

LI.

A Teachable Spirit.

Luke ii, 46, 52.

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A Teachable Spirit

Luke ii, 46, 52: "And it came to pass that after three days they found Him, in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And Jesus increased, in wisdom, and stature; and in favour with God and man."

The Teachable Spirit

Matt xviii, 3:

And [Jesus] said: Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, & become as little children, ye shall not² enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Revised Version:- ' turn ² in no wise

A K. must be childlike. His earnestness in declaring this: 1. He sets a vivid illustration before eyes.
2. He speaks vehemently: "Verily".
3. He goes far beyond answering "who is fit", even denying any place in the Kingdom to any but the childlike.

We need then to give gr. heed to
this principle for ourselves.

St. Tho^s "is in Heaven", when on
earth in the flesh, illus. in his own
person during his childhood, the
childlike spirit. It is expressly said
of him: "He went down (Luke ii, 51) with
[his parents] them, & came to Nazareth,
and was subject unto them." Of this

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let us now take thought.

No devout Christian can read this²
or passages like this in the gospels, with-
-out thanking God that it pleased Him to
afford us a divine example & illustra-
-tion of a good life, in the person of our
Lord. It was not enough, in the full
measure of our Heavenly Father's love, that
divine grace should be proclaimed; nor
-that its proclamation should be accom-
-panied with miraculous kindnesses to the
poor, the blind, the lame, the deaf; but
our blessed Saviour took the form of a
child, & grew, & increased in wisdom as
He increased in age, & came to man's
estate & used His human wisdom, & in
many, many respects brightened this dis-
-tressed world with His beautiful exam-
-ple. He has thus shown us how to act,
if we will, in time of temptation; as citizens
living under oppressive laws; under the afflic-

3 -tion of heaviness of spirit; in the ordinary discharge of duty.

I desire to call your attention on this occasion to our Lord's example to us, of

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We are told very little about the period of His infancy & childhood. This latter part of the second chapter of Luke contains absolutely all ^{that the Scriptures contain} on that interesting subject. But in these few verses, the disposition which He manifested in the years when He was "subject to His Joseph & His mother" (l. 51), is very plainly brought out; & we cannot fail to value, even to the degree of emulating, the example which He therein sets in the matter of ~~the~~ our relation to the gaining of Knowledge.

~~It was the custom of the Jews, that every family should go up to Jerusalem~~

5 -ment could not possibly be quartered
~~within~~ for a single day, much less
seven, within even the broadest of our
great cities. But Palestine was a national
domain of about the extent of our State
of New Hampshire (which it resembles in
shape); its total population, very great for
so small a territory, was (Lange, note
Luke p. 49) somewhere about ten millions
of souls. ~~At least the number of male per-~~
~~sons in the~~ The capital, Jerusalem, ordi-
-narily ~~posses~~ contained a hundred & thir-
-ty thousand of these (somewhat above
the present population of Newark). Now
when the time of the Passover came
around, & the whole nation, except the
exempted classes, had arrived in the Ho-
-ly City, Josephus tells us the number of
male persons there were upwards of two
millions seven hundred thousand;
making evidently a total ^{transient} population within
& about the ~~of~~ city during the pass.

-over days, of more than five mil-¹⁶
-lions of persons.

Imagine to yourself such a scene as this
must have presented! In the narrow, mis-
erable streets of an Oriental city — with
shops crowding upon its space, & filled
& passed by a motley multitude; in
the fargon of tongues such as is aptly
suggested to us in the narrative of the Pentecost
in the second of Acts — how diffi-
cult must it have been to move about,
& how ~~utterly~~ impossible for a family to
keep together!

It was ^{probably} the first time that the child
Joseph had ever left his mountain
home to enter the great city where he
was to do such mighty works. One of the
classes of persons exempted from the duty
of attending the passover, was children un-
der twelve years of age. That period of
exemption ^{for him} had now expired, & the holy
child had been taken with his parents,
& had traversed the seventy miles of

7 distances in their caravan. His flour-
-ing human mind was already aware of
his mission, ^{of his divine nature & power,} & consciously preparing for
it, altho years were to elapse before his
showing unto Israel" (Sm. Bib. Dict., "Jesus
Christ", p. 1349, by Archbp. of York). With what in-
-describable feelings must he, a child &
yet the Lord, have looked upon the gather-
-ing tribes, the religious preparations, &
the great city!

