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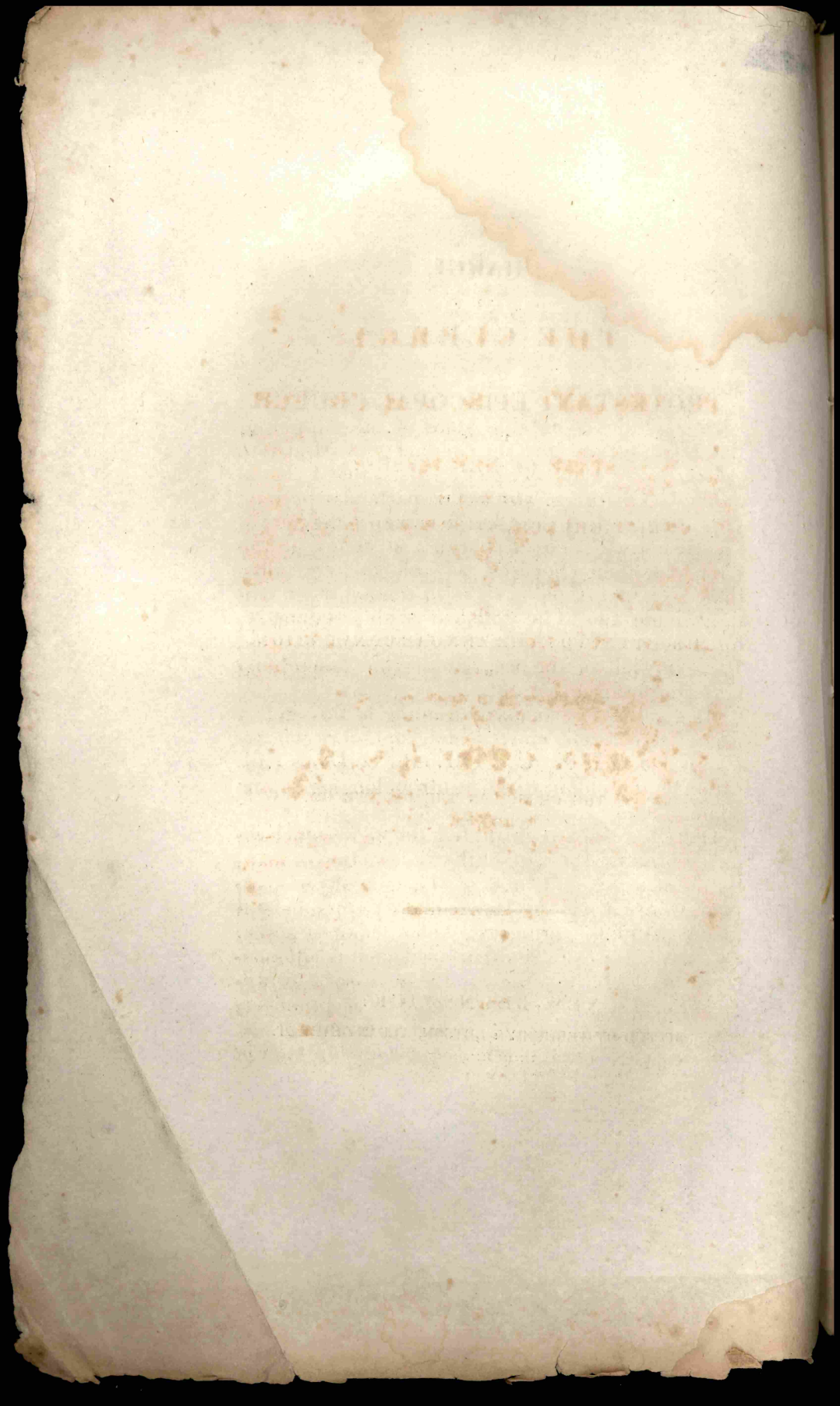
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A
CHARGE
 TO
THE CLERGY
 OF THE
PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH
 IN THE
STATE OF NEW-JERSEY:
 DELIVERED IN
CHRIST-CHURCH, AT NEW-BRUNSWICK,
 ON
THURSDAY, MAY 28TH, 1829.
 DURING
THE SITTING OF THE ANNUAL CONVENTION
 OF
THE CHURCH IN THAT STATE,
 BY
JOHN CROES, D.D.
 BISHOP OF THE CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE OF NEW
 JERSEY.

