It was a sultry summer's day a hundred and fifty years ago, and John Wesley was on the rocky road to Dublin. 'The wind being in my face, tempering the heat of the sun, I had a pleasant ride to Dublin. In the evening I began expounding the deepest part of the Holy Scripture, namely, the First Epistle of John, by which, above all other, even above all other inspired writings, I advise every young preacher to form his style. Here are sublimity and simplicity together, the strongest sense and the plainest language! How can any one that would speak as the oracles of God use harder words than are to be found here?' With which illuminating extract from the great man's journal we may dismiss him, the road to Dublin, and the text from which he preached in the Irish capital, all together. I have no further business with any of them. The thing that concerns me is the suggestive declaration, made by the most experienced preacher of all time, that sublimity and simplicity always go hand in hand. Here, in this deepest part of Holy Scripture, says the master, are sublimity and simplicity together. 'By this, above all other writings, I advise every preacher to form his style. How can any one that would speak as the oracles of God use harder words than are to be found here?' Such words from such a source are like apples of gold in pictures of silver, and I am thankful that I chanced to come upon the great man that hot July night in Dublin, and gather this distilled essence of wisdom as it fell from his eloquent lips.

I have often wondered why we teach children to pray that their simplicity may be pitied.

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child!
Pity my simplicity!
Suffer me to come to Thee!

Why 'pity my simplicity'? It is the one thing about a little child that is really sublime, sublimity and simplicity being, as we learned at Dublin, everlastingly inseparable. Pity my simplicity! Why, it is the sweet simplicity of a little child that we all admire and love and covet! Pity my simplicity! Why, it is the unspoiled and sublime simplicity of this little child of mine that takes my heart by storm and carries everything before it. And, depend upon it, the heart of the divine Father is affected not very differently. This soft, sweet little white-robed thing that kneels on my knee, with its arms around my neck, lisping its

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
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shames me by its very sublimity. It outstrips me, transcends me, and leaves me far behind. It soars whilst I grovel; it
flies whilst I creep. That is what Jesus meant when He took a little child and set him in the midst of the disciples and said, 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven!' The simplest, He meant, is always the sublimest. And it was because the great Methodist had so perfectly caught the spirit of his great Master that he declared so confidently that night at Dublin, 'Simplicity and sublimity lie here together!'

It is always and everywhere the same. In literature sublimity is represented by the poet. What could be more sublime than the inspired imagination of Milton? And yet, and yet! The very greatest of all our literary critics, in his essay on Milton, feels it incumbent upon him to point out that imagination is essentially the domain of childhood. 'Of all people,' he says, 'children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. Every image which is strongly presented to their mental eye produces on them the effect of reality. No man, whatever his sensibility may be, is ever affected by Hamlet or Lear as a little girl is affected by the story of poor Red Ridinghood. She knows that it is all false, that wolves cannot speak, that there are no wolves in England. Yet, in spite of the knowledge, she believes; she weeps; she trembles; she dares not go into a dark room lest she should feel the teeth of the monster at her throat.' And from these premisses, Macaulay proceeds to his inevitable conclusion. 'He who, in an enlightened and literary society, aspires to be a great poet must,' he says, 'first become a little child. He must take to pieces the whole web of his mind. He must unlearn much of that knowledge which has perhaps constituted hitherto his chief title to superiority. His very talents will be a hindrance to him. His difficulties will be proportioned to his proficiency in the pursuits which are fashionable among his contemporaries; and that proficiency will in general be proportioned to the vigour and activity of his mind.' Could there be any finer comment on the words of the Master?

'Simplicity and sublimity always go together!' said John Wesley that hot July night at Dublin.

'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven!' said the Master on that memorable day in Galilee.

'He who aspires to be a great poet must first become a little child!' says Lord Macaulay in his incomparable essay on Milton.

I have carefully put the Master in His old place. He is in the midst, with the very greatest of our modern apostles on the one side of Him, and the very greatest of our modern historians on the other. But they are all three of them saying the same thing, each in his own way. It is a pity that we teach our children that the sublimest thing about them--their simplicity--is a thing of which they need to be ashamed. And the way in which their tiny tongues stumble over the great word seems to show that, following a true instinct, they do not take kindly to that clause in their bedtime prayer.

I am told that, away beyond the Never-Never ranges, there is a church from which the children are excluded before the sermon begins. I wish my informant had not told me of its existence. I am not often troubled with nightmare, my supper being quite a frugal affair. But just occasionally I find myself a victim of the terror by night. And when I am mercifully awakened, and asked why I am gasping so horribly and perspiring so freely, I have to confess that I was dreaming that I had somehow become the minister of that childless congregation. As is usual after nightmare, I look round with a sense of inexpressible thankfulness on discovering that it was only a horrid dream. An appointment to such a charge would be to me a most fearsome and terrifying prospect. I could not trust myself. In a way, I envy the man who can hold his own under such circumstances. His transcendent powers enable him to preserve his sturdy humanness of character, his charming simplicity of diction, his graphic picturesqueness of phrase, and his exquisite winsomeness of behaviour without the extraneous assistance which the children render to some of us. But I could not do it. I should go all to pieces. And so, when I dream that I have entered a pulpit from which I can survey no roguish young faces and mischievous wide-open eyes, I fancy I am ruined and undone. I watch with consternation as the little people file out during the hymn before the sermon, and I know that the sermon is doomed. The children in the congregation are my salvation.

I fancy that the custom to which I have referred was in vogue in the church to which the Rev. Bruno Leathwaite Chilvers ministered. Everybody knows Mr. Chilvers; at least everybody who loves George Gissing knows that very excellent gentleman. Mr. Chilvers loved to adorn his dainty discourses with certain words of strangely grandiloquent
"Nullifidian," "morbific," "renascent"—these were among his favourites. Once or twice he spoke of "psychogenesis" with an emphatic enunciation which seemed to invite respectful wonder. In using Latin words which have become fixed in the English language, he generally corrected the common errors of quantity and pronounced words as nobody else did. He often alluded to French and German authors in order that he might recite French and German quotations. And so on. Poor Mr. Chilvers! I am sure that the little children filed out during the hymn before the sermon. No man with a scrap of imagination could look into the dimpled face of a little girl I know and hurl 'nullifidian' at her. No man could look down into a certain pair of sparkling eyes that are wonderfully familiar to me and talk about things as 'morbific' or 'renascent.' If only the little tots had kept their seats for the sermon, it would have saved poor Mr. Chilvers from committing such atrocities. As it is, they went and he collapsed. Can anybody imagine John Wesley talking to his summer-evening crowd at Dublin about 'nullifidian,' or quoting German? I will say nothing of the Galilean preacher. The common people heard Him gladly. He was so simple and therefore so sublime. As Sir Edwin Arnold says:

The simplest sights He met--
The Sower flinging seed on loam and rock;
The darnel in the wheat; the mustard-tree
That hath its seeds so little, and its boughs
Widespreading; and the wandering sheep; and nets
Shot in the wimpled waters--drawing forth
Great fish and small--these, and a hundred such,
Seen by us daily, never seen aright,
Were pictures for Him from the page of life,
Teaching by parable.

Therein lay the sublimity of it all.

A little child, especially a little child of a distinctly restless and mischievous propensity, is really a great help to a minister, and it is a shame to deprive the good man of such assistance. It is only by such help that some of us can hope to approximate to real sublimity. Lord Beaconsfield used to say that, in making after-dinner speeches, he kept his eye on the waiters. If they were unmoved, he knew that he was in the realms of mediocrity. But when they grew excited and waved their napkins, he knew that he was getting home. Lord Cockburn, who was for some time Lord Chief Justice of Great Britain, when asked for the secret of his extraordinary success at the bar, replied sagely, 'When I was addressing a jury, I invariably picked out the stupidest-looking fellow of the lot, and addressed myself specially to him—for this good reason: I knew that if I convinced him I should be sure to carry all the rest!' Dr. Thomas Guthrie, in addressing gatherings of ministers, used to tell this story of Lord Cockburn with immense relish, and earnestly commended its philosophy to their consideration. I was reading the other day that Dr. Boyd Carpenter, formerly Bishop of Ripon and now Canon of Westminster, on being asked if he felt nervous when preaching before Queen Victoria, replied, 'I never address the Queen at all. I know there will be present the Queen, the Princes, the household, and the servants down to the scullery-maid, and I preach to the scullery-maid.' Little children do not attend political dinners such as Lord Beaconsfield adorned; nor Courts of Justice such as Lord Cockburn addressed; nor Royal chapels like that in which Dr. Boyd Carpenter officiated. And, in the absence of the children, the only chance of reaching sublimity that offered itself to these unhappy orators lay in making good use of the waiter, the stupid juryman, and the scullery-maid. If the Rev. Bruno Leathwaite Chilvers really cannot induce the children to abandon the bad habit in which they have been trained, I urge him, as a friend and a brother, to adopt the same ingenious expedient. But if he can get on the right side of a little child, persuade him to sit the sermon out, and vow that he will look straight into that bright little face, and say no word that will not interest that tiny listener, I promise him that before long people will say that his sermons are simply sublime. Robert Louis Stevenson knew what he was doing when he discussed every sentence of Treasure Island with his schoolboy step-son before giving it its final form. It was by that wise artifice that one of the greatest stories in our language came to be written.
The fact, of course, is that in the soul's sublimest moments it hungers for simplicity. One of Du Maurier's great Punch cartoons represented a honeymoon conversation between a husband and wife who had both covered themselves with glory at Cambridge. And the conversation ran along these highly intellectual lines:

'What would Lovey do if Dovey died?'

'Oh, Lovey would die too!'

There is a world of philosophy behind the nonsense. We do not make love in the language of the psychologist; we make love in the language of the little child. When life approaches to sublimity, it always expresses itself with simplicity. In the depth of mortal anguish, or at the climax of human joy, we do not use a grandiloquent and incomprehensible phraseology. We talk in monosyllables. As we grow old, and draw near to the gates of the grave, we become more and more simple. In his declining years, John Newton wrote, 'When I was young I was sure of many things. There are only two things of which I am sure now; one is that I am a miserable sinner, and the other that Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour.' What is this but the soul garbing itself in the most perfect simplicities as the only fitting raiment in which it can greet the everlasting sublimities?

'Here are sublimity and simplicity together!' exclaimed John Wesley on that hot July night at Dublin. 'How can any one that would speak as the oracles of God use harder words than are to be found here? By this I advise every young preacher to form his style!'

'He who aspires to be a great poet--as sublime as Milton--must first become a little child!' declares the greatest of all litterateurs.

'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven!' says the Master Himself, taking a little child and setting him in the midst of them.

'Pity my simplicity!' pleads this little thing with its soft arms round my neck.

'Give me that simplicity!' say I.

(The end)
Frank Boreham's essay: 'Pity My Simplicity!'