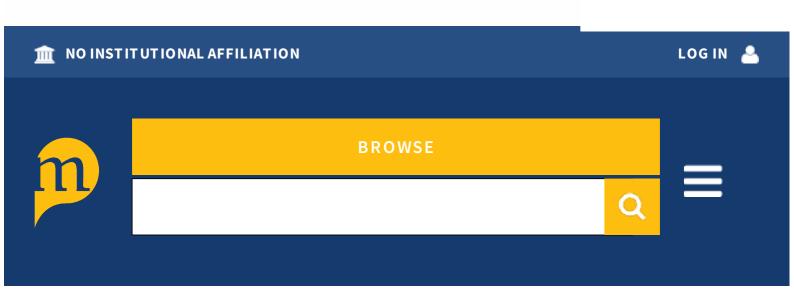
The water-babies as catechetical paradigm.

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The Water-Babies as Catechetical Paradigm

John C. Hawley

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

The Water-Babies as Catechetical Paradigm

John C. Hawley, S.J. (bio)

Does not each of us, in coming into this world, go through a transformation just as wonderful as that of a sea-egg, or a butterfly? and do not reason and analogy, as well as Scripture, tell us that that transformation is not the last? and that, though what we shall be, we know not, yet we are here but as the crawling caterpillar, and shall be hereafter as the perfect fly.

(The Water-Babies 87)

Tutor to the Prince of Wales and first Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, Charles Kingsley (1819-75) was well-known in his own day as an educator and as a strong advocate for Thomas Arnold's educational reforms. Kingsley became especially vocal as a proponent of the Greek ideal of forming a sound mind in a sound body—so vocal, in fact, that his suggestion that sports should play a major role at Eton, Harrow, and the other training grounds for the leaders of the Empire became caricatured as "muscular Christianity."

As the tag suggests, however, the goal of education for Kingsley, whether it was to be education of the mind or of the body, was ultimately religious. He was, after all, an Anglican clergyman and chaplain to Queen Victoria, and the emphasis in his pedagogy is highly moral: while granting that any knowledge, even religious, must be based on observation (*Letters* 2: 303), he writes that the principal aim of education is to "enable us hereafter to make ourselves and all around us, wiser, better, and happier" (*Letters* 1: 60). If more empirical knowledge does not produce a better human being, it comes under Kingsley's attack.

Furthermore, like Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) and *Hard Times* (1854), he worries that schools have been taken over by the "reforming," statistics-minded educators—the Gradgrinds and the M'Choakumchilds. What is required to reverse this deadening trend, he feels, is not more "facts" but a love of learning, and this can best be nurtured by exploiting the child's natural inclination for the fanciful. At the same time, in preparation for the highly moralistic goal that Kingsley sets for education, the student must first be *taught* to see. While encouraging the development of the imagination, therefore, Kingsley did not conceive of children's literature as a refuge from the real world. It was to be a non-threatening, imaginative preparation for the assumption of

one's Christian responsibilities in a world of real, complex, and sometimes fearsome adult problems. "Correct" perceptions in childhood—that is, perceptions that had been coached and clarified by the narrator—would prompt strong emotions in the young reader; these emotions, in turn, would compel moral actions in the same readers as adults.

Charles Kingsley was best known in his own day as a preacher and as the author of six highly polemical novels. Since he held such strong views on the philosophy of pedagogy, however, it is not surprising that he is today most widely appreciated as the author of a delightful children's book. Since it was written, in 1863, *The Water-Babies* has been dramatized, animated, filmed, and televised, and many adults, if they know nothing at all about Kingsley's other works, still fondly recall the compelling fantasy of this story, the fine original illustrations by Linley Sanbourne (who became, in 1900, the chief cartoonist for *Punch*), and the even happier world that Jessie Willcox Smith evoked with her colorful drawings for the 1916 edition. Thirty-five years after its publication his tale of a little boy who plunges beneath the water into a world as colorful as Alice's Wonderland remained among the ten most popular children's books in England, and it is today still available in three editions.

The Water-Babies offers a classic example of children's literature employed to disarm and to teach. C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Antoine de Saint Exupery and many others after them have used this Kingsley an model: writing a nonsensical story supposedly for children, fully aware that it will be read aloud by adults. Since Kingsley's own earlier...

Wood, J. G. Bille Animals (London 1969-71) Philadelphia Bradley Garreson ScCo., 1875.

Half Herry with a Nagualite Remitte Near the Store (London, 1855) New York: Thomas Whiteker, 1887.

Alen Rauch is a decreas candidate in English at Ruge'r Universin. His distantaion is an Ramandaine i le has an anticle an Bruce Springstern fortheomisty in American Standars.

The Water-Babies as Catechetical Paradigm

by John C. Howing S.L.

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Una Pepe Harmosey, one of Kingdey's imaginglishs, cretends that this approach to children in the liveral relate words for them was now, seeking to lawstern in (them is sense of words, to call out their powers of observation, and teach them witness, their knowing that they were learning." Kingsley was the from a contract in man against instructions charactaining. "Now if you don't like my chery," he matter readers of The Water Beirie. "Once go to the schoolesses and learn true multiplication-table, and see if you like that better. Some people, and doubt, wetlid do so. So much the certain teach, if you have the them, it takes all sent thay say, to make a world." (93). This undersuring his nationalistic relative case of supposes and his related of rote recipitation within tense for many values, but no the delight of meny, but no the arrangement of the delight of meny, but no the arrangement of a great many others.

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