

"Christian Manhood"  
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St. John Henry Newman  
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1 "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but  
2 when I became a man, I put away childish things." 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

3 WHEN our Lord was going to leave the world and return to His Father, He called His  
4 disciples *orphans*; children, as it were, whom He had been rearing, who were still  
5 unable to direct themselves, and who were soon to lose their Protector; but He said, "I  
6 will not leave you comfortless orphans, I will come to you;" [John xiv. 18.] meaning to  
7 say, He would come again to them in the power of His Holy Spirit, who should be their  
8 present all-sufficient Guide, though He Himself was away. And we know, from the  
9 sacred history, that when the Holy Spirit came, they ceased to be the defenceless  
10 children they had been before. He breathed into them a divine life, and gifted them with  
11 spiritual manhood, or *perfection*, as it is called in Scripture. From that time forth, they  
12 put away childish things: they spake, they understood, they thought, as those who had  
13 been taught to govern themselves; and who, having "an unction from the Holy One,  
14 knew all things."

15 That such a change was wrought in the Apostles, according to Christ's promise, is  
16 evident from comparing their conduct *before* the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit  
17 descended on them, and *after*. I need not enlarge on their wonderful firmness and zeal  
18 in their Master's cause afterwards. On the other hand, it is plain from the Gospels, that  
19 before the Holy Ghost came down, that is, while Christ was still with them, they were as  
20 helpless and ignorant as children; had no clear notion what they ought to seek after,  
21 and how; and were carried astray by their accidental feelings and their long-cherished  
22 prejudices.—What was it but to act the child, to ask how many times a fellow-Christian  
23 should offend against us, and we forgive him, as St. Peter did? or to ask to see the  
24 Father, with St. Philip? or to propose to build tabernacles on the mount, as if they were  
25 not to return to the troubles of the world? or to dispute who should be the greatest?  
26 [Note 1] or to look for Christ's restoring at that time the temporal kingdom to Israel?  
27 [Note 2] Natural as such views were in the case of half-instructed Jews, they were  
28 evidently unworthy of those whom Christ had made His, that He might "present them  
29 perfect" before the throne of God.

30 Yet the first disciples of Christ at least put off their vanities once for all, when the Spirit  
31 came upon them; but as to ourselves, the Spirit has long since been poured upon us,  
32 even from our earliest years; yet it is a serious question, whether multitudes of us, even  
33 of those among us who make a profession of religion, are even so far advanced in a  
34 knowledge of the Truth as the Apostles were before the day of Pentecost. It may be a  
35 profitable employment today to consider this question, as suggested by the text,—to  
36 inquire how far we have proceeded in putting off such childish things as are inconsistent  
37 with a manly, honest profession of the Gospel.

38 Now, observe, I am not inquiring whether we are plainly living in sin, in wilful  
39 disobedience; nor even whether we are yielding through thoughtlessness to sinful  
40 practices and habits. The condition of those who act against their conscience, or who  
41 act without conscience, that is, lightly and carelessly, is far indeed from bearing any  
42 resemblance to that of the Apostles in the years of their early discipleship. I am  
43 supposing you, my brethren, to be on the whole followers of Christ, to profess to obey  
44 Him; and I address you as those who seem to themselves to have a fair hope of  
45 salvation. I am directing your attention, not to your sins, not to those faults and failings  
46 which you know to be such, and are trying to conquer, as being confessedly evil in  
47 themselves, but to such of your views, wishes, and tastes, as resemble those which the  
48 Apostles cherished, true believers though they were, before they attained their  
49 manhood in the Gospel: and I ask, how far you have dismissed these from your minds  
50 as vain and trifling; that is, how far you have made what St. Paul in the text seems to  
51 consider the first step in the true spiritual course of a Christian, on whom the Holy Ghost  
52 has descended.

53 1. For example, Let us consider our love of the pleasures of life. I am willing to allow  
54 there is an innocent love of the world, innocent in itself. God made the world, and has  
55 sanctioned the general form of human society, and has given us abundant pleasures in  
56 it; I do not say *lasting* pleasures, but still, while they are present, really pleasures. It is  
57 natural that the young should look with hope to the prospect before them. They cannot  
58 help forming schemes what they will do when they come into active life, or what they  
59 would wish to be, had they their choice. They indulge themselves in fancyings about the  
60 future, which they know at the time cannot come true. At other times they confine  
61 themselves to what is possible; and then their hearts burn, while they dream of quiet  
62 happiness, domestic comfort, independence. Or, with bolder views, they push forward  
63 their fortunes into public life, and indulge ambitious hopes. They fancy themselves rising  
64 in the world, distinguished, courted, admired; securing influence over others, and  
65 rewarded with high station. James and John had such a dream when they besought  
66 Christ that they might sit at His side in the most honourable places in His kingdom.

