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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

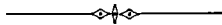
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led to take refuge in the Church of Rome, while others have been drawn into scepticism and infidelity. The true remedy is the one which Scripture itself gives—we must “search,” “dig” beneath its surface for its hidden treasures, and to those who thus diligently seek, the blessings it promises will be given. Prayer, meditation and reading of the Divine Word—these make the experienced interpreter of the sacred Scriptures. “Where meditation shows anything lacking, prayer,” says St. Bernard, “obtains its supply.” Just one word of caution about what may be called catch-passages—where the apparent meaning is not the true one. Every passage must be taken in connection with its context, and not wrested from its natural meaning. The neglect of this simple rule has produced what may be called the monstrosities of interpretation.

Grammatical criticism abounds, while spiritual discrimination is rare in modern commentaries; yet this is ever the most important, and no exegesis can be sound which neglects it. The Scriptures themselves state this, *e.g.*, 1 Cor. ii. 15, “He that is spiritual judgeth all things;” 1 John ii. 20, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” Even plain passages such as Acts xvi. 31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;” 1 John i. 7, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,” are sometimes interpreted so as to lose all their simplicity and comfort. Again, it is very important to remember that there are key-words in Scripture—great cardinal truths to lay hold of—such as atonement and propitiation. No exegesis can be sound which overlooks or undervalues this important feature of the Sacred Volume. Nor is this caution unnecessary in the present day, as our controversies show.

Above all, we should remember the saying of an old writer, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,” and that interpretation of the inspired writings, which does not recognise the Lord Jesus Christ as the sum and substance, “the Alpha and Omega” of them all, must be pronounced to be radically false and unsound.

R. C. W. RABAN.



#### ART. V.—MISSIONS TO CHILDREN.

“SUFFER little children to come unto Me.” “He took them up in His arms and blessed them.” Something like this should, I think, be the line on which children’s missions ought to be carried out, though, like many other so-called “lines” suggested by Holy Scripture, the explanation

will vary according to the views of the explainer: *e.g.*, lately I saw this text quoted as an argument *against* infant baptism—but this is a digression, and must be suppressed.

I am going to speak of children's missions or services in Church, for, after all, it is in Church and not by the seashore that most of us come face to face with our children.

*Children's Services in Church.*—Looking back over four years' experience of these in some of the many churches I have visited as a Church Pastoral-Aid Association Secretary, I find it hard to repress a shudder. There *are* brethren who will tell you, in strict confidence, that anything will do for a week-night service. Alas! I fear that *less* than anything will sometimes do for the children. We meet in this society to help one another. We meet even to criticise one another in a sincerely loving spirit. Let me say boldly, then, that I do *not* think *all* Evangelical clergy understand children and children's "services." As to the service, the more dreary (it would seem) the better—a careful elimination of all *responses* (one church, a famous London Evangelical stronghold that I dare not mention, denies the children the use of the Creed, so necessary, one would think, in view of confirmation), the Psalms and Canticles abolished in favour of hymns rarely practised beforehand, no attempt whatever to inculcate reverence; as to the sermon, well, I am reminded of a dear old lady whom I met at the seaside last year, who told me she never missed attending the children's services on the shore—and she was wise—for the addresses exactly suited *her* spiritual level, but as for suiting the children, of that I am not so sure.

I will say a few words on: (1) The System of Children's Missions or Services; (2) The Service itself; (3) The Sermon.

### 1. *The System of Children's Services.*

There are, roughly speaking, *three* systems of children's services, or of getting at the children. First, that of evangelizing pure and simple, such as is pursued with more or less success by the agents of the Children's Special Service Mission. Secondly, there is that of the High Anglican School, whereby children are thoroughly drilled in the doctrines of the Church, and become finally disciples of the sacerdotal system. Thirdly, there is the system which combines the best features of the first two, and which may be described as spiritual life on a Church of England basis. My own convictions are with this third system.

