

CHILDREN.

"A little child shall lead them."

One cold market morning I looked into a milliner's shop, and there I saw a hale, hearty, well-browned young fellow from the country, with his long cart whip, and lion-shag coat, holding up some little matter, and turning it about on his great fist. And what do you suppose it was? A baby's bonnet! A little, soft, blue satin hood, with a swan's down border, white as the new-fallen snow, with a frill of rich blonde around the edge.

By his side stood a very pretty woman, holding, with no small pride, the baby--for evidently it was the baby. Any one could read that fact in every glance, as they looked at each other, and then at the large, unconscious eyes, and fat, dimpled cheeks of the little one.

It was evident that neither of them had ever seen a baby like that before.

"But really, Mary," said the young man, "isn't three dollars very high?"

Mary very prudently said nothing, but taking the little bonnet, tied it on the little head, and held up the baby. The man looked, and without another word down went the three dollars--all the avails of last week's

butter; and as they walked out of the shop, it is hard to say which looked the most delighted with the bargain.

"Ah," thought I, "a little child shall lead them."

Another day, as I was passing a carriage factory along one of our principal back streets, I saw a young mechanic at work on a wheel. The rough body of a carriage stood beside him, and there, wrapped up snugly, all hooded and cloaked, sat a little dark-eyed girl, about a year old, playing with a great, shaggy dog. As I stopped, the man looked up from his work, and turned admiringly towards his little companion, as much as to say, "See what I have got here!"

"Yes," thought I; "and if the little lady ever gets a glance from admiring swains as sincere as that, she will be lucky."

Ah, these children, little witches, pretty even in all their faults and absurdities. See, for example, yonder little fellow in a naughty fit. He has shaken his long curls over his deep-blue eyes; the fair brow is bent in a frown, the rose leaf lip is pursed up in infinite defiance, and the white shoulder thrust angrily forward. Can any but a child look so pretty, even in its naughtiness?

Then comes the instant change; flashing smiles and tears, as the good comes back all in a rush, and you are overwhelmed with protestations, promises, and kisses! They are irresistible, too, these little ones.

They pull away the scholar's pen, tumble about his paper, make somersets over his books; and what can he do? They tear up newspapers, litter the carpets, break, pull, and upset, and then jabber unheard-of English in self-defence; and what can you do for yourself?

"If I had a child," says the precise man, "you should see."

He does have a child, and his child tears up his papers, tumbles over his things, and pulls his nose, like all other children; and what has the precise man to say for himself? Nothing; he is like every body else; "a little child shall lead him."

The hardened heart of the worldly man is unlocked by the guileless tones and simple caresses of his son; but he repays it in time, by imparting to his boy all the crooked tricks and callous maxims which have undone himself.

Go to the jail, to the penitentiary, and find there the wretch most sullen, brutal, and hardened. Then look at your infant son. Such as he is to you, such to some mother was this man. That hard hand was soft and delicate; that rough voice was tender and lisping; fond eyes followed him as he played, and he was rocked and cradled as something holy. There was a time when his heart, soft and unworn, might have opened to questionings of God and Jesus, and been sealed with the seal of Heaven. But harsh hands seized it; fierce goblin lineaments were impressed upon it; and all is over with him forever!

So of the tender, weeping child is made the callous, heartless man; of the all-believing child, the sneering sceptic; of the beautiful and modest, the shameless and abandoned; and this is what the world does for the little one.

There was a time when the divine One stood on earth, and little children sought to draw near to him. But harsh human beings stood between him and them, forbidding their approach. Ah, has it not always been so? Do not even we, with our hard and unsubdued feelings, our worldly and unspiritual habits and maxims, stand like a dark screen between our little child and its Savior, and keep even from the choice bud of our hearts the sweet radiance which might unfold it for Paradise? "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not," is still the voice of the Son of God; but the cold world still closes around and forbids. When, of old, disciples would question their Lord of the higher mysteries of his kingdom, he took a little child and set him in the midst, as a sign of him who should be greatest in heaven. That gentle teacher remains still to us. By every hearth and fireside Jesus still sets the little child in the midst of us.

Wouldst thou know, O parent, what is that faith which unlocks heaven? Go not to wrangling polemics, or creeds and forms of theology, but draw to thy bosom thy little one, and read in that clear, trusting eye the lesson of eternal life. Be only to thy God as thy child is to thee, and all is done. Blessed shalt thou be, indeed, "when a little child shall

lead thee."