

Notes and Comments *

THE writer of the note in last year's *Annual* was dissatisfied with various solutions to the vexed question of the place of children at morning service. There are, however, still other possibilities.

In *Congregation A* the Sunday School has been closed, and all children attend morning service, which has changed somewhat in character and can now perhaps best be described as a highly successful children's religious entertainment.

In *Congregation B* the children, about forty in number, occupy the front pews below the pulpit at morning service, and spend the time lolling, inattentive, listless, bored. Except for very good reasons, they are to be found in their places every Sunday, because at Christmas time, provided they have seventy-five per cent. attendance, they receive very valuable prizes.

Congregation C had a morning service based on the principles upheld by the Church Service Society and a fully graded Sunday School that must have been the ideal of the Sunday School Organizer (the two for obvious reasons are often found together); but a new minister came to *C*, determined to "integrate the Sunday School with the Church". He closed the Sunday School, which had taken his predecessor a lifetime to build up, and ordained that the children come to morning service. What has happened now is that the Sunday School is no more; the children do not all come to Church; and the morning service is punctuated by "calls to order" from the pulpit, and the devotional atmosphere, which it was naively expected would have a permanent influence on the young people, has been lost.

Clearly these are solutions that are no more acceptable to members of this Society; and if, as the writer of last year's note suggested, we are to "return to sense and sanity in this regard", we must return to first principles, not just psychological principles—though these obviously have an important bearing on the subject—but Church principles.

* Contributed by various members.

(1) According to the doctrine of the Church of Scotland, the child at Baptism is "received into the membership of the holy Catholic Church"; and there is an obligation upon the Church to treat him, not as one who one day will become a member, but as one who at every stage of his development belongs fully to the "family and household of God." Whatever his "age, ability and aptitude", he has, as a member of the Church, his own contribution to make to the Church's worship; and this seems to imply that from his earliest years he should be introduced to a common worship which is appropriate to his needs and capacities and not to the needs and capacities of adults. His common worship naturally will be expressed in quite different forms and words from those suggested in the Order of Morning Service in *The Book of Common Order*: although the underlying principles of both will be the same.

(2) Nevertheless in the Church of Scotland the sacrament of the Holy Communion is not administered to baptized infants: before they are admitted to the Lord's Table they must have come to "years of responsibility". The apparent deprivation in this complementary principle is capable of a wider application and is the justification for the training of young people in their own place within the fellowship of the Church—in home and Sunday School—so that in due time they will take their own place in the full worship of the Church.

This two-fold doctrinal emphasis suggests that the only proper solution to this problem of the place of children in the common worship of the Church is the frank recognition that the Sunday School at worship is the Church at worship. If the years spent in the different departments of the Sunday School are wisely used to promote the children's understanding and experience of what it means to belong to a worshipping community which is the Body of Christ and to lay the foundations of a common worship based on sound liturgical principles, then we can expect that the time will come when the young people will pass freely and naturally to take their place with the rest of the faithful at a morning service which is a true *missa fidelium*. The only practical alternative to this seems to be the massacre and cheapening of the morning service to enable the children to "sit through" an hour's corporate worship; but surely the mere physical presence of the child at divine service can be bought at too high a price.

A minister of a rural parish writes : Most people will agree that children should, at as early an age as possible, be encouraged to participate in the regular worship of the Church. A Sunday School in some form is, no doubt, essential for instruction in religious knowledge, and it can afford a simple training in worship ; but in itself it is not enough. An older generation was much wiser, in bringing the young into the family pew where, however imperfectly, they could sense the atmosphere of awe and reverence in common worship in God's House. Possibly much was beyond their comprehension, but the cumulative effect was there. Much of this is lost in our modern set-up. Children no longer come in any numbers with their parents, mostly, we fear, because the parents themselves are absentees. Another difficulty is that most Sunday Schools meet either immediately before or immediately after morning service, and the choice is either school or church.

In smaller parishes, especially in the country where distance is a factor, it might be better for the minister to discontinue the Sunday School as such, and simply give a lesson for some fifteen minutes to the children in the church *before* the service. (The so-called " Children's Address ", a modern innovation dear to the hearts of adults, is not enough, and might profitably be omitted. It is significant that the *Book of Common Order* makes no provision for this feature). The children could then share in the worship of the Church until at least the hymn before sermon, when they might unobtrusively retire ; or better still, they might well remain for the whole service. Services and sermons are not so lengthy nowadays that any real hardship would be felt, and children could then return home with their parents.

