

Service for the Young—A Review.

THE real significance of an era depends not on its duration but on its content. Thus the last two decades have been more significant for the service for childhood and youth than any previous century. The last war disrupted the life of youth more than any previous war. Prior to 1939 the acids of modernity and economic factors had undermined the stability of home-life. With these dangerous influences came some positive assets such as the greater concern of the community and the State for childhood, and the more scientific study of child life with its resultant better educational policy and method. These ferments and others were working vigorously beneath the hard crust of convention when the rude blasts of war violently broke it. The decade that preceded this event and the one that followed it make an era of profound consequence for the service for the young, and it is of this period that we write.

One significant feature of the era was the increased State action in the service for childhood and youth. The Government pamphlet, 1486, describing the plans of the Government Youth Service was something of a land-mark. Here the State stepped into the region of the leisure time of youth. Here it extended the range of its compulsory services. Young people over sixteen years of age had to appear before a tribunal and, if they belonged to no youth organisation, were strongly advised to join one. Government grants would be given to certain organisations which provided physical training and community service. Further, the anticipated community centre was, and still is, to provide for youth good recreational, cultural and educational facilities. It does not preclude the possibility of religious instruction and worship being given under certain conditions. Moreover, the Butler Education Act by its provision of County Colleges will bring youth under a beneficial part-time compulsory education till the age of eighteen is reached.

Into the results of these developments we cannot look. Space permits us only to note certain significant trends. So for a moment let us go further back. There was a time when the Church and the home were the sole custodians of the spiritual interests and welfare of the young. In the Christian sanctuary the spiritual training of the young was inculcated, and in the Christian home, in varying degrees, it was exemplified. Then, choosing only those periods that serve our purpose, we note the

Church in the 9th century opened her day-schools. For centuries before the dual system, we had a single system with the Church in full control. Then the State, not without necessity, stepped into this field. In 1833 the first grant, a sum of £20,000, was made to two societies to enable them to build schools. In 1870, by the Forster Act, the State provided schools out of its own resources to supplement, not to supersede, those provided by the Church. The State now compels children to go to school and provides nearly £200,000,000 a year for their education.

Thus the Church, which for nearly ten centuries alone provided education, now finds that, in spite of the generous provisions of the Butler Act, its hold on all its schools is difficult, and upon some precarious. It is estimated that the Anglican Church is likely to lose fifty per cent of its 12,000 primary day-schools because their modernisation is beyond the resources of a Church. The general situation of which this forms a part is not without its suggestive and informing parallels. The day was when the medical, the social and the educational services of this land were entirely in the custody of the Christian Church. With increasing development and differentiation in the services came increasing detachment from the Church. The Church had initiated what her resources were inadequate to maintain and develop. Some services, e.g. health, have passed entirely into the care of the State; education is going that way and leisure-time interests of youth have in recent years started a rapid movement in the same direction. This forces on the mind the question, are we moving to a situation in which all youth organisations will be under Government control, which will permit of religious instruction and worship only under well-defined conditions? But this essay is intended to describe an era rather than predict a future, and the former more modest task compels one to admit that, while holding that the claims of the Church's own work for childhood and youth should have first priority for us, the modern trends with wider State action leave open for the Christian Church splendid opportunities for the service for childhood and youth.

The last two decades have also seen a further increase in the variety of youth organisations. Towards the close of the last World War, three Russian youth leaders visited America and this country. The present writer had two long interviews with the leader of the team, Nicholai Krassachenko. Asked what had impressed him most as he visited the various youth organisations in this country, he replied: "Their great variety and their detachment from one another." He would sweep them into one Anti-Fascist Youth Movement. He was reminded that you cannot dragoon young democrats in that way. Yet his judgment on the

