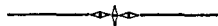


from visiting with condign censure any of her members who committed the offence of entering into such a union.

An objection may be raised in some quarters that it is a harsh and unwarrantable proceeding to impose a strict marriage law on a new and imperfectly instructed Christian community formed out of and still dwelling in the midst of an atmosphere in which the laxest ideas on the conjugal relationship have prevailed for generations. Indulgence, it may be urged, should be shown towards the first generation of converts. Among those with whom Christianity has become hereditary, we shall have a right to expect more. I believe this to be altogether a mistake. Hardship in individual cases, no doubt, there will be. But it is a trite saying that "hard cases make bad law." We must legislate according to what is intrinsically right, and for the good of the community at large, without regard to the suffering which may be caused in isolated instances. If it were made to appear that the regulations worked real injustice in a given instance, the true remedy would be, not to alter the regulations, but to dispense with the application of them to that particular case. The binding and loosing power of the Church may be rightfully invoked for this purpose. In short, I believe that the true policy with reference to marriage among Christian converts is to lay down a high standard and strict general law, giving power at the same time to the Bishop, in consultation with leading clerical and lay members of the Church, to suspend the law in individual cases where its enforcement would clearly occasion extreme hardship, if not actually injustice, to both or one of the parties concerned, and where its suspension would not injure the Church at large by appearing to countenance laxity of practice or theory upon the subject of marriage.

PHILIP VERNON SMITH.



ART. IV.—THE EARLY LIFE OF OUR LORD.

IN our study of the life of Christ, as recorded by the Evangelists, we cannot but notice, as a peculiar feature, the absence of a detailed account of the time of His boyhood and of His manhood before He entered on His public ministry. We would naturally attach an interest to that period of His history; we would fain learn somewhat particularly of "the child Jesus," of the youth who "grew in favour with God and man," and of the maturity of the same Jesus while He dwelt in Nazareth; and yet, of the first thirty years of His

life, scarcely anything is recorded, while there is a full detailed account of the remaining brief time during which He exercised His public ministry. Through all the previous time it would seem that our Lord lived an ordinary life in outer aspect and circumstances. If there had been any departure from such usual routine, any distinctive manifestation of the prophet and teacher, any exercise of miraculous power, it would probably have been put on record; but, as there is no such record in the Gospels, we may infer that for thirty years there was nothing extraordinary in the circumstances and aspect of Christ's life, that He only differed outwardly from other men in the sinless perfection with which He fulfilled all the duties and relations of the humble sphere in which He dwelt.

It might seem that the ordinary aspect and circumstances of the life which Christ lived in that earlier period of His history would be sufficient reason for the omission of any details of that period; but when we consider who the biographers were, and their relation to their Master, then their silence as to events in His early life becomes surprising and suggestive. They were men who had companied with Him throughout His ministry, who loved Him and revered Him in deep devotion, who believed in Him as God manifest in the flesh; and having such feeling and faith in regard to Him, the expectation would be that they would, in proceeding to record His human history, have endeavoured to give a full-length picture. Even though their own personal knowledge of Him was limited by the period of His public life, it is most probable that they would have sought back into His life before, and gathered incidents out of all that previous time, and shown them forth as containing promise and indication of the development which was afterwards displayed.

Never would a biographer, obeying his own judgment and feeling, confine himself to a record so limited in details of his hero as are the records written by the Evangelists of the life of Christ. A man who has achieved greatness, and whose life, because of its prominence, calls for the pen of the biographer, is never presented in the history of his life only in connection with the circumstances that made him famous. He may not have attained to fame till he had somewhat advanced in maturity; his former life may have been obscure and humble; nevertheless his biographer will, first of all, seek to draw aside the veil that hangs over his former life, will gather incidents of his boyhood and youth, and put them forward as a part of the great whole; and the more the affection and respect which had been felt towards the hero by his biographer, the more carefully, the more fondly would the