In these days when teachers are scarce and many churches in these rural areas have no separate accommodation nearby, this arrangement might tend to revive the family habit of church attendance, and much benefit would be gained, not only by the children themselves, but also by the worshipping congregation.

No Church claims more boldly than does our own to be devoted to the psalms ; yet in general practice our devotion is limited to the small singable minority in the metrical version. The loss thereby suffered in our public worship is quite inestimable, many of the very finest psalms being

sadly excluded on account of the tortured and bathetic form in which they survive under the tyranny of the metrical regime.

We cannot indefinitely afford this loss. While retaining the use of the psalms that have been successfully rendered in the metrical version, we must recover the prose version in its unrivalled power. How can it be done? Some ministers (some quite contentedly, others regretfully) resort to the reading of a psalm as the First Lesson—and thereby appropriate to themselves yet another part of the people's rightful share of vocal worship. Others would "introduce" the chanting of the psalms (backed by the authority of the *Book of Common Order* and the *Scottish Psalter*, 1929), but find in their congregations a steadfast loyalty to an unthinking prejudice against chanting, an attitude of mind none would dare carry out into business or professional life.

One solution, especially for congregations with small choirs and limited musical resources, is to have a psalm *read* by all at Evening Service. This method has much to recommend it: it demands no technical skill save the ability to read; no service-books are required save the Bible, against which there can be no prejudice; those who have no voice for singing or ear for music can join in on equal terms; and it implements, equally with chanting, the "then . . . shall be sung or read" of the *Book of Common Order*. Above all it provides (as has been found in practice) an enrichment of corporate worship and perhaps the most ready way of restoring the Psalter to its rightful place in our devotions.

The reading may be responsive: not by alternate verses, but with the minister saying the first part of each verse to the caesura, and the congregation responding with the remainder of the verse. But perhaps it is simpler, and equally satisfying, to have "everybody saying everything", including the Gloria.

The minister must of course be prepared to lead and set the time throughout; but the co-operation of the Choir (who should practise the reading of the psalm along with the other items of praise) is invaluable. In the congregation young people, through their Fellowships and other organizations, might be encouraged to lift up their voice and be not afraid. But it is wise for the minister, before introducing the practice, to take the congregation with him by explaining the very strong reasons which justify it. After all, he is

only asking them to read their Bible, and, in the case of the psalms, for the purpose for which they were composed !

In January, 1953, the Presbytery of Dundee held a Retreat at Barnhill, using the outstandingly fine Church of S. Margaret there. Encouraged by the influence of the Society, the Presbytery's Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion received presbyterial sanction to organize the Retreat ; and in the event a gratifying number was present at Barnhill. Following Holy Communion, Rev. John Kennedy gave an address on " The Meaning of Worship ", which was followed by a full discussion. After lunch, Mr R. Barrett-Ayres, Mus. Bac., Aberdeen, addressed members on " The Place of Music in Worship ", and again lively discussion followed. All present greatly appreciated the opportunity of thus meeting presbyterially for consideration of essential things which have so little place in ordinary presbyterial routine.

This is surely one valuable avenue of action which members of the Society, acting through their Presbytery's Aids to Devotion Committee, might fruitfully use. Potentially it is twice blessed : it could further the aims of the Society more widely throughout the Church, and might win many sympathisers to full (and subscribing) membership.

Another opportunity which might be more widely used lies in Presbytery lunches and ministers' clubs, and on corresponding synodic occasions. The present writer some time ago, having spoken in conversation to one who turned out to be the secretary of a luncheon club associated with the Synod of Dumfries, was duly invited to address that club on " Some Aspects of the Sacrament of Holy Communion ". Might not this latent opportunity be profitably exploited by approaching such secretaries (through Presbytery Correspondents) with the offer of a speaker from the Society. A panel of such members prepared to serve the Society in this way, and drawn from different parts of the country, might well be prepared.

Members of the Society should take special note of the appointment of the new Secretary, the Rev. R. A. Howieson, M.A., of Newport, Fife, whom the Council very cordially welcomes to this office. The former Secretary, the Rev.

David A. Hodges, B.D., Ayton, who relinquishes his post after ten years' service in that capacity, continues as Editor of the *Annual*. Presbytery Correspondents should remit all subscriptions from members in their areas to the Hon. Secretary at the above address, who will transmit them in due course to the Hon. Treasurer. The efficient ordering of the affairs of the Society suffers greatly from delay in the payment of subscriptions. With this fresh appointment may we earnestly appeal again for *prompt attention* in this matter ?