

HOME AND SCHOOL

'A CHILD above all other gifts brings hope with it and forward-looking thoughts,' but to entertain hope means to recognise fear, and standing as we do at present on the brink of an unknown future, both hope and fear imperatively urge us to do now what we can to make that future safe for the child.

Of all the groups into which every Christian child is born, the family is the most divinely natural and the most fundamentally important. It is through the family that he becomes a member of that wider, more self-sufficing society, the State, whose function it is to provide for the temporal well-being of the community. Through the family also he becomes a member of that supra-natural society by whose instrumentality he is enabled to attain to full development and to his appointed supernatural end. In his encyclical letter on 'The Christian Education of Youth,' His Holiness Pius XI sets forth with authority and uncompromising clarity the respective rights and duties (as educators) of these three societies, 'distinct from one another yet harmoniously combined by God into which man is born. The family holds directly from the Creator the mission, and hence the right, to educate the offspring . . . It is the right and duty of the State to protect and foster but by no means to absorb the family and the individual or to substitute itself for them. It also belongs to the State . . . to supplement the work of the family whenever this falls short of what is necessary . . . and to provide suitable means (*e.g.* education) . . . in conformity with the rights of the child and the supernatural pre-eminent rights of the Church.'

Parents may delegate their God-given mission to others, but the authority and the responsibility for the children's education rests ultimately with them. So, while the State rightly provides an educational service parents are bound to discriminate in the choice of school or teacher when necessary. This privileged position of the family is, in this country, tacitly acknowledged by the State in respect, at least, of the upper and monied classes; but the conditions of our modern industrialised civilisation (rather than a preconceived policy) have made it appear an obligation, or even a virtue, for the State to take over on behalf of the mass of the nation's children, the authority and duties belonging properly to the parents, who, for the most part, seem content to waive their rights and to transfer their responsibilities. The exigencies of war—entailing absence

of the father, the calling up of the younger women for war service, the evacuation of children (including the under-fives), and the actual destruction of house and property—have combined to reduce the family almost to a non-entity and to encourage the State to assume the entire control of the child from its pre-natal stage to the moment when it has been scientifically directed by psychologist and psychiatrist to some suitable employment.

On the other hand, the very conditions which are weakening the authority of the family and strengthening that of the State are bringing about among those in actual contact with the young—whether in school, 'Homes,' factory or juvenile court, and, more latterly, in Youth Centres of various kinds,—an increasingly urgent realisation of the truth that 'it is ultimately upon the Christian family that our hopes for the future must be based.'

Even those who do not think along Christian lines have been led by war conditions to reconsider their standard of values. So much that is held to constitute the 'good life' has been lost or taken away, so much more is still threatened. What is worth while? Can anything be salvaged from the universal destruction? One strong unanimous determination has emerged from these cogitations, namely that the present and future generations of children shall be spared the frustrations and injustices of the past and shall be put into the way of receiving and holding what matters most in life. All are agreed that the education of youth is 'a business of terrifying and immediate importance.' Here the unanimity ends. As has been already hinted, those concerned with educational policy—and who is not in these democratic days—fall into one of two main groups which for brevity's sake may be distinguished as the *revolutionists* and the *evolutionists*. Both are aiming at the good of the child as they see it. The programme of the former group involves a rooting up of the present system and the establishment of complete State control to the exclusion of all parental and religious interference; their watchword is 'equality of opportunity for all.' The other group stand rather for 'equality of consideration for all'; their reforms would be extensive and thorough, but they would reconstruct rather than destroy, and their programme would include the re-christianising of home and school.

From whatever point of view the existing impasse in the educational situation is regarded, one thing stands out clearly, that if the Christian ideal of education is to prevail it is all important that the family should resume its rightful place in the body politic. But, as has already been hinted, all is not well with the family. Its spectacular collapse under stress of

war conditions was but the last stage in a steadily developing process of disintegration: the radio, cinema, cheap press, popular fiction, subtle propaganda against the sanctities of the home and a widespread ignorance of God and his laws had combined to weaken or destroy all appreciation of Christian values including a true idea of the rights and duties of parents. Is the same true of Catholic homes? There are doubtless many thousands of them in which Catholic standards are heroically maintained notwithstanding the subversive influences referred to; nevertheless, there are countless others which have been affected to a greater or less degree by the prevalent worldliness on one hand, or, on the other, by the depressing and demoralising conditions arising from bad housing, poverty, overwork, overcrowding and ignorance. There is no question here of apportioning blame, but rather of considering a possible remedy for so disastrous a state of affairs: there is no doubt that the remedy lies in 'the Christianising of the home from within' (A New Apostolate—Fr. Ferdinand Valentine, O.P., BLACKFRIARS, June, 1940). But how is this colossal task to be accomplished? The way about to be suggested does not claim to be the only way, but it has the advantage of being simple and obvious, and with the instruments at hand waiting to be used.