67 Now such dreams can hardly be called sinful in themselves, and without reference to  
68 the particular case; for the gifts of wealth, power, and influence, and much more of  
69 domestic comfort, come from God, and may be religiously improved. But, though not  
70 directly censurable, they are *childish*; childish either in themselves, or at least when  
71 cherished and indulged; childish in a Christian, who has infinitely higher views to  
72 engross his mind; and, as being childish, excusable only in the young. They *are* an  
73 offence when retained as life goes on; but in the young we may regard them after the  
74 pattern of our Saviour's judgment upon the young man who was rich and noble. He is  
75 said to have "loved him;" pitying (that is) and not harshly denouncing the anticipations  
76 which he had formed of happiness from wealth and power, yet withal not concealing  
77 from him the sacrifice of all these which he must make, "if he would be perfect," that is,  
78 a man, and not a mere child in the Gospel.

79 2. But there are other childish views and habits besides, which must be put off while we  
80 take on ourselves the full profession of a Christian; and these, not so free from intrinsic

81 guilt as those which have been already noticed;—such as the love of display,  
82 greediness of the world's praise, and the love of the comforts and luxuries of life. These,  
83 though wrong tempers of mind, still I do not now call by their hardest names, because I  
84 would lead persons, if I could, rather to turn away from them as unworthy a Christian,  
85 with a sort of contempt, outgrowing them as they grow in grace, and laying them aside  
86 as a matter of course, while they are gradually learning to "set their affections on things  
87 above, not on things of the earth."

88 Children have evil tempers and idle ways which we do not deign to speak seriously of.  
89 Not that we, in any degree, approve them or endure them on their own account; nay, we  
90 punish some of them; but we bear them *in* children, and look for their disappearing as  
91 the mind becomes more mature. And so in religious matters there are many habits and  
92 views, which we bear with in the unformed Christian, but which we account disgraceful  
93 and contemptible should they survive that time when a man's character may be  
94 supposed to be settled. Love of display is one of these; whether we are vain of our  
95 abilities, or our acquirements, or our wealth, or our personal appearance; whether we  
96 discover our weakness in talking much, or in love of managing, or again in love of dress.  
97 Vanity, indeed, and conceit are always disagreeable, for the reason that they interfere  
98 with the comfort of other persons, and vex them; but I am here observing, that they  
99 are *in themselves* odious, when discerned in those who enjoy the full privileges of the  
100 Church, and are by profession men in Christ Jesus, odious from their inconsistency with  
101 Christian faith and earnestness.

102 And so with respect to the love of worldly comforts and luxuries (which, unhappily, often  
103 grows upon us rather than disappears, as we get old), whether or not it be natural in  
104 youth, at least, it is (if I may so say) *shocking* in those who profess to be "perfect," if we  
105 would estimate things aright; and this from its great incongruity with the spirit of the  
106 Gospel. Is it not something beyond measure strange and monstrous (if we could train  
107 our hearts to possess a right judgment in all things), to profess that our treasure is not  
108 here, but in heaven with Him who is ascended thither, and to own that we have a cross  
109 to bear after Him, who first suffered before He triumphed; and yet to set ourselves  
110 *deliberately* to study our own comfort as some great and sufficient end, to go much out  
111 of our way to promote it, to sacrifice any thing considerable to guard it, and to be  
112 downcast at the prospect of the loss of it? Is it possible for a true son of the Church  
113 militant, while "the ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents," and the "servants of his  
114 Lord are encamped in the open field," to "eat and drink" securely, to wrap himself in the  
115 furniture of wealth, to feed his eyes with the "pride of life," and complete for himself the  
116 measure of this world's elegancies?

117 Again, all timidity, irresolution, fear of ridicule, weakness of purpose, such as the  
118 Apostles showed when they deserted Christ, and Peter especially when he denied Him,  
119 are to be numbered among the tempers of mind which are childish as well as sinful;  
120 which we must learn to despise,—to be ashamed at ourselves if we are influenced by  
121 them, and, instead of thinking the conquest of them a great thing, to account it as one of  
122 the very first steps towards being but an ordinary true believer; just as the Apostles, in  
123 spite of their former discipleship, only commenced (surely) their Christian course at the

124 day of Pentecost, and then took to themselves a good measure of faith, boldness, zeal,  
125 and self-mastery, not as some great proficiency and as a boast, but as the very  
126 condition of their being Christians at all, as the elements of spiritual life, as a mere  
127 outfitting, and a small attainment indeed in that extended course of sanctification  
128 through which the Blessed Spirit is willing to lead every Christian.