NEW-BRUNSWICK:

PRINTED BY TERHUNE & LETSON, ALBANY-STREET.

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 1829.



C H A R G E, & c.



Reverend Brethren—

Such is the favourable state of the Church in this Diocese, and such the conduct of its Ministers generally, that no necessity exists, that I should deliver a Charge to you at this particular period; yet, as a canon of the Church makes it the duty of the Bishops to deliver charges, at times, to the Clergy of their Dioceses, as well to keep alive their faithfulness and zeal, as to remind them, that they ought not to be satisfied with a stationary, but progressive condition of their respective cures; I avail myself of the occasion of your assembling here, to perform that duty.

As a subject particularly tending to this end, I cannot select one more useful, and more worthy of our care and diligence, than the religious education of the children and youth belonging to our communion.

Our Church is so constituted, the views which we have of the universality of the redemption of man, by the sacrifice of Christ, of the necessity of baptism, where it may be had, to make us members of his body, of the promises, which children make, by their sureties, when that ordinance is administered to them; the knowledge necessary to prepare them for the assumption of those promises, themselves, in the apostolic rite of confirmation; and the joint mode in which we worship God in

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our public services; are of such a nature, that without considerable instruction on these topics in early life, they will grow up with very defective ideas of the religion of Christ, as understood by our Church; be liable to imbibe what we believe pernicious errors; and, of course, be in imminent danger of making shipwreck of faith, and its concomitant, a good conscience.

The Church has, however, not left it to our discretion, whether the office of particularly instructing the young in the principles and practice of our holy religion, shall be performed, or omitted, at pleasure. On the contrary, she has not only prepared for their use, a catechism, or summary of the fundamental articles of Christian faith and practice; but has made it the especial duty of every clergyman, having charge of a congregation, to "*instruct, and examine, in the Church, the children belonging to his cure, on Sundays, Holy Days, or other convenient occasions.*"* By the tenour of this rubrick, which is annexed to the catechism, we are not to understand—which it is to be feared is too often so understood—that our whole duty, in this respect, is performed, when we simply hear the children, under our care, repeat from memory the answers, to the questions, which we put to them, from the catechism; however frequently this repetition may be made. If this were the whole of our duty, the Church would have made very inadequate provision for the instruction of the younger part of her members. For all experience shows, that children may repeat from mem-

* Rubrick annexed to the Catechism.

ory, with the greatest readiness and accuracy, the whole of the catechism; and yet acquire little or no knowledge of the subjects which compose it. They merely learn the words of that summary, in the order in which they are arranged in the sentences. This could not have been the intention of the Church. The catechist, therefore, who has a just sense of his duty, and is desirous of rendering his labours subservient to the eternal interests of the children of his charge, must understand by the words, "instruct and examine," in the rubrick, not merely putting the questions, and hearing the answers, as they stand in the catechism; but also making such expositions of the subjects, by varying the questions and expressions into others of the same meaning, that the children may learn something besides sound. "Unless this danger, which is a very great one, be guarded against, you will have spent both their pains and your own to but small purpose. Besides, all sciences have their terms, which must be interpreted to beginners; and some of those in the catechism are figurative ones; very prudently used; as they comprehend, in a little compass, much meaning, and lead to the understanding of the same figures in Scripture; but undoubtedly used on purpose to be explained; without which they are liable to make either no impression, or a wrong one. And farther still, a system so short as to be learned by heart, must have need, were it ever so clear, to be enlarged on; the proofs of its truth, the connections and tendency of its doctrines, the use and extent of its precepts to be shown; and therefore, since the "rubrick," with great reason, enjoins,

not only, that you examine, but instruct the children in their catechism, I hope you will think this a very needful part of that instruction."* Nor should you be satisfied with your endeavours, till your pupils appear ultimately to understand the meaning of every answer they make, and have a comprehensive knowledge of the whole system.

It will aid much in effecting this object, if indeed it be not indispensable to its full success, that the children be divided into classes, according to their numbers, age, capacity and acquirements.—To catechise, as is too commonly done, the children of a considerable congregation, composed of different ages and degrees of improvement, in one promiscuous body, is necessarily unpleasant, indeed irksome, to the elder ones, who have made considerable progress; to beginners, very discouraging, and destructive of emulation in all.—The result is little or no benefit to any. But by classing the catechumens, according to their standing, the emulation of all will be excited, and when those of the highest grade have become well acquainted with the matter contained in the catechism, provided by the Church; they may be advanced to some illustration of that summary, or to an enlarged catechism, as the one adopted by the Sunday-School Union, numbered 3. Pursuing uniformly this course, the children of your several congregations, when arrived to the age at which it is expected they will offer for confirmation, will be, by the divine blessing, well prepared, as it respects religious knowledge, for that solemn rite;

* Archbishop Secker's second Charge to the clergy of the Diocese of Oxford, when he was Bishop of that Diocese.

and in little danger of afterwards imbibing erroneous principles.

But however desirous we may have heretofore been, that the children of our respective charges should be well instructed in the principles and practice of our holy religion, and whatever pains we may have taken to accomplish it, it must be confessed, that the success, in most cases, has not equalled our expectations. This may have arisen, in some instances, from the erroneous idea before mentioned, which is too prevalent, as well in literary and scientific, as in religious instruction, that children's repeating from memory, the words of which answers to questions are composed, is an evidence that they have attended to the ideas conveyed by such answers, and a presumption that they generally understand them; whereas, the reverse of the former is, in almost all cases, and of the latter, too frequently, the fact. Those instructors, therefore, who rest satisfied with merely hearing the answers contained in the catechism, must not be surprised, if they find that they have laboured to little purpose. This, however, has not been the only, or greatest cause of some of us not succeeding in the important duty before us. The remissness and indifference of many parents, guardians and masters, in not sending their children, wards, and other young members of their families, or compelling them to go to the church, at the times appointed for catechetical exercises; and the irregularity of the attendance of many, who occasionally appear, tend to thwart, and in a great degree defeat our exertions for their religious instruction. The consequence has been, that a considerable

part of the children of our flocks have not been taught at all; and from the irregular attendance of others, little improvement has been made by them. The circumstance also of those of us having the charge of more than one congregation, and therefore officiating at each, after longer intervals of time than a week; besides, residing at a distance from a part of them, has added much to the difficulty of giving due instruction to the younger members, and of aiding their parents in "bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

But though these difficulties and discouragements have existed, and in some instances—perhaps in many—have had their influence in causing catechetical exercises to be less frequent, and less effective than they otherwise would have been, or than the Church expected from her ministers:—Yet, through the blessing of God on the institution of Sunday-Schools, their increasing prevalence, and their becoming more and more schools of religious instruction, as well as instruction in reading; a prospect is opened for the removal of these impediments—indeed they have already been considerably lessened—and from the recent institution of the General Sunday-School Union of our Church, and the Diocesan Sunday-School Society, auxiliary to it, which we have just established—there is reason to hope that they will be in a great degree, if not entirely, remedied. For, as the schools of the several churches, which already exist, or may hereafter be established, will be under the direction and control of their respective Rectors or Ministers; the superintendents and teachers will naturally become their auxiliaries in

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the religious instruction of the greater part of the children of their flocks; and as several of those, whose parents are under no necessity of sending them to Sunday-Schools for literary instruction, are already in the practice of attending those schools for religious improvement, especially as the teachers are generally members of the most respectable families in the congregations; the clergymen, by statedly attending the schools of their churches, such portion of their time as they can conveniently spare from their other duties, suppose every second or third Sunday, and calling on the children, who are not members of the Sunday-schools, also to attend at the same time, may, with the aid they receive from the teachers, instruct all, much more efficiently, and satisfactorily, in the doctrines and precepts of religion, than they have had it in their power to do heretofore; and of course, better prepare them for confirmation, and for living, with the help of Divine grace, a life, in conformity with the precepts of our blessed Lord. Besides this aid afforded to clergymen, in the religious instruction of the children of their congregations, by well regulated Sunday-Schools; it cannot but relieve their minds from much anxiety, and at the same time afford them great comfort and satisfaction, when they see several of the young members of their congregations, diligently performing the office of teachers in these valuable institutions; and, by this means, not only making up the deficiency, caused by former neglect, in their own religious knowledge; but putting themselves in the way to receive additional pious impressions, by the operations of Divine grace, and,

ultimately becoming, as has been the case with many, sincere participators in the communion of our blessed Saviour's body and blood.

But though this is so well calculated, my Reverend Brethren, to aid us in the performance of the duties assigned to us, as it respects the religious education of the children of our communion; though it removes, in a considerable degree, the painful anxiety many of us must have experienced, lest the means, which the Church has devised, and directed us to use, for this very important purpose—means, for the due performance of which we are so deeply responsible to the great Head of the Church, our Lord and Master, who has expressly commanded us, if we love him, to feed his lambs—lest, I say, these means should be rendered inefficient—as no doubt they often have been through the causes before mentioned—yet we are, by no means, to rely upon this mode of instruction alone. The Church, in her twenty-second canon, has not only made it obligatory upon her “ministers, who have charge of parishes, to be diligent in instructing the children in the catechism; but that they shall also, by stated catechetical lectures and instruction, be diligent in informing the youth and others in the Doctrines, Constitution, and Liturgy, of the Church.” This duty the house of Bishops considered so important, that in the Convention of 1817, they sent a message to the house of Clerical and Lay Deputies, calling their attention to this canon, and expressing the opinion, that the catechetical lectures and instruction made obligatory in that act of the Convention, are “among the most important du-

ties of a clergyman, and among the most effectual means of promoting religious knowledge, and practical piety."

In a former charge, I called the attention of those of you, who, at that time, had cures in the Diocese, to this important part of your duty; and I hope that it has not been neglected. It is not sufficient, however, that a course of lectures on these subjects be delivered only once, should a clergyman have the charge of a parish many years. The successive generations, continually progressing from childhood to youth, and to manhood, require the course to be renewed, at not very distant periods, so that all, in turn, may have the benefit of them.

In the preparation of children and youth for the solemn hour in which they are to assume, in the rite of confirmation, the vows and promises which their sponsors made for them in baptism, something more is necessary, than merely a knowledge of the doctrines and duties which are the subjects of those promises. They must possess the desire, and seriously resolve to make the endeavour, through the aids of the Holy Spirit, to fulfil them. Great pains should therefore be taken, to impress upon their young and tender minds, the greatness, holiness, and mercy of God; his goodness in giving existence to man, and placing him in so enviable a situation; the ingratitude and sinfulness of man, in yielding to the tempter, and disobeying God; the awful consequences of that act, to himself, and all his posterity; the infinite mercy of God, not only, in not leaving him in that woful condition, into which he had plunged himself, but

in providing a Saviour to rescue him; the inconceivable love, condescension, and compassion of God's only Son, incarnate, who, in the capacity of Saviour, by his sufferings and death, became a ransom for the whole human race, destroyed death, and opened the portals of heaven to all those who repent and forsake their sins, accept him as their Saviour, by a true and living faith, and endeavour, with the assistance of Divine grace, "to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." These, and all other rational means should be resorted to, in dependence on Divine aid, so to operate on their hearts, that they may be induced to give them to God, as he has graciously requested them to do; and upon their minds, that they may be convinced, that it is both grateful and wise to "remember their Creator in the days of their youth;" often reminding them, however, that they are "not able to do these things of themselves, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve him, without his special grace, which they must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer."*

It would contribute very much, Reverend Brethren, to our success in accomplishing the great object of religiously educating the children and youth of our respective parishes, should we endeavour to make ourselves so well acquainted with every individual, in those periods of life, that, whenever we meet with them, we may at once recognize them, and address them by name. This notice of them, would tend to create and foster such attachments, as would increase our influence with

* The Catechism.

them, and at the same time give us opportunities occasionally to say a few words to them in a familiar, but serious manner, respecting their religious concerns. In very large or very scattered congregations, this indeed could not be done to much effect. But in those of a moderate size, and situated in towns, much good might be effected in this way. I therefore seriously recommend it to your attention.

Having made these observations on a subject of such deep interest, in the due administration of our holy office; and especially with respect to the very encouraging prospects, which the Sunday-School system holds out, of our being relieved, in a considerable degree, from the concern and anxiety which we have heretofore experienced, relative to the due performance of the duty of religiously instructing the rising generation of our cures; may I not urge you, to use your influence, and to make personal exertions, to establish branch Societies in every Episcopal congregation in this Diocese, where Sunday-Schools already exist, and where they have not yet been instituted; and to modify the course of instruction in the schools conformably to the fifth article of the Constitution of the Diocesan Sunday-School Society, which the Convention of this Diocese has just established. It is in this way, in connection with your ordinary duties, you can, under the Divine blessing, most effectually promote Union in our Church; render our catechetical instructions more complete and more general; attach the children and youth more firmly to the Church of their fa-

thers, and further their spiritual and eternal welfare.

Nearly allied to this subject, the very important one of endeavouring to induce capable and pious young men with whom you may be acquainted, to turn their thoughts to the Gospel ministry, ought also to occupy not a little of your attention. Our Church, my Reverend Brethren, suffers much from the want of ministers, both to supply the vacancies occasioned by death, or the decline of health; and also to minister to new congregations, which are continually forming in every part almost of our extensive country. Unless, therefore, clergymen generally make it a duty to seek for, encourage, and endeavour to aid young men whom they may think fit for candidates for orders, our wants, in this respect, I fear will neither be soon nor sufficiently supplied. Suffer me then to urge upon you, the clergy of this Diocese, that consideration of the subject which it justly merits—and let me pray you to use your best endeavours to carry the result of it into effect. We are now, and have been for some time without a single candidate for holy orders; and, at the same time, we very much need the services of more than one clergyman, to act as Missionaries to those of our churches, which are now almost destitute of the services of the sanctuary; but see, as yet, but little prospect of procuring them. I hope, however, that your zeal and exertions, in connection with my own, will be so directed to this object, that in due time, through the blessing of the great Head of the Church, such a supply of competent and

faithful ministers will be afforded, as is sufficient to meet all our wants.

Although this charge is exclusively addressed to the Clergy of the Diocese, on some of the duties of their sacred office; yet, as it is given in the presence of the Lay Representatives of the several churches of which this Convention is in part composed; it will not be taken amiss, I hope, if I avail myself of this occasion to remind them how much their countenance and aid is needed to enable us to execute our offices with success. This will be true, especially in carrying into effect the provisions of the Diocesan Sunday-School Society, which we have just instituted, and its branches in the several congregations, with the schools, which they superintend. Without the laity freely contribute to the small expense which will necessarily accrue; and also take an active part in the business, they cannot be maintained for any great length of time; and the benefits which may, or will have been experienced from the institution of Sunday-Schools, will be lost to such Churches as either neglect to establish them, or, when once established, suffer them to die away. This is a consideration, which cannot but strongly affect the minds of all who have a just sense of such an evil, especially after the contrary benefit has been experienced; and who seriously desire to promote, and would not willingly neglect any measure which would tend to promote the welfare, and further the salvation, of their beloved offspring. The well known character of the gentlemen who compose the Lay Deputies of this Convention, and the pious errand on which they have voluntarily left

their homes, warrant me in the belief that I do not address them in vain; that they will cheerfully give their countenance and aid to carry into full effect this great object of the Church.

I now commend you, my Reverend Brethren, and the churches under your care, to the protection, favour, and love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, to whom be glory and praise for ever and ever.