded that the one reason why men do not advance in that divine life which alone can meet the demands of conscience and satisfy our own spirit is, that it has never been rightly begun. The one thing needful has not been done—that of yielding ourselves to God. The kingdom has not entered our hearts; for the "gates" have not been opened, that "the King of Glory might come in." Without this our life here must be a comparative failure. On what apparent trifles great results depend! Thus have I seen a majestic ship about to be launched: everything was ready for her departure from the dry land, and every impediment which could hinder her from entering the element for which she was formed and destined had been removed, save one—a single block, the one link that now bound her to the earth. It was a mere trifle, indeed; and the blow of a hammer wielded by a vigorous arm could set her free in a second of time. But let that block remain untouched, that little act undone, no onward movement would be ever made by the gallant ship. No doubt, even in these circumstances she might be made available for many useful purposes. Her capacious hold and fine deck and beautiful cabins might be turned to account, and made sources of pleasure and profit; still she never could fulfil the end for which she had been made! But the sea longs to receive her noble form; brave sailors are ready to navigate her, and a skilled master to command her; rich merchandise waits to load her, and her owners have confidence in her future, and long to see her begin her voyage; and so the order is given to loose her and let her go. The hammer swings in the air, the block is struck, and amidst ringing cheers she begins to move, and then rushes into the great deep, where she soon floats with ease and grace, as one born for it as her own possession!

Let us with the same decision part with our self-will and unbelief, that so we may realise the true end of our being.

It would be profitable, if our time permitted it, to illustrate, from the other narratives in this chapter, the nature and the necessity of this unreserved consecration to God, as of children to their father. This was "the one thing" which the rich young man "lacked," and which hindered him at that time from entering into the kingdom of heaven, and thus finding what he so earnestly sought—a true and eternal life in God, which could not possibly be found "in the abundance of the things which he possessed."

This unreserved, childlike spirit was what St. Peter (ver. 28) had not attained at the time when he thought he had given up "all" his earthly possessions—few and little worth—yet hoping to get more even of these in return. He imagined that, in comparison with those who went away from Christ, he was "first;" but on the sad night when he denied his Master, and gave *Him* up in order to save his own life,—he was "last." Not until he again met his Lord on the Lake of Tiberias did he give up his *all*, and as a little child consecrated himself wholly and unreservedly to his Master's service, even until death. Then was "the last first."

Again, in our Lord's teaching to James and John (ver. 35) we learn how the glory and honour of the kingdom of heaven are spiritual; and how they are bestowed not according to any principle of favouritism, but on all who will as little children receive the baptism of their Lord, and accept of his cross of suffering with the filial confidence which says, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Finally, we have also in this chapter (ver. 32—34) the example of the perfect son—the one "child," Jesus Christ, who, being the least, was thus the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. We ask, in regard to Him, whether He himself lived and acted out the principle which He applies to others; whether He stamped by his example the absolute necessity of unreserved self-consecration to God? The Gospels, as a faithful record of all that Jesus was, contain such a reply to this question. Jesus was in everything a true child to his Father. He made no compromises, no "conditions;" had no reservations ere He accepted his Father's will. He did not ask what might befall Him—whether, or what, He might suffer, ere He should obey his God. His cry before He came to the world was, "Lo I come to do thy will, O Lord!" He left



"great possessions" in heaven, laid aside his glory, made himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross. His "meat and drink," while He lived, was to do the will of God. Wherever God led Him He followed,—whether into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, or to the cross to be offered up. He had no place where to lay his head. Out of the depths of the deepest agony ever endured by man, He put his trust in God, and cried, "Not my will, but thine be done!" With his last breath He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, this being who in himself combined the divine in the human and the human in the divine, lived the truth, and taught the truth, that there is an eternal life for every man; and that it consists not in ease, or self-will, in great possessions, or in riches of any kind, but in the knowledge and love of God, and in unreserved, undoubting consecration of ourselves to Him. This was the perfect man, the little child,

who in asking us to follow Him said, He alone knowing the full meaning of his words (ver. 33), "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles: and they shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him; and the third day He shall rise again." This is He who, "through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself unto God," the grand purpose of which offering was that we should do the same, and thus be sprinkled, and consecrated, with the blood of His sacrifice. O blessed Jesus! may we be as little children, in order to be like to Thee, and trust ourselves and our all into Thy hands, seeking only that eternal life which God hath given to us all in Thee; and grant that, like blind Bartimeus, we may cast away all that would hinder us from going to Thyself, in order to receive our sight by seeing Thee, and that, following Thee in the way, we may thus be "followers of God as dear children." Amen.

NORMAN MACLEOD.

## STRAW.



**W**HEAT is so universally known as a food plant that we are apt to consider it valuable solely on that account, and to forget that its straw forms a not unimportant article of commerce, more important perhaps in years gone by than it is at present. But, though the home market of the straw plait

trade has to some extent decreased of late years, owing to the smaller quantities required for ladies' bonnets and hats, the growth and trade in straw remains nevertheless a recognised branch of British commerce.

In some parts of the country, wheat is grown as much for its straw as for its grain. To be useful to the plaiter, however, it must be grown and reaped with special care. Some soils are quite unsuited for it, as for instance a stiff clay; on light rich soil the best straws are grown. At the period of

harvest attention has to be paid to the proper time for cutting. Wet weather causes the straws to spot or to become rusty; while excessive heat and dryness render them too brittle for use. It is said that an acre of ground sown with wheat of the proper sorts, will, in a good season, yield from fifteen cwt. to a ton of cut straws, realising from £5 to £6 or even more per ton, according to the state of the market. The straws after being cut down are sorted, the ears being taken off, and the straws alone made up into bundles, which are then ready for removal to the straw-factors' premises. Here they are submitted to the fumes of sulphur, and again sorted more carefully so that those which are spotted or discoloured may be excluded. The less perfect ones are mostly put aside for dyeing, but the worst are thrown away as useless.

Thus prepared, the straws are ready for plaiting. Straw is grown and collected for this purpose chiefly in the southern and home counties. The wives and children of agricultural labourers, principally in Beds, Berks, and Bucks, are the best manipulators in straw plaiting; the work being done in their own cottages. Before the passing of the new education act, schools existed in the chief plaiting districts, where the art of plaiting