129 Now in this last remark I have given a chief reason for dwelling on the subject before us.  
130 It is very common for Christians to make much of what are but petty services; first to  
131 place the very substance of religious obedience in a few meagre observances, or  
132 particular moral precepts which are easily complied with, and which they think fit to call  
133 giving up the world; and then to make a great vaunting about their having done what, in  
134 truth, every one who is not a mere child in Christ ought to be able to do, to congratulate  
135 themselves upon their success, ostentatiously to return thanks for it, to condemn others  
136 who do not happen to move exactly along the very same line of minute practices in  
137 detail which they have adopted, and in consequence to forget that, after all, by such  
138 poor obedience, right though it be, still they have not approached even to a distant view  
139 of that point in their Christian course, at which they may consider themselves, in St.  
140 Paul's words, to have "attained" a sure hope of salvation; just as little children, when  
141 they first have strength to move their limbs, triumph in every exertion of their newly-  
142 acquired power, as in some great victory. To put off idle hopes of earthly good, to be  
143 sick of flattery and the world's praise, to see the emptiness of temporal greatness, and  
144 to be watchful against self-indulgence,—these are but the beginnings of religion; these  
145 are but the preparation of heart, which religious earnestness implies; without a good  
146 share of them, how can a Christian move a step? How could Abraham, when called of  
147 God, have even set out from his native place, unless he had left off to think much of this  
148 world, and cared not for its ridicule? Surely these attainments are but our first manly  
149 robe, showing that childhood is gone; and, if we feel the love and fear of the world still  
150 active within our hearts, deeply must we be humbled, yes, and alarmed; and humbled  
151 even though but the traces remain of former weaknesses. But even if otherwise, what  
152 thank have we? See what the Apostles were, by way of contrast, and then you will see  
153 what is the true life of the Spirit, the substance and full fruit of holiness. To love our  
154 brethren with a resolution which no obstacles can overcome, so as almost to consent to  
155 an anathema on ourselves, if so be we may save those who hate us,—to labour in  
156 God's cause against hope, and in the midst of sufferings,—to read the events of life, as  
157 they occur, by the interpretation which Scripture gives them, and that, not as if the  
158 language were strange to us, but to do it promptly,—to perform all our relative daily  
159 duties most watchfully,—to check every evil thought, and bring the whole mind into  
160 captivity to the law of Christ,—to be patient, cheerful, forgiving, meek, honest, and  
161 true,—to persevere in this good work till death, making fresh and fresh advances  
162 towards perfection—and after all, even to the end, to confess ourselves unprofitable  
163 servants, nay, to feel ourselves corrupt and sinful creatures, who (with all our  
164 proficiency) would still be lost unless God bestowed on us His mercy in Christ;—these  
165 are some of the difficult realities of religious obedience, which we must pursue, and  
166 which the Apostles in high measure attained, and which we may well bless God's holy  
167 name, if He enables us to make our own.

168 Let us then take it for granted, as a truth which cannot be gainsaid, that to break with  
169 the world, and make religion our first concern, is only to cease to be children; and,  
170 again, that in consequence, those Christians who have come to mature years, and yet  
171 do not even so much as this, are "in the presence of the Angels of God" an odious and  
172 unnatural spectacle, a mockery of Christianity. I do not say what such men are in God's  
173 sight, and what are their prospects for the next world, for that is a fearful thought,—and  
174 we ought to be influenced by motives far higher than that mere slavish dread of future  
175 punishment to which such a consideration would lead us.

176 But here some one may ask, whether I am not speaking severely in urging so many  
177 sacrifices at the beginning of true Christian obedience. In conclusion, then, I observe, in  
178 the first place, that I have not said a word against the moderate and thankful enjoyment  
179 of this life's goods, *when* they actually come in our way; but against the wishing  
180 earnestly for them, seeking them, and preferring them to God's righteousness, which is  
181 commonly done. Further, I am not excluding from the company of Christians all who  
182 cannot at once make up their minds thus vigorously to reject the world, when its goods  
183 are dangerous, inexpedient, or unsuitable; but excluding them from the company of  
184 mature, manly Christians. Doubtless our Lord deals gently with us. He has put His two  
185 Sacraments apart from each other. Baptism first admits us to His favour; His Holy  
186 Supper brings us among His perfect ones. He has put from fourteen to twenty years  
187 between them, in the ordinary course of things, that we may have time to count the cost,  
188 and make our decision calmly. Only there must be no standing still,—there cannot be;  
189 time goes slowly, yet surely, from birth to the age of manhood, and in like manner, our  
190 minds, though slowly formed to love Christ, must still be forming. It is when men are  
191 mature in years, and yet are "children in understanding," then they are intolerable,  
192 because they have exceeded their season, and are out of place. Then it is that  
193 ambitious thoughts, trifling pursuits and amusements, passionate wishes and keen  
194 hopes, and the love of display, are directly sinful, because they are by that time  
195 deliberate sins. While they were children, "they spake as children, understood, thought  
196 as children;" but when they became men, "it was high time to awake out of sleep;" and  
197 "put away childish things." And if they have continued children instead of "having their  
198 senses exercised to discriminate between the excellent and the base," alas! what deep  
199 repentance must be theirs, before they can know what true peace is!—what self-  
200 reproach and sharp self-discipline, before their eyes can be opened to see effectually  
201 those truths which are "spiritually discerned!"