Meanwhile, in our anxiety for the family as a whole we seem to have lost sight of the child. Let us return to him, for he is to be the starting-point in our planning towards the betterment of the home. During at least nine years of his life he spends five hours a day at school and although, throughout this formative period, parent and teacher are engaged in the common task of educating him, there is, strangely enough, little or no collaboration between them. The need for harmonising a child's home life and standards with those of the school, and, consequently for securing the good will of the parents, and, in certain directions, their further enlightenment and education, has led to a variety of efforts at co-operation between home and school. It is from the latter point of view—namely, that of influencing the parents—that we are now considering this movement. The Catholic teacher, by virtue of his office, vocation and specialised Catholic training, is obviously able to contribute to this essential work and it may generally be taken for granted that he is also willing to do so.

Thinking along some such lines as are indicated in this article and having watched one most successful experiment in the collaboration between home and school, a certain headmistress (a Religious) with her staff, undertook, about a year before the outbreak of the war, to form a Parent-Teacher Association,

The School (an Infants' department) was attached not to a parish but to a Training College; the building was fairly new, well-planned, and, though in the heart of the city, pleasantly situated; the children were poor—very poor for the most part—their homes suffered from the social disabilities already mentioned, and the parents were often ignorant and careless, and sometimes uninterested in the child's school life. The school itself was a happy place, and excellent methods of teaching were in use there; its first aim was to educate in the art of living, and—it was 'integrally Catholic.' So far as they went the relations between School and the homes were good, but the Head and Staff had long felt the need for getting into closer touch with the parents. An 'Open Day' was made the occasion of explaining the idea of the Parent-Teacher Association, and, later, individual written invitations were sent to each home asking the mothers to meet at the school at seven o'clock on a certain evening. From that time onwards regular monthly meetings (intended later to be more frequent) were held, and out of a possible maximum of about one hundred and sixty there were rarely fewer than one hundred present. Great stress was laid on the fact of their meeting not only the headmistress and the staff, but the other mothers, and eventually a very happy family spirit was developed among them.

The meetings opened informally between 6.30 and 7 o'clock by the mothers dropping in, as their circumstances allowed, for a cup of tea; then followed the more formal proceedings which generally included simple lectures—given by a priest, a lady-doctor, and others—on subjects of interest and of practical value; or films, usually of a semi-educational nature; and talks by Sister on such subjects as the Season's Feasts, child-psychology, child-management, the part of the parents in preparing the children for the Sacraments, and so on—the mothers appreciated these talks more than any other part of the programme; and, lastly, there was an occasional dance or party. On one occasion eighty-two mothers made a day's retreat at a neighbouring Cenacle Convent, and to make this possible the School took charge, for the day, of the children under school age. It had been intended to form groups for sewing, knitting, and making children's clothes, but this did not appeal to the mothers, they preferred to sit quietly and talk and be talked to. 'Such a change,' they said, 'to be able to sit still for half an hour.' Sometimes a 'choir practice' was held, and the meeting always closed with a prayer and a hymn.

Something of the spirit of these meetings, their religious yet happy atmosphere, their simplicity and friendliness, the conscious-

ness of personal dignity and worth which they aroused, the sense of Catholic fraternity and equality which they engendered—as between parents and teachers, and between mothers in better and those in poorer circumstances—can be gathered from extracts from the simple ‘talk’ given by Sister to the assembled mothers at the close of the first year of the experiment :

‘ . . . It is just a year in September since our Association was formed. You will remember that when first we met we deliberated over its name, and we decided not to call it a Mothers’ Club but a Parent-Teacher Association because Parent and Teacher alike were to form the membership with one common aim, the interests and the good of the children.

‘ True, so far, except on two occasions, we seem to have excluded the fathers (these, by the way, often stayed in to mind the younger children on “meeting” nights, and messages were often received from them: “When are the fathers to have a meeting?”), but perhaps we may be able to bring them in during the coming year.

‘ Such associations as ours are attached to many Council Schools and they, too, have the good of the children in view: their health and education, cleanliness, their need for rest, and so on. We go one step, a very important step, further, for we realise that the child is made up of body and soul, and the latter is immortal and that, while we must not neglect the needs of the body, as Catholics we place the soul and its eternal welfare first.

‘ As Catholic parents you wish your children to live the life of true Catholics, to grow up in a Catholic atmosphere, to be under the charge of teachers who see in each child’s soul the image of God himself, and so you choose a Catholic school in preference to the much grander Council School where instruction in the truths of faith would be denied to them.

‘ As Catholic teachers we glory in our privilege of assisting you in educating your children . . . We welcome these monthly meetings when together we can help one another in the glorious work of caring for the little ones whom God has entrusted *to you and, through you, to us* for certain hours of the day.’

(Then follows a summary of the principal activities of the year.)

‘ One final word. You will remember that at our first meeting we pledged ourselves to make these meetings *our* bit of Catholic Action—that is, we hope through our Association to help to extend the Kingdom of Christ in our own hearts, in the hearts of the children, in our families, and so on to others’

Here are a few of the observed results of this first year’s experiment.

THE PARENTS, through living and thinking in a Catholic atmosphere regularly (even for so brief a time), grew to understand their privileges as Catholic parents: they were learning how to attend more successfully to the material, moral and spiritual needs of their children; they became, for example, more particular about their own and the children's Sunday duties, attendance at the Sacraments, etc. Their spiritual and temporal outlook was widened while new interests, higher aims, new friendships, all made for happiness and confidence. They appreciated the talks which furthered their own education or taught them how to deal with childish faults or with difficulties of character and temperament in children. They showed an increasing interest in the school and often proffered their services; those in more comfortable circumstances privately, through Sister, gave help to those in need. It was intended that all should by degrees be encouraged to take a more active part in the procedure of the meetings, for example by contributing to formal discussions or by preparing brief 'talks.'

The homes gradually assumed a more Catholic character, Catholic practices were introduced and in some cases night prayers were said in common. In fine, some little beginning had been made towards that sanctification of the home which is fundamental to the success of any form of Catholic Action.

In school, the appearance, manners and general attitude of the CHILDREN steadily improved; they were more interested in their lessons and other activities because 'mother is coming to school'; their little world of ideas was becoming more unified—perhaps the most important result of all.

THE TEACHERS (to whose devotedness, friendliness and apostolic spirit the experiment owed so much of its success) gained in sympathy and understanding, realising their own position as co-operators with the parents, seeing in the children not merely pupils but members of individual families, persons to be trained in the art of living a full Christian and Catholic life.

This venture of faith has seemed worth describing in some detail, not primarily as a model for imitation—for different types of home and school will call for different methods of co-operation—but because by reason of its utter simplicity it reveals a purpose, a spirit and principles which may be considered to be the common essentials for any similar undertaking.

If at this stage it may be taken for granted that some suitable form of collaboration between home and school is one obvious means towards the attainment of our end, 'the christianising of the home

from within,' the question arises as to whether a beginning could be made *now* when our need is the sorest?

The answer is that if, on the one hand, the times seem singularly unpropitious for the initiation of new projects, yet, on the other, the home and the school are always with us (in whatever stage of temporary disintegration they may happen to be); moreover, the very fluidity of conditions facilitates and encourages experimentation opening up ever new possibilities and opportunities. Others have not been slow to use these very conditions for the furtherance of their own ends. It behoves us to be no less vigilant and active: 'the readiness is all.' Good will will always find a way. So let us do what we can *now*, with the means actually at our disposal, 'to rebuild in this country a sound tradition of Catholic family life,' by bringing together those most nearly concerned with the education of the child—the parent and teacher. *Caritas Christi urget nos.*

This paragraph is in the nature of a footnote. When this article was written some months ago there were in existence no Catholic Parents' and Electors' Associations. It is of the utmost importance that these should not be considered merely as emergency bodies organised to safeguard Catholic rights in a present crisis; it is to be hoped that they will remain in being to provide the machinery for that co-operation between home and school which in principle and practice is seen to be so necessary for the attainment of the Christian ideal in education.

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A NOTE OF APOLOGY

Mr. Douglas Jerrold has complained that the review (in the Supplement to the September issue of *BLACKFRIARS*) of his translation of Quinton's *Maxims on War* falsely accuses him of teaching that war is 'a fundamentally social instinct' and 'a biological necessity.'

The words quoted are taken from Mr. Jerrold's introductory summary of Quinton's teaching. The words are Mr. Jerrold's with which he is describing the sentiments of M. Quinton to whom he explicitly attributes them. If for the phrase 'in Mr. Jerrold's own words' the reviewer had written 'in the words of the translator's summary of the author's ideas,' confusion would have been avoided. In view of the doubtful nature of some of the author's teaching, Mr. Jerrold could have made it clearer if he wished to dissociate himself from some of the views expressed. However, the reviewer sincerely regrets any ambiguity which may have led any reader to suppose that the opinions impugned proceeded from Mr. Jerrold, and not M. Quinton, as author.

With this apology the EDITOR also wishes to associate himself,