CHRIST'S BOYHOOD.

Dr. Talmage Preaches on "Christ as a Village Lad."

Roaming the Hills and Climbing the Trees Around Nazareth—Working In His Father's Carpenter Shop, and Teaching the Doctors in the Temple.

The subject of Dr. Talmage's recent sermon was "Christ the Village Lad." He took for his text Luke ii 40: "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." Following is the sermon:

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 canvass and sculpture. Before the infant Christ in Mary's arms, or taking his first sleep in the rough outhouse, all the painters bow, 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 Chirlandojo's "Adoration of the Magi" and Raphael's "Madonna" and Orcagna's "Madonna" and Murillo's "Madonna," and Madonnas 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 conjoined evidences I think we can come to as accurate an 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 minify 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 the religious change, He was as a lad what He was as 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 there are not 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 that whole apocryphal book. But what right 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. Then while a lad he must have had the power to work miracles, whether he did or did not work them. When, having reached manhood, Christ turned water into wine that was said to be the beginning of miracles. But that may mean that it was the beginning of that series of manhood miracles. In a word, I think that the New Testament is only a small transcript of what Jesus did and said. Indeed, the Bible declares positively that if all Christ did and said were written, the world would not contain the books. So we are at liberty to believe or reject those parts of the apocryphal gospel which says that when the boy Christ with His mother passed a band of thieves He told His mother that two of them, Dumachus and Titus by name, would be the two thieves who afterwards would expire on the cross beside Him. Was that more wonderful than some of Christ's manhood prophesies? Or the uninspired story that the boy Christ made a fountain spring from the roots of a sycamore tree so that His mother washed his coat in the stream—was that more unbelievable than the manhood miracle that changed common water into a marriage beverage? Or the uninspired story that two sick children were recovered by bathing in the water where Christ had washed! Was that more wonderful than the manhood miracle by which the woman twelve years a complete invalid should have been made straight by touching the fringe of Christ's coat?

In other words, 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 men out of trouble, I think that the boy Christ was the most of the time getting boys out of trouble. I have declared to you this day a boy's Christ. And the world wants such a one. He did not sit around moping over what was to be or what was. From the way in which natural objects unwreathed themselves into his sermons after he had become a man I concluded 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 lithe 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, or mountains as high and ragged as they, 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 hills that held their heads far aloft. From yonder height his eye at one sweep took in the mighty scoop of the valleys and with another sweep took in the Mediterranean sea, and you hear the grandeur of the cliffs and the surge of the great waters in his matchless sermonology. One day I see that divine boy, the wind flurrying his hair over his sun-browned forehead, standing on a hill-top looking off upon Lake Tiberias, on which at one time, according to profane history, are not four hundred but four thousand ships. Authors have taken pains to say that Christ was not affected by these surroundings, and that he lived 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 mounted and explored all the hills around Nazareth, among them 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 Olivetic pulpit.

And then it was not uncultivated grandeur. These hills carried in their arms or on their backs gardens, groves, orchards, terraces, vineyards, cactus, sycamores. These outbranching foliages 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 were pelicans, were thrushes, were sparrows, were nightingales, were larks, were quails, were blackbirds, were partridges, were bulbuls. Yonder the white flocks of sheep snowed down over the pasture lands. And yonder the brook rehearses to the pebbles its adventures down the rocky shelving. Yonder are the Oriental homes, the housewife with pitcher on the shoulder entering the door, and down the lawn in front children reveling among the flaming flora. 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 face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times." By day, as every boy has done, he watched the barnyard fowl at sight of over-swinging 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 candle light 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 wandering among the rocks or bushes, and years afterward it all came out in the smile 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." Some time when his mother in the autumn took out the clothes that had been put away for the summer he noticed how the moth miller flew out and the coat dropped apart ruined and useless, and so twenty years after he enjoined: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt." His boyhood spent among birds and flowers, they all caroled and bloomed again fifteen years after as he cries out: "Behold the fowls of the air." "Consider the lilies." A great storm one day during Christ's boyhood blackened the heavens and angered the rivers. Perhaps standing in the door of the carpenter's shop he watched it gathering louder and wilder until two cyclones, one sweeping down from Mount Tabor and the other from Mount Carmel, met in the valley of Esdraelon and two houses are caught in the fury and crash goes the one and triumphant stands the other, and he noticed that one had shifting sand for a foundation and the other an eternal rock for basis; and twenty years after he built the whole scene into a peroration of flood and whirlwind that seized the audience and lifted them into the heights of sublimity with the two great arms of pathos and terror, which sublime words I render, asking you as far as possible to forget that you ever heard them before: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