202 So much on the case of those who neglect to grow betimes into the hope of their calling.  
203 As to the young themselves, it is plain that nothing I have said can give encouragement  
204 to them to acquiesce in their present incomplete devotion of themselves to God,  
205 because it will be as much as they can do, even with their best efforts, to make their  
206 growth of wisdom and of stature keep pace with each other. And if there be any one  
207 who, as thinking the enjoyments of youth must soon be relinquished, deliberately  
208 resolves to make the most of them before the duties of manhood come upon him, such  
209 an one, in doing so, is rendering it impossible for him to give them up, when he is called  
210 to do so. As for those who allow themselves in what, even in youth, is clearly sinful,—  
211 the deliberate neglect of prayer, profaneness, riotous living, or other immorality,—the

212 case of such persons has not even entered into my mind, when I spoke of youthful  
213 thoughtlessness. They, of course, have no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of  
214 God."

215 But if there be those among us, and such there well may be, who, like the young ruler,  
216 "worshipping Christ," and "loved" by Him, and obeying His commandments from their  
217 youth up, yet cannot but be "sorrowful" at the thought of giving up their pleasant visions,  
218 their childish idolatries, and their bright hopes of earthly happiness, such I bid be of  
219 good cheer, and take courage. What is it your Saviour requires of you, more than will  
220 also be exacted from you by that hard and evil master, who desires your ruin? Christ  
221 bids you give up the world; but will not, at any rate, the world soon give up you? Can  
222 you keep it, by being its slave? Will not he, whose creature of temptation it is, the prince  
223 of the world, take it from you, whatever he at present promises? What does your Lord  
224 require of you, but to look at all things as they really are, to account them merely as His  
225 instruments, and to believe that good is good because He wills it, that He can bless as  
226 easily by hard stone as by bread, in the desert as in the fruitful field, if we have faith in  
227 him who gives us the true bread from heaven? Daniel and his friends were princes of  
228 the royal house of David; they were "children well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom,  
229 cunning in knowledge, and understanding science;" [Dan. i. 4.] yet they had faith to  
230 refuse even the literal meat and drink given them, because it was an idol's sacrifice, and  
231 God sustained them without it. For ten days of trial they lived on pulse and water; yet "at  
232 the end," says the sacred record, "their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh  
233 than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." Doubt not, then, His  
234 power to bring you through any difficulties, who gives you the command to encounter  
235 them. He has showed you the way; He gave up the home of His mother Mary to "be  
236 about His Father's business," and now He but bids you take up after Him the cross  
237 which He bore for you, and "fill up what is wanting of His afflictions in your flesh." Be not  
238 afraid,—it is but a pang now and then, and a struggle; a covenant with your eyes, and a  
239 fasting in the wilderness, some calm habitual watchfulness, and the hearty effort to  
240 obey, and all will be well. Be not afraid. He is most gracious, and will bring you on by  
241 little and little. He does not show you whither He is leading you; you might be frightened  
242 did you see the whole prospect at once. Sufficient for the day is its own evil. Follow His  
243 plan; look not on anxiously; look down at your present footing "lest it be turned out of the  
244 way," but speculate not about the future. I can well believe that you have hopes now,  
245 which you cannot give up, and even which support you in your present course. Be it so;  
246 whether they will be fulfilled, or not, is in His hand. He may be pleased to grant the  
247 desires of your heart; if so, thank Him for His mercy; only be sure, that all will be for your  
248 highest good, and "as thy days, so shall thy strength be. There is none like unto the God  
249 of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky.  
250 The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." [Deut. xxxiii.  
251 25-27.] He knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning; and when we outgrow our  
252 childhood, we but approach, however feebly, to His likeness, who has no youth nor age,  
253 who has no passions, no hopes, nor fears, but who loves truth, purity, and mercy, and  
254 who is supremely blessed, because He is supremely holy.

255 Lastly, while we thus think of Him, let us not forget to be up and doing. Let us beware of  
256 indulging a mere barren faith and love, which dreams instead of working, and is  
257 fastidious when it should be hardy. This is only spiritual childhood in another form; for  
258 the Holy Ghost is the Author of active good works, and leads us to the observance of all  
259 lowly deeds of ordinary obedience as the most pleasing sacrifice to God.

260 END OF VOLUME I.

261 Notes

262 1. Matt. xvii. 4; xviii. 1; xx. 20. John xiv. 8.

263 2. Acts i. 6.