The evangelizing system pure and simple has several drawbacks from the Church of England point of view. To take one only, it ignores baptism, and though it is quite possible to

make more of Baptism than the Prayer-Book would seem to warrant, yet, in the case of Church of *England* children (and my paper is meant to refer only to these) we lose a great deal when our mouths are compelled to be shut upon this important subject. "You belong to Christ, for you have been given to Christ as an infant," is a definite starting-point of great value. And here let me note, that with regard to this thorny question of baptism, everything depends on our *aim*. If *that* is (as it ought to be) the *conversion* of our children, we are not likely to fall victims to any mechanical theory of baptismal regeneration; a change of heart is as necessary for a baptized child as for an unbaptized one, but a change of heart is *God's* work; *ours* is to teach the child in accordance with our formularies, and these bid us regard *confirmation* as the aim of our instruction. The ideal confirmation is the confirmation which is also *conversion*. Let that ideal be ours, and I venture to think we need not shirk one sentence in the Prayer-Book.

And here may I say a word on child conversion? A few days ago I buried a man who, when a boy, had been converted in St. John's Sunday-school, Holloway. The story of his conversion has been published as a tract by the Religious Tract Society.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by that of several other boys, for whom I arranged (it was in my layman's days) a kind of class-meeting. I mention this to show that I do believe, firmly believe, in child conversion, though I cannot quite endorse all the methods of the Evangelistic school. I remember being considerably pained by the attempt witnessed some years since at one of Mr. Josiah Spire's meetings to extort testimony from boy believers. Two years ago I was present at the last of a series of seaside services. Five evangelists gave searching addresses of five minutes each, and the whole thing at last palled upon me. It was subjective religion run mad. "Suffer little children to *come*"—don't "work them *up* to come." Be careful to teach them the rudiments of the Christian faith—something of the *WHOLE* counsel of God, and not a *repetition* (frequently *ad nauseam*) of but one part of it.

Listen to this, from the letter of one of the most thoughtful of our younger clergy, well known to some in this room. He writes (from Oxford) to me as follows: "The Atonement has become a living truth to me. It used to be almost a dead and broken 'note' in my spiritual life compared with the personal affection it inspires now. I had *lost* its meaning from hearing about it *always* as a *boy*, but now it has sprung up as a well of living water."

Children are very impressionable, but impressions, let us re-

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<sup>1</sup> "The Walk to the City." Price 1s. per 100.

member, are apt to fade away. I can conceive of no more awful state than that of the youth who, when at last face to face with sin in its most deadly form, has been sickened with years of emotional Christianity, which has somehow lost its power when that power is most needed. These are extreme cases, I willingly admit, but do let us be careful. Never allow your children to get *tired* of the Gospel, or, rather, of the Atonement. Remember that the Creed, Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and the Bible history are full of teaching which is *varied*. Let their hearts be *drawn*, not *driven*, to Christ; let Christ Himself, by the Holy Ghost, be their Teacher; let us fear to intrude ourselves, lest, perchance, we hinder God's work. "He that *believeth* shall not make *haste*." But I must hasten to—

## 2. *The Children's Service.*

Why should not this be *every* Sunday? It was *meant* to be at the Reformation; but *then*, you will say, there were no Sunday-schools. True; but now there are no day-schools, and, do what we will, we cannot get Sunday-school teachers to really teach the children anything but the Bible stories, which they know already from Board-school acquaintance, and know frequently better than their Sunday-school teacher. Few Sunday-school teachers can prepare two lessons for a Sunday. Then why not have a service *every* Sunday morning or afternoon? Do we realize that if we clergy wait until confirmation time to deal with our children we shall probably never deal with them at all? I have heard lately of a clergyman who is vicar of a parish of some eleven thousand people, who, on account of illness, was obliged to ask a friend to prepare his female candidates for confirmation. Only nineteen came forward, one of whom was a married woman, another was over twenty-one years of age, and but twelve of the remainder were eventually presented to the Bishop. But I am forestalling what will come under my third division. The children are in church—what shall the service be?

I quote again from the letter already referred to: "Do tell the brethren not to be afraid of a bright and hearty service for children, not too long; and attention in teaching them to *kneel* down, all together, if possible, when they come to church in a body. It is by such detail that real reverence is taught and followed." To this I venture to utter a hearty Amen. The weekly Sunday service should be in some sort a practice-ground. There should be no lolling, no inattention, no irreverence in posture or manner. The thing can be done, and done thoroughly, *only* when the service is held weekly. I may

add that for ten years before I was ordained I conducted a children's service every Sunday in St. John's Sunday-school, Holloway. The order and attention were such that I never even asked a question in order to sustain interest. I never told one anecdote by way of sugar-plum, only Bible stories drawn out and applied, and there was always the same breathless attention. Once I turned a boy out simply for fidgeting. Alas! never since then have I been able so to preach, for never since then have I been privileged to conduct a children's service *every* Sunday.