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 nightingales call, and broken through the flowery hedge and looked out of the embrasures 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 of 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 afterwards 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. In that village of Nazareth I am certain there was what is found in all the neighborhoods of the earth, that terror of children, the bully, who seems born to strike, to punch, to bruise, to overpower the less muscular and robust. The Christ who afterward in no limited terms denounced hypocrite and Pharisee, I warrant, never let such juvenile villain impose upon less vigorous childhood and yet go unscathed and undefended. At ten years he was in sympathy with the underlings as he was at thirty and three. I want no further inspired or uninspired information to persuade me that he was a splendid boy, a radiant boy, the grandest, holiest, mightiest boy of all the ages. Hence I commend him as a boy's Christ. What multitudes between ten and fifteen years have found him out as the one just suited by his own personal experience to help any boy.

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 insult a boy, you insult 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 why, I suppose, that Jonathan Edwards, afterwards the greatest American logician and preacher of his time, became a Christian at seven years of age; and Robert Hall, who afterwards 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. Themistocles 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 decline of the sun, evidenced a disposition towards the experiments which afterwards showed the nations how the worlds swing. Robert Stephenson, the boy, with his kite on the commons experimented with electric currents and prophesied 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?" The boy answered: "They make men out of such things as we are." Hear it, fathers, mothers! hear it philanthropists and patriots! hear it, all the young! The temporal and eternal destiny of the most of the inhabitants of this earth is decided before fourteen years of age. Behold the Nazareth Christ, the village Christ, the country Christ, the boy Christ.

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 support his mother, and what that is some of you know. There is a royal race of boys on earth now doing the same thing. They wear no crown. 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 boy Christ taking care of his mother. He had been taught the carpenter's trade by his father. The boy had done the plainer work at the shop while his father had put on the finishing touches of the work. The boy also cleared away the chips and blocks, and shavings. He helped hold the different pieces of work while the father joined them. In our day we have all kinds of mechanics, and the work is divided up among them. But to be a carpenter in Christ's boyhood days meant to make plows, yokes, shovels, wagons, tables, chairs, sofas, houses and almost every thing that was made. Fortunate was it that the boy had learned the trade, for when the head of the family dies it is a grand thing to have the child able to take care of himself and help take care of others. Now that Joseph, the father, is dead, and the responsibility of the family support comes down on this boy, I hear from morning to night his hammer pounding, his saw vacillating, his axe descending, his gimlets boring, and standing amid the dust and debris of the shop I find the perspiration gathering on his temples and notice the fatigue of his arm, and as he stops a moment to rest I see him panting, his hand on his side, from the exhaustion. Now he goes forth in the morning loaded with implements of work heavier than any modern kit of tools. Under the tropical sun he swelters. Lifting, pulling, adjusting, cleaving, splitting all day long. At nightfall he goes home to the plain supper provided by his mother and sits down too tired to talk. Work! work! work! You can not tell Christ any thing now about blistered hands or aching ankles or bruised fingers or stiff joints or rising in the morning as tired as when you laid down. While yet a boy he knew it all, he felt it all, he suffered it all. The boy carpenter! The boy wagon maker! The boy house-builder! O Christ, we have seen Thee when full grown in Pilate's police court room, we have seen Thee when full grown thou wert assassinated on Golgotha; but O Christ, let all the weary artisans and mechanics of the earth see Thee while yet undersized and arms not yet muscularized, and with the undeveloped strength of juvenescence trying to take Thy father's place in gaining the livelihood for the family.

But, having seen Christ, the boy of the fields and the boy of the mechanic's shop, I show you a more marvelous scene, Christ, the smooth-browed lad among the long-bearded, white-haired, high fore-headed ecclesiastics of the Temple. Hundreds of thousands of strangers had come to Jerusalem to keep a great religious festival. After the hospital 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 that there were in Galilee two hundred cities, the smallest of them containing fifteen thousand 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 terrorized 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 auburn 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 all the surrounding hills that most dismal sound, "A lost child! A lost child!" And lo, after three days they discover him in the great temple, seated among the mightiest religionists of all the world. The walls of no other building ever looked down on such a scene. A child twelve years old surrounded by septuagenarians, he asking his own questions and answering theirs. Let me introduce you to some of these ecclesiastics. This is the great Rabbin Simeon! This is the venerable Hillel! This is the famous Shammai! These are the sons of the distinguished Betirah. What can this twelve-year lad teach them or what questions can he ask worthy their cogitation? Ah, the first time in all their lives these religionists have found their match and more than their match. Though so young, he knew all about that famous Temple under whose roof they held that most wonderful discussion of all history. He knew the meaning of every altar, of every sacrifice, of every golden candlestick, of every embroidered curtain, of every crumb of shrew bread, of every drop of oil in that sacred edifice. He knew all about God. He knew all about man. He knew all about Heaven, for He came from it. He knew all about this world, for He made it. He knew all worlds, for they were only the sparkling morning dewdrops on the lawn in front of His heavenly palace. Put these seven Bible words in a wreath of emphasis: "Both hearing them and asking them questions."

I am not so much interested in the questions they asked Him as in the questions He asked them. He asked the questions not to get information from the doctors, for he knew it already, but to humble them by showing them the height, depth, and length, and breadth of their own ignorance. While the radiant boy thrusts these self-conceited philosophers with the interrogation point, they put the forefinger of the right hand to the temple as though to start their thoughts into more vigor, and then they would wrinkle their brows and then by absolute silence or in positive words confess their incapacity to answer the interrogatory. With any one of a hundred questions about theology, about philosophy, about astronomy, about time, about eternity, He may have balked them, disconcerted them, flung them flat. Behold the boy Christ asking questions, and listen when your child asks questions. He has the right to ask them. Alas for the stupidity of the child without inquisitiveness! It is Christ-like to ask questions. Answer them if you can. Do not say: "I can't be bothered now." It is your place to be bothered with questions. If you are not able to answer, surrender, and confess your incapacity, as I have no doubt did Rabbin Simeon and Hillel and Shammai and the sons of Betirah when that splendid boy, sitting or standing there with a garment reaching from neck to ankle, and girdled at the waist, put them to their very wit's end. It is no disgrace to say, "I don't know." The learned doctors who environed Christ that day in the Temple did not know or they would not have asked Him any questions. The only being in the universe who never needs to say, "I do not know" is the Lord Almighty. The fact that they did not know sent Keppler and Cuvier and Columbus and Humboldt and Herschel and Morse and Sir William Hamilton, and all the other of the world's mightiest natures into their life long explorations. Telescope and microscope, and stethoscope and electric battery, and all the scientific apparatus of all the ages are only questions asked at the door of mystery. Behold this Nazarene lad asking questions, giving everlasting dignity to earnest interrogation.

But while I see the old theologians standing around the boy Christ, I am impressed as never before with the fact that what theology most wants is more of childish simplicity. The world and the church have built up immense systems of theology. Half of them try to tell what God thought, what God planned, what God did five hundred million years before the small star on which we live was created. I have had many a sound sleep under sermons about the decrees of God and the eternal generation of the Son, and discourses showing who Melchisedek wasn't, and I give a fair warning that if any minister ever begins a sermon on such a subject in my presence, I will put my head down on the pew in front and go into the deepest slumber I can reach. Wicked waste of time, this trying to scale the unscalable and fathom the unfathomable while the nations want the bread of life, and to be told how they can get rid of their sins and their sorrows. Why should you and I perplex ourselves about the decrees of God! Mind your own business and God will take care of His. In the conduct of the universe I think He will somehow manage to get along without us. If you want to love and serve God, and be good and useful and get to Heaven, I warrant that nothing which occurred eight hundred quintillion of years ago will hinder you a minute. It is not the decrees of God that do us any harm, it is our own decrees of sin and folly. You need not go any further back in history than about 1,856 years. You see this is the year 1889. Christ died about thirty-three years of age. You subtract thirty-three from 1889 and that makes it only 1,856 years. That is as far back as you need to go. Something occurred on that day under an eclipsed sun that sets us all forever free, if with our whole heart and life we accept the tremendous proffer. Do not let the Presbyterian church or the Methodist church or the Lutheran church or the Baptist church or any of the other evangelical churches spend any time in trying to fix up old creeds, all of them imperfect as every thing man does is imperfect. I move a new creed for all the evangelical churches of christendom, only three articles in the creed, and no need of any more. If I had all the consecrated people of all denominations of the earth on one great plain, and I had voice loud enough to put it to a vote that creed of three articles would be adopted with a unanimous vote and a thundering aye that would make the earth quake and the heavens ring with hosanna. This is the creed I propose for all christendom:

Article First—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Article Second—"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief."

Article Third—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive blessing and riches and honor and glory and power, world without end. Amen."

But you go to tinkering up your old creeds and patching and splicing and interlining and annexing and subtracting and adding and explaining and you will lose time and make yourself a target for earth and hell to shoot at. Let us have creeds not fashioned out of human ingenuities but out of scriptural phraseology, and all the guns of bombardment blazing from all the port holes of infidelity and perdition will not in a thousand years knock off the church of God a splinter as big as a cambric needle. What is most needed now is that we gather all our theologies around the boy in the temple, the elaborations around the simplicities, and the profundities around the clarities, the octogenarian of the scholastic research, ar... the unwrinkled cheek of twel... year juvenescence. "Except you b...ome as a little child you can ... no wise enter the kingdom;" an... except you become as a little child you can not understand the Christian religion. The best thing that Rabbin Simeon and Hillel and Shammai and the sons of Betirah ever did was in the Temple, to bend over the lad who, first made ruddy of cheek by the breath of the Sudean hills and on his way to the mechanic's shop, where he was soon to be the support of his bereaved mother, stopped long enough to grapple with the venerable dialecticians of the Orient, "both hearing them and asking them questions." Some referring to Christ have exclaimed Ecce Deus! Behold the God. Others have exclaimed Ecce homo! Behold the man. But to-day in conclusion of my subject I cry, Ecce adolescens! Behold the boy.

—Duty ought never to wait on feeling; but feeling ought always to wait on duty. A man ought never to pivot his duty on his feelings; but every man ought to conform his feelings to the demands of duty. Kind speech is a duty, whether a man feels kindly or not. But kindly feelings are always a duty, and he who lacks them ought to set himself at acquiring them. Not feeling, but duty, must lead a man's course; but a man's right feeling is included in his every-day duty.—S. S. Times.

—Life is like a harp. Childhood has its silver string tuned to joy and forgetfulness; youth adds hope, love and courage; middle life, sympathy, devotion, friendship; but old age, experience, that attunes each to its full measure of tone; and it is the wrinkled hand sweeping the strings that makes life's true harmony.—Christian Union.

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