complete picture be filled in. So that we may certainly infer that the Evangelists who had so loved and revered their Lord, whose belief in His Divine humanity had been so established by His resurrection and ascension, and whose love and reverence had been so strongly confirmed and intensified by that crowning evidence, would, if left to themselves, have endeavoured to collect every detail of that marvellous life, from the manger-cradle of Bethlehem till the day in which He was taken up from them into heaven. Fondly and devotedly would they have searched back beyond the period of their own personal knowledge, in anxious zeal that nothing of His perfection in the whole space of His manifestation on earth should be omitted from their record. They would have sought to glorify Him in reference to the time of His previous obscurity; to supply indications of the sublime development which He subsequently displayed, and of which further manifestation of His glory they were able to testify—"That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life."

From all analogy in the matter we are compelled to conclude that, under the circumstances, these writers, following their own inclinations, would have adopted such a usual method in their biographical records. In fact, human feeling, breaking out afterwards, seems to lament the deficiency, not perceiving the importance of these omissions and the evidence of inspiration which the apparent imperfection supplies; and so have legendary tales of our Lord's childhood and boyhood been invented, in a fond weakness and folly, to fill in to some extent what appeared to be an unaccountable and unhappy breach in the Gospel narrative.

The evangelistic writers, in leaving that large space of Christ's life unfilled by details, show themselves outside the universal rule that directs ordinary biographers; they thereby disappoint those who would fain have that gap built up, and thus do they furnish a remarkable evidence that in the compiling of their history they were not allowed to follow the dictates of their own feelings and judgment, but that they were overruled, directed, and limited—in a word, that they were inspired by the Spirit of God; that they wrote "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

But the question arises here: What importance attaches to their omission of a detailed account of the early life of Christ? Why should they be so limited and restrained in their record? In reference to this question, we are led to observe the manner in which Christ was received in connection with His public ministry. There was, in a considerable section of the Jewish people, a determined prejudice manifest against Him.

While multitudes followed the Miracle-worker, and many of the people heard His teaching gladly, and showed a half readiness at times to acknowledge Him as the Messiah, scribes and Pharisees were unconvinced and bitter in their established enmity. However, there was a community besides, which, while not adopting the particular prejudice of the scribes and Pharisees, was far from conformity with the passing disposition in His favour that was occasionally exhibited by the people who heard Him gladly, and who were won now and then into expressions of partial belief. Those of His own country, "His friends," those among whom He had grown up, and in whose sight He had lived an ordinary human life in its outer aspect for so long a time, were, as we can judge from the Gospel narrative, apparently the farthest removed from faith in Him. While His fiercest foes, even in their settled prejudice, allowed a supernatural power in Him, but ascribed it to an evil source, those of His own country seem to have been so fortified in a stronger prejudice, though of a different kind, as to be enabled thereby to take no note at all of the signs and wonders which He displayed. When multitudes flocked to Him because of the miracles He performed, and when scribes and Pharisees protested against the enthusiasm with the assertion, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub," "His friends went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, He is beside Himself." All through the history of His public life we may notice this contemptuous indifference on the part of "His friends" in regard to what they would call His pretensions: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not here with us?" So that the utterance was forced from Him: "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house;" and it is put on record that "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

Perfect in purity and goodness, without a blemish in any of His human relations was the life of Christ in all that time of His dwelling at Nazareth; but that perfection did not prepare the minds of those who were familiar with His presence there, for the reception of Him as God manifest in the flesh. Nay, they seem to have been the farthest from His subsequent influence, and the most unlikely to be won into an acknowledgment of the claims which He afterwards advanced. And this is only to be accounted for by the fact that He had lived among them for so long a time as an ordinary man in outer aspect and circumstances.

