

CHILD GUIDANCE

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THIS has been called 'the century of the child'; and with justice, because never before has there been such intense interest shown in the world of childhood. This interest, and the knowledge that has resulted from observation and study during fifty years and more, has found application in our day, which has seen the tragedy of homeless children and disturbed homes to an unparalleled degree. There have been set up, all over Europe, children's colonies, schools, hostels of a new kind for orphan, abandoned and delinquent children. Congresses and Committees are constantly discussing these problems. Books and articles on the subject are innumerable.

In the world of education too there has been an evolution, almost a revolution, of which we are hardly aware: the almost purely intellectual or instructional idea has given way, or is giving way, to one which has more regard for the whole child—body as well as mind, the senses and the imagination as well as the cognitive faculty alone. There is far more stress on doing and making; on music, painting and drama: on *things*, so to speak, as well as just facts. The application of this to the teaching of religion and the escape from the tyranny of the mere catechism is something so obvious and fruitful that, to Catholics, it should hardly need saying. It may be said here too that 'child art' is a new revelation—brought about simply by learning to *watch* children doing things and encouraging them instead of 'teaching' them. In the same way most lovely expression in movement and mime can be produced by the right type of drawing out instead of the horribly artificial 'acting' which used to be taught.

There is another aspect from which this interest can be viewed: the deep study of human motivation and action has shown us how the child within us shapes not only individual lives but the very destinies of nations. In other words, the neuroses of adults, their quirks and distortions of character, their anti-social or aggressive behaviour, have been traced in

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detail back to the beginnings of childhood and in essence back to the mother-child relationship and all its later ramifications into wider personal relationships.

Anthropologists and psychiatrists have shown how the bringing-up of young children—their feeding, weaning, training, and the way they are treated by adults—seems to shape (as well as to be shaped by) the particular culture. This has been fairly convincingly shown in the study of simpler or more isolated cultures than ours, but eight recent studies of Nazi prisoners (and of the American nation!) seem to demonstrate how the type of family conditions determines the outlook, manners, and trends of a nation. We are only at the beginning of this kind of sociological science.

It would almost seem as though the 'eternal child' has become increasingly a necessary symbol to mankind in his agony today. It is as though we needed to re-discover the roots of our being, and to start again with something fresh and unspoilt.

What we start with is in fact love, in all the levels of our being: sensual, intellectual, spiritual. At the basis of all behaviour is the necessity of love, but this implies both the need to love good objects and to hate bad ones. The infant loves the mother who ministers to its biological-emotional need, and is enraged by the same mother who denies or frustrates it. Everything, one might say, depends on this primal love. As Dante has it: 'Love is germin of each virtue in you, and of each fault no less that merits pain'.

With this concept surely is bound up the idea of natural law—which is the expression of the love of God for his creation, or the framework of the God-man relationship on this earth. Therefore may we not say that whatever is done in the educational or social field for and with children can be estimated in relation to the natural law?

In child guidance we are seeking to prevent or cure aberrations in the child's personality as it is being formed. To do this we have to study each problem in its individual setting, taking into account the bodily condition, the intelligence, and the whole emotional development, which implies an understanding of the whole environment. We are apprais-

ing the extent to which those natural conditions have been fulfilled, which make for the normal development of the particular child.

If there is a lack of understanding, sympathy and care on the part of parent or teacher, we try to rectify this, so far as is possible. If as, alas, so often happens, the child's personality is warped by too little, or the wrong kind of, love, we try to make up to the child what it has missed by giving it the opportunity, through the techniques which we now possess, to work through its conflicts and fears to form new and better personal relationships. We have come to be able to measure, one may say mathematically, the effects of deprivation of maternal love in the first months and years, and we can forecast the probable nature of a child's reactions to this deprivation.

Knowing the deadly nature of traumatic experiences in early childhood and the symptoms which are an index of its disturbance, we can create for it, in a suitable home, the conditions for its recovery. These conditions again devolve upon a love which understands, therefore forgives, and thus heals. And if the 'bad' behaviour in deprived children is met by repression and punishment it may disappear under the surface, but the 'badness' is still there. Like a deep infection it must be allowed to open and drain itself out before the healing process can begin.