The revival to which I referred was partly carried on at that service, and yet we had no after-meetings, no testimonies, nothing but the Prayer-Book service and the Hymnal Companion. As a digression, I may add that at the tenth anniversary we invited the present Rector of Whitechapel (then an undergraduate at Oxford) to teach us the responses according to Tallis—somewhat, I fear, to the horror of a few of our straiter brethren. This service still continues, though I have not visited it since 1881. Four of its conductors are now in holy orders. Use the Prayer-Book. There are three services which can be arranged: (1) Morning Prayer, (2) Litany, (3) Ante-Communion. We taught our children these so thoroughly that when they went to church one Sunday morning they carried away the congregation by their vigorous responding. Never omit a Versicle; let these and the *Amens* be sung. The Ferial responses are far easier than Tallis, and the Litany is always enjoyed when set to music. Use a *Church* hymn-book. May I say that I do not like "Golden Bells" as a whole? Many of the hymns are far removed from the *sobriety* of the Church of England, which is, after all, more in accordance with *youthful* piety than more ecstatic utterances not always couched in Scripture language. A processional hymn when there is a surpliced choir is a very harmless custom, and I cannot speak too highly of a plan which I saw at a church in Southampton—viz., the choir standing by the west door and singing a hymn as the children filed out. But I must pass on to—

### 3. *The Sermon.*

I am afraid this must be to some extent catechetical in these Board-school days. Every child is bound by its baptismal obligations to know the Creed, Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and Catechism, and we clergy are responsible that these shall be taught and explained over and over again. Don't be afraid of them. They are (as the Bishop of London once said) a kind of spiritual multiplication-table, for want of which many souls are led into paths of heresy in after-life. As a rule, children like to learn and to be questioned; they appreciate the law,

and are more moral than spiritual in their theology. Why should they not be? The law is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. It would doubtless grieve the hearts of the young seaside missionaries whose farewell five minutes' addresses I had the privilege of hearing, if they knew that two little boys (very dear to me) talked frequently of a sermon on little foxes which one of the preachers gave in the course of the mission, whilst of the five minutes' farewell appeals I heard nothing from them at all. And here let me remind you of the serious obligation we are under of preparing *all* our children for their approaching confirmation, and not only the mere handful who come out in response to our annual invitation. Every baptized infant is bound to be confirmed; and when confirmation is evangelically regarded—viz., as a heart decision for Christ, and not merely as an ecclesiastical coming of age—our sermons ought not to lack any of the fervour which is the charm of the seaside exhortation. It should be impossible for a child to reach the age of twelve or thirteen without being thoroughly acquainted, not only with the whole scheme of instruction (Church Catechism, etc.), but with the *idea* of confirmation itself as the great step of its early youth—the public confession of Christ, and realization of the full privileges of a Church of England Christian. Surely in this matter we may adapt to our use and take comfort from the old proverb (that is, if we deserve the consolation): “Train up a [Church of England] child in the way he should go, and when he is old [enough to be confirmed] he will not depart from it.”

But let us beware of being *satisfied* with catechizing, or formal preparation for confirmation. It is a *means*, but it is not *grace*, and we want grace as well as means. Never let us lose sight of the fact that we wish to see *Christ formed* in our children. In this aim we yield to none, however earnest. But we believe that as Church of England Christians we have the best machinery in Christendom at our disposal, and we need not be ashamed or afraid to use it. It is only when the machinery is allowed to be an *end* instead of a means that even the very use of it pains those “whose hearts God has touched.” I am more and more convinced, as years pass on, that the whole system of the Church of England only needs to be spiritualized in order to be the most perfect of its kind; and I plead earnestly that our children may be brought up to love the Church in which they were baptized, not merely because it is an ancient Church, or a Protestant Church, or a branch of the Church Catholic, but because in that Church they found *Christ*, and by the means of grace provided in that Church they are rooted and grounded and built up in Him.

EDWIN J. STURDEE.