situation was valid and accurate. Mr. J. T. Wolfenden, C.B.E., M.A., Chairman of the Youth Advisory Council, admits: "During the past few years there has been a most welcome increase in the number and variety of the societies, organisations, camps, groups, movements and associations which try to cater for the leisure-time activities of young people; and mercifully there has been no attempt to regiment, standardise or cramp what must, if it is to meet the needs of the present and the future, be encouraged to develop with the richest possible variety and diversity." To realise the range of this variety one may mention that the contents page of the book entitled *Youth Organisations of Great Britain, 1944-45* lists, under "Organisations represented on the Standing Conference of National Voluntary Organisations," nineteen organisations. Then follow Pre-Service Organisations. Under the heading "Other Religious Youth Organisations" seven are listed. Some political youth organisations are mentioned and twenty-eight are quoted under the general heading "Other organisations." These are all additional to "Denominational Organisations." Here is diversity indeed and much of it a war-time growth. But surely here as elsewhere the ideal is not unbridled diversity but unity in diversity. Russia shows us unity at the expense of diversity. Here we have diversity at the expense of unity. But this is typically British and is clearly manifested in our national system of education which has no conscious and well-defined purpose. We are aware of certain immediate objectives but who could define our ultimate aim? In like manner much is left to local initiative and judgment. "A French Minister of Education is said to have boasted that he could pull out his watch at any moment of the day and say to himself with absolute certainty: 'At this moment every child in France between the ages of x and y is doing Long Division, reading Corneille, conjugating Latin Verbs, etc.', as the case might be. This represents the exact antithesis of our English practice."¹

The typically British phenomenon of free diversity at the expense of efficient unity nowhere manifests itself more extravagantly and harmfully than in the organisations for childhood and youth in our Churches. Often in one Church in a week, five different youth organisations may hold their separate and unrelated meetings. One may be concerned mainly with physical exercises, another almost exclusively given to devotion, another yet aiming at the elimination of one social evil and a fourth concerned solely with one aspect of the Christian obligation, a fifth may comprehend all these interests. There may be little

¹ *The Character of England*, edited by Ernest Barker, p. 328.

or no collaboration or co-operation between these organisations which may awaken a keen but narrow loyalty with little regard to the whole, the Christian Church. Sometimes instead of wasteful overlapping there may be a grave omission of essential constituents of a comprehensive Christian education and training.

Now the number and variety of these organisations have greatly increased during the last twenty years, which incidentally was a period with a declining birthrate. It forces on one the question: where is this leading us, and where stands the Church amid these organisations with their varying degrees of integration in the Christian Church? We acknowledge with gratitude that most of these arose to meet needs the Christian Church at that time was not meeting. Most of their leaders are men and women of fine Christian character and are loyal Church members. Many are concerned with the situation which has been described. The incidence of this diversity has been relieved in some Churches by the formation of a Youth Council formed of representatives of all the organisations for childhood and youth in the Church, together with the minister and representatives of the Deacons' Court. This Council surveys all the activities for childhood and youth in their own Church with a view to promoting mutual helpfulness and a balanced and comprehensive service for young life. These Councils in the main have worked well, but are rather palliatives than cures for an extravagant and unrelated diversity. In the same period we have come to a deeper and clearer understanding of the value and the glory of the Church. From many quarters comes the cry: "Let the Church be the Church." This Church is the body of Christ and her organisations for childhood and youth should be a continued extension of those arms which first offered welcome to the children of Salem. This is the ultimate test of all our organisations for the young.

We pass, then, to a related theme and consider a new development in the work for the young, namely the beginnings of a new Churchmanship. Twenty years ago one frequently met with derisive references by the young to what were called, "our wretched divisions." Many who admired the lofty ethic and noble heroism of Jesus disparaged His Church. Our divisions, or manifestations of the one Church, remain, but gradually we are coming to recognise and realise the unity of the Spirit without sacrificing the diversity of gifts. Moreover it is seen that the only way to join the Body of Christ is by membership of one of the parts. To despise the parts and boast a loyalty to some union that exists only in abstraction is an empty and unworthy boast. Moreover, it is obvious that such unjusti-

fiable division as does exist will be healed at last, not by the disparagement of the critics outside, but by the insights and love of the members in the Church. All this is appreciated more by the upper range of our young life. Other factors are, however, influencing all our young people in the direction of a better churchmanship. The Church has a bigger place now in the syllabus of religious instruction than it had twenty years ago. This is clearly seen by a reference to the British Lessons Council Sunday School Lesson Schemes. More care is now taken to give to our own young people an adequate conception of Baptist history and principles. The Young Baptist Advance literature, issued by the Young People's Department of the Baptist Union, has been of great value in this connection. The Young People's Department of the Baptist Missionary Society is bringing home to the childhood and youth of our Churches better than ