

FURNISS John

Was born of Catholic parents in Sheffield on 19th June 1809. After

studies in the seminary of Ushaw he was ordained for the Vicariate Apostolic of the Northern District on 24th May 1834. Becoming a Redemptorist, he took his vows in St. Trond on 2nd July 1841. As a missionary in England he became renowned for his success in preaching to the children. His hymns and instructions for children continued his work long after his death in Clapham on 16th September 1865.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

T. Livius, *Father Furniss and his Work for Children*, London, 1896; *The Clergy Review*, London, 63 (1978) 99-104; BG, II, 150-151; III, 304; *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Cambridge, 35 (1984) 220-238.

John Furniss



newadvent.org/cathen/06324c.htm

A well-known children's missionary, born near Sheffield, England, 19 June, 1809; at Clapham, London, 16 September, 1865.

His father was a wealthy master-cutler. He was educated at Sedgley Park, Oscott, and Ushaw College, where he became a priest in 1834. He was resident priest at Doncaster for five years, but his health having given way he travelled during eight years through Europe and the East, rather as a pilgrim than a tourist. After his return home, 1847, he spent some time at Islington, London, working for the welfare of the waifs and strays, for "Suffer little children to come to me" was his motto then as in after years. He became a professed member of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer at St. Trond, Belgium, 1851, and afterwards gave missions in England and Ireland; but from 1851 until his death he devoted himself wholly to giving missions to children. He was the founder of children's missions and "the children's Mass", and by his writings systematized the philosophy of religious training. These missions lasted sometimes three weeks, and were given not only to school-children, but to working boys and girls. His maxim was that "nothing so disgusted children as monotony", and therefore he had the prayers at Mass and the Rosary sung to simple airs, and his sermons seldom lasted more than twenty minutes. He entered fully into the mode of thought of the child-mind, and, speaking quietly but with great dramatic power from a platform, he always riveted their attention. He was a wonderful story-teller, seldom moving to laughter but often to tears. He spent his spare time writing books for children which, though written with the utmost simplicity of language, are models of good English. His chief works are "The Sunday-School Teacher" and "God and His creatures", which has been published in French. He wrote a scathing answer to an attack on his works by the "Saturday Review" which was then the great organ of unbelief in England. His writings were assailed as "infamous publications" by the rationalist historian Lecky in his "History of European Morals", chiefly on account of the somewhat lurid eschatology of the children's books. More than four millions of his booklets have been sold throughout English-speaking countries.