These children must first learn to love the adults in charge of them—must feel secure, trusted, tolerated, treated with justice but not harshness before they can acquire self-control, self-discipline, and the capacity to use their energies in useful ways. They have learnt too much to hate bad objects—and these are now incorporated into their very personality—so they must learn to love good objects: a lesson which is learnt slowly and painfully, with many lapses—sometimes hardly at all, when love has been too much denied at the beginning.

It is a striking thing that all over the Western world, whether you take 'Boys' Towns' in America or Italy, or homes and schools which are 'modern' in outlook in any country, you will find the same lessons applied—because they are based on the laws of love, and approximate to the ideal of a large, united and loving family. All over the

Western world it is now accepted that to promote the welfare of maladjusted children, to prevent the development of delinquency and neurosis, to ensure adequate education for handicapped children, to serve all these ends, a *medico-paedagogic* approach to their problems is essential. We do not use this cumbrous term here—it is continental—but we talk of team-work, shared by psychologists, social workers, educationists, probation officers and so on.

In its practical application it is found in organisations commonly known as Child Guidance Clinics which are staffed by a team consisting of psychiatrist, educational psychologist, and psychiatric social worker. This division of labour corresponds to the different aspects of the personality: the temperament-emotional, the cognitive-educational, and the familial-environmental. These are not of course separate, and therefore the roles of these various individuals are interchangeable, with special reserves which are the domain of a particular discipline. The treatment of maladjustment is a question of promoting adjustment: of fitting child to environment and vice versa, also of a process of enlightenment of the parent and giving understanding and security to the child, so that as a result the two are adjusted to each other so far as is possible—and the symptoms of maladjustment disappear. This is to put in very condensed form a process which has a fairly clear-cut and accepted technique.

All this is described in a simple and straightforward manner in a C.T.S. pamphlet by one of the pioneers of the method in this country, Sister Marie Hilda, S.N.D., whose recent death has been such a great loss. This wise little nun defends Child Guidance from certain objections that have been made against it by Catholics, for example:

‘It is said that misbehaviour and delinquency are exonerated. . . . In so far that misdeeds are usually treated as mere symptoms, the criticism is just; but in children the hidden cause is usually a greater moral evil and, once discovered, it becomes the object of attack.’

‘It is said that perverse conduct as a consequence of original sin is discredited and the blame laid rather on environmental conditions. . . . The Clinic does tend to lay the chief burden of responsibility on those in authority over

the child, for it recognises the enormous influence of suggestion and example, especially in the early years. Is it not just in the ease with which bad example is followed that the effect of original sin is manifested?’

‘It is said that parents and teachers who are good disciplinarians can handle their own problem children better than strangers in a Clinic, no matter how expert. This may be true, but unfortunately good discipline usually means harsh punishment. Stern measures may cause the offending symptoms to disappear more readily . . . but the source is left untouched, and probably another outlet is sought, less obvious to the adult but more disastrous to the child.’

If we ask whether these methods do in fact undermine the authority of the family or diminish the sense of moral obligation and responsibility, it can be said that, if this is the case, it is not the fault of Child Guidance, but it will be due to the wrong philosophy and ethic of those who are seeking to guide; the same applies to any method of education.

There is no doubt that the Catholic body in this country has been slow and unduly suspicious in taking up the concepts and practices of the ‘new psychology’ of our age. Some Catholic schools and institutions seem almost to pride themselves on a splendid isolation from newer currents of education and cultivate a kind of spiritual toughness. (I have expressed my feelings on this aspect more fully in an article in *BLACKFRIARS*, March 1950.)

Because they have the prerogative of the supernatural in education they seem to take less heed of the natural, and consequently often fail to cultivate (as efficiently as their more secular colleagues) the soil upon which the seed of supernature is to flourish. There should be in our schools, to my mind at least, more tenderness, more respect for the nature of children, more stress on beauty (as well as goodness!), less rigidity and pedantry (less caning!) than in other schools. Let us hope that it is so.

There is in most of what we term Child Guidance nothing that need affright or antagonise any Catholic; on the contrary, with the safeguards of our sense of personal responsibility, there is much that we should value and use in the newer developments of child psychology.