If, then, that familiarity with the conditions and surroundings and commonplace routine of His former life contributed

to the building up of a special barrier of prejudice against the acknowledgment of His Divinity, a barrier even stronger than that behind which scribes and Pharisees were entrenched, it is plain that no beneficial instruction could come to us from any record in detail of circumstances and events belonging to that part of His sojourn among men. As to the incidents and outward conditions of that time, indeed, it is probable that nothing could be recorded except what might be observed in the ordinary action of an upright man of humble rank in a small community. We can, therefore, readily perceive, not only that it would be needless to lead us through the details of His life in such an aspect, but besides, that it would be, perhaps, in some degree obstructive to our reverential feelings in regard to our Lord, just as the familiarity with that period of His earthly career was the cause of the special distance from belief manifest in those of His own country when He dwelt visibly in the world.

However, it might be said that the anticipation of that probable effect would have influenced the Evangelists, in the exercise of their own judgment, to refrain from a particular account of the commonplace occurrences of Christ's sojourn in Nazareth. But it is most unlikely that, if left to their own judgment, they would have been capable of such forecasting. They personally knew Christ, and were associated with Him in the days in which He manifested forth His glory: they were eye-witnesses of His majesty, in having seen His miracles, without the dulling influence that would arise from intimate acquaintance with the manner of His life before: so would they see all His past, from the ground on which they stood, in a golden light; a halo would be thrown back out of their enthusiasm upon every little incident in His previous history, and they would be unfit to estimate the effect of such details when read in generations after by those who did not stand under the noon brightness and warmth in which they were placed by their personal knowledge of Him whom they followed and venerated as the Christ of God. It is remarkable that in their detailed account of His public ministry they do introduce incidents of an ordinary character as belonging to His human life. They tell of Him as an hungry and athirst, as weary and as sleeping; but these incidental indications of the completeness of the manhood which He assumed are introduced in the midst of the grander records of the display of His Divine omnipotence. It cannot, for instance, hurt our reverence to read that at one moment He was "asleep on a pillow" in a storm-tossed boat, when we go on to read that, in the next moment, "He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." Nay, the very fact of their

introducing these manifestations of human infirmity in Him, side by side with their record of the contemporaneous evidences of His Divine omnipotence, has a valuable suggestiveness for us. They were allowed to insert such contrasts in juxtaposition that it might be borne in on us that He, our Immanuel, was very man, made like unto His brethren, and at the same time very God, omnipotent for the deliverance of others, but never asserting His omnipotence in His own behalf. There is thus an obvious difference in the effect which would follow the records of ordinary circumstances in Christ's history during the time when He was manifesting forth His glory, and in the influence which would arise out of a detailed account of a long period of an ordinary life unbroken by any miraculous manifestations. That former period was distinct in aspect; and while it holds valuable suggestive teaching for us, it is not needful, nor would it be beneficial, that it should be lit up in all its details with the full light of description that is thrown on the after-period of our Lord's history, in which He has been evidently set forth as the Incarnate God.

Thus the Evangelists, as they were influenced by the Holy Ghost, have sent down to us a full and particular account of Christ's public ministry, while they have left the previous portion of His life in comparative shadow, only partially illumined by the few lamps of inspiration which disclose to us just as much of it as it would be profitable for us to know. He is shown to us as "the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes lying in a manger;" as made conformable to the ordinances of the law; as "subject" to His parents; as growing "in favour with God and man;" and as "the carpenter"—the toiling Man who ate His bread in the sweat of His brow. These few lights disclose to us enough of that part of the picture. We can discern, without details, that He is in brotherhood with the humblest and most laborious life; and that toil and care, and the commonest and most limited duties, are sanctified by that wondrous humiliation.

As we bend over our little children in their mysterious sufferings, we seem to hear the echo of His infant cry—the cry of the helpless babe, as pitiful almost as was the death-cry of His agony on the cross. He is in fellowship with our boys and girls as they grow up round about us in our homes, and He is in sympathy with ourselves in the businesses and duties, in the cares and conflicts, of ordinary life. We can, in a general way, take that knowledge from the little that is revealed to us in particular of the first thirty years of the time that our Immanuel dwelt among us; and the realization of that holy fellowship can so sanctify us in all our earthly