It is not strange, as we have seen, that
he was soon separated from this guar-
-dians. ~~How would it have been strange,~~
~~that every other parent missing a child~~
~~in Jerusalem could have borne ^{such a} ~~the distance,~~~~
~~that Mary & Joseph~~ Nor is it strange
that Mary & Joseph would believe that
he was still in the caravan, when they
fairly departed from Jerusalem. But it
does seem strange — a seeming which
the Holy Child's word sustains — that
when they returned to the city, it should

have been (as it seems) so long before they bethought them of going to the temple to seek Him. Wither He had gone, there it seems natural for us to think that the Christ should be found. But He was not yet manifested as the Christ; and the incident shows us how foreign the thought was to the minds of those who were the familiar observers of His childhood.

It throws a flood of light back upon His behavior in the house at Nazareth. There He had evidently been, as the narrative further on tells us He afterwards was, "subject unto His parents". O the holy submission of the Prince of peace! How is it that we can ever love to depart from its imitation, as alas! we do! But He was obedient to them, & at His mother's knee daily illustrated the ~~teachable~~ humble, childlike, teachable spirit

9 which they here seemed to miss.

But ~~his~~ behold Him also in the Temple! Behold your Savior, a child missed by His parents, sitting in the midst of the doctors, & hearing them & asking questions; & surprising all by His understanding & His answers! Ah! He does not surprise us, now that we have read of His whole life, in His answers; but it is the mission of this Scripture to awaken our reverent surprise that He sat at the feet of men! So perfect is this lesson of humility, of atachable spirit; ~~that~~ ~~so~~ complete is His acceptance of "the form of a servant," that the wisest men of the time wonder only at the greatness of His child's understanding!

Let us see Him, then, as the

Scriptures tell us that ~~they so~~
 His parents & the doctors saw Him.
 Not unlike any child of virtuous dispo-
 sition, the Holy One passes by a multi-
 tude of objects in the strange city that
 would be of interest, & seeks the com-
 pany of the great teachers in the clois-
 ters about the Temple. He is eager
 to learn of them. He listens to them. He
 asks them questions. He would "increase
 in wisdom" by obtaining instruction of
 those qualified to give it. And in all
 this His reply to His mother indicates
 directly that He felt He was fulfilling
 His mission to earth. Not yet was
 He to appear among men their Messiah;
 not yet was He to be known as the
 Great Teacher; He, Who must suffer
 in order to save, must first learn
 in order to teach, must in this as

"in all other things" fulfill all
righteousness."

From this incident in the life of
our dear Lord & Savior we learn,
that we ought to be teachable spirit.
There is evidently a good in it, that we
should not be indifferent about ob-
-taining. If in the life which He
has condescended to bear here for our
example, He could desire knowledge,
we ought to desire it; if He could
call the seeking of wisdom His father's
business, we may be very sure it is
also ours; if He was not ashamed
to ask questions, nor to be attentive
& obedient, certainly whenever we are
in need of knowledge we should not
suffer an unchristian pride to debar
us from imitating Him. How can we
put this plain Bible-lesson into practice

1. I remark first, that a teachable spirit consists in the proper cultivation of the desire for knowledge.

Every mortal has the desire for knowledge, who has a mind at all; from the babe that reaches a tiny hand for a bauble, to the old man who dreads the day when his eyes shall fail him. ~~Call it by a less sounding title, & we must all own it is the inheritance of Eve's whole posterity; curiosity few will ~~admit~~ ^{acknowledge}, but all will gratify:~~

Ah! curiosity! first cause of all our ill,
~~And yet the plague which most torments us still!~~
It is hardly necessary for me to urge upon any one the encouragement of this desire in the abstract. Every one feels it & every one shows it; & that in their inactivity as well as by their efforts. The awkward youth in a parlor makes it as plain as the lamp & every one that he longs to know how to

please. (It is a pity the poor fellow
cannot know that people respect him
for his evident respect for them, tho'
it is ~~overdone~~.) The very manner of an
inquisitive gossip tells the story of the
desire in such a person's mind, be-
-yond all doubt. The attention or
inattention of a church-goer describes
faithfully not only his or her desire
for spiritual knowledge, but the par-
-ticular department of that knowledge
— experimental, Scriptural, whimsical
— which he most cares for. Every
one does cultivate the desire for
knowledge in some direction, & un-
-avoidably ~~inevitably~~ makes the fact known too.

But the commonest cultivation of
this native desire, this mental ap-
-petite, is a bad one; & ~~there is no~~
~~need of commending the cultivation~~
~~of ours~~ to follow the holy example
that we have been observing, we must

14
first discourages that Knowledge
is limited on all sides; ~~and~~ some is
withheld from ~~us~~ by necessity, & some
from propriety. The wicked desire be-
yond these limits is most commonly
called curiosity: (Earl of Stirling, in Richardson's ver-
se.)
Ah! curiosity! first cause of all our ill,
And yet the plague which most torments us still!

A teachable spirit will flee this bad
tendency of the disposition; for it will
lead us to acknowledge the authority of
him who has hidden from us the un-
knowable, that we may afterward sit
at his feet & learn what he will de-
clare. Saul was curious about his
future; it was a lamentable knowledge
of it. He might better have desired
to know how to love God. The dis-
ciples of Christ were curious to
know how many mortals will be
saved; he who had been obedient &
teachable, saw them instead the know-
ledge of their own deceitful hearts.

~~2. But a teachable spirit will, in
 stead of cultivating ^{and} curiosity, cultivate
 the equally natural desire of knowing
 profitable truths.~~

For when mere curiosity gets crushed back,
 there is often danger that the whole
 desire of which it is a perversion may
 decay. There are many other desires
 natural to the mind; such as the
 desire of power; the desire of ^{wealth} fame;
 & these may be suffered to quite de-
 -stroy the desire of knowledge. How
 often we see an arbitrary will not
 only making a man a tyrant, but
 keeping him unteachable & ignorant!
 How hard it is to seek money &
 wisdom both at once! A teachable
 spirit, I remark then, consists
 first in the ^{proper} cultivation of this de-
 -sire of knowledge.

~~2. But secondly, a teachable spirit~~
 2. Now ^{secondly} a teachable spirit keeps the

consists & this more particularly 16
~~in allowing the desire~~
desire of knowledge before the mind, &
allows it to have its satisfaction.
It ~~is~~ causes a continual medita-
-tion on the value of truth. Do you
see a person who evidently wishes to
know what learning is of most use;
how to obtain it; who is plainly inter-
-ested in revealed truth; you know
that were an opportunity to offer, such
a person would be glad to be taught,
at on any terms; ~~A prince & walking~~
~~for a lost diamond, would be grateful for~~
the aid of the meanest person. A schol-
-ar zealous to learn will forget the se-
-verity of the ^{as long as he can really teach.} harshest instructor. A
famous lover of languages used to beg
admission to hospital that he might
learn a new tongue by the care of
one sick who spoke it. The desire
speaks out; it endures, it dares any-
-thing; ~~as a man thinketh, so is he;~~

17 for he wants to hear, & his desire
is ever before him. It often appears
in his conversation; the least con-
-fidence awakens its mention, or mani-
-festation in some way.

But a teachable spirit consists
not only in the ^{proper case of the} desire for knowledge,
nor in its mere continuance; these
are but its foundations. It consists
chiefly in such a ~~of~~ supremacy of
the desire, as consents to any hard-
-ship that will bring the gratification
of ~~the desire~~ it.

The power of a single idea over the
mind & the active faculties, is won-
-derful. What obstacles did Columbus
overcome, to prove his view of the
western passage to India? How su-
-perior to the power of fear was his
-this idea of justification by faith!
How triumphant over every softer feel.

ing man Washington's conception
of justice when he hung Major An-
dri!

How easy it is, then, for a mind
really governed by the desire of know-
-ledge, to rise superior to all other
~~considerations~~ influences! ~~It laughs~~
~~at poverty~~ But the greatest of these is
pride - or the desire of esteem. This
makes people unteachable, destroys ~~the~~
or prevents the docile disposition which
our Master's boyhood has commended
as our choice.

Some are unwilling to concede
that any man but their man can
possibly be right; and so they prefer
pride to teachableness, & a narrow bigo-
-try to knowledge. ^{Such a bigotry we see in every profession, in every walk} ~~of~~ ~~it~~ ~~never~~ ~~not~~
~~in~~ ~~life~~. We grow most familiar with it perhaps, as a blot
on this fair name of the Christian Church; & surely, it
is most hateful in single a place.
And how many who
would cease.

19
make this very fact their excuse,
would, if they were not also in the
same case, find peace & joy in sit-
-ting humbly at the feet of Jesus, as
He did before the doctors, & learning
of Him! Alas! how can men
hope to go to the Great Account & say
that they sincerely desired to know
the right, when partisan pride, & hos-
-tility to a church, has been rather up-
-permost in their hearts & minds!

Others are unteachable because
of the pride of ignorance. They would
rather ~~be ignorant~~ remain without
knowledge forever, than make that
peculiar exposure of ignorance, which
consists in saying I want to learn.
If there was any royal road to
~~learning~~ the knowledge of truth;

20
if it could be obtained but in
some secret way; if it could be
a confidence between one's mind
& its Maker; they would be teach-
able. But this cannot be; & so they
prefer to be unteachable. They are too
proud. They love the praise of men
more than the praise of God. Ra-
ther than suffer poor fellow-creatures
to know the measure of their desire
for new knowledge, they will go up
to the throne of God & boldly say: We
had opportunities to obtain much holy
wisdom, & we despised them in
view of their hard conditions.

On the other hand, a teachable spirit
puts the desire of knowledge first,
& leaves pride, partisanship, intolerance,
trinity, behind. It says, with Bacon:
"It is a pleasure to stand upon the
shore, & to see ships tossed upon the

sea; a pleasure, to stand in the windows of a castle, & to see the battle, & the adventures thereof, below; But no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage-ground of truth - a hill not to be commanded, where the air is always clear & serene - & to see the errors, & man-
-ers, & mists, & tempests, in the vale below; so always that this prospect be with pity not with swelling or pride. Certainly it is Heaven upon Earth, to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, & turn upon the poles of truth."

The teachable man wants to learn. He knows that God has made it possible for his mind to revel in many delights of knowledge. He remembers that the favor of men

sat in the Temple hearing the doctors, & asking them questions. He chooses to follow so good an example, for it exactly fits his wish to gain answers to many queries which his own mind cannot solve. So he laughs at those who buy their ignorance — he detects their secret — and he seizes his opportunities, nay, he makes opportunities. And he learns & rejoices: he dwells on the vantage-ground.

Five reasons may be read from our text, why we should profit by the lesson of our Lord's boyhood. It is told us that he increased in wisdom & stature, & in favor with God & man.

Here are incitements to cultivate a teachable spirit: to take care of our natural desire for knowledge, & give it a fair chance in our

23 life; & to resist firmly the un-
-wonted temptations of bigotry, or
pride, or indolence, or what not,
& be always ready to be taught.

1. The first is, we shall find that
we increase in favor with men.
They will like us better.

The merchant or the farmer likes
that employe of his best, who is the most
willing to improve by his instructions.
Away with a fellow that knows more
than his master! None but the mis-
-resses of city servant girls know
how to endure that! The world
will never have done praising Peter
the Great of Russia, who literally ~~learned~~
the lesson of an ~~text~~ & went to
work for wages as a ship-carpen-
ter's apprentice that he might at
once add to his own skill & teach his

subjects a teachable spirit. Every one knows — or should know — that a teacher likes those pupils best, who are most teachable; and a minister, those hearers who realize that he preaches to them, & own it when there is occasion.

So if it were a matter of pride that could make people teachable, one would think they would see the profit of it from that point of view. I grant you it is a very low motive. But remember that it is one thing to covet undeserved esteem — quite another thing to increase in favor with people because of a noble faithful-ness to a virtuous principle.

2. This is not all that "increased in favor with men" means, however. Peter the Great was able to do more with his subjects for his teachableness;

25 they looked upon him not only as
superior but as a good worthy man;
& even an emperor, yes, a czar, might
well covet ~~that~~ ~~the~~ superior influence
of that good name. If your neighbors
know that you are willing to learn, they
will be willing to learn of you - at least,
more willing to you than to your oppo-
-site. Some men will not learn of
any body.

3. More than this, however, there
will be good reason for this favor-
-ableness of ~~the~~ ~~wise~~ men toward you.
You will know more. It is impossible
for a person with a teachable dispo-
-sition to go about with eyes & ears open,
without constantly learning. ~~Wisdom~~
Doth not wisdom cry? & understanding
putt forth her voice? she standeth
in the top of high places, by the way
in the places of the path? A teachable

spirit is constantly fed from the food supplies of God.

4. But above ~~these~~ God will be favorable to us. Thus saith the Lord (Isa. (lxvii): The Heaven is My throne, & the earth is My footstool; "but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor & of a contrite spirit, & that trembleth at My word." Ah! brethren! it is a grand thing to gratify our desires for knowledge, even the highest & noblest; but it is a far greater, sweeter thing, to feel with & above that pleas- use the precious approval of God's voice within us for the rectitude of our course. One only reason yet remains beyond this.

5. We are urged to cultivate a teachable spirit above all by the consideration, that God will finally, beyond all earthly blessings,

27 bestow upon us an abundant
entrance into that sphere of bliss
where we shall know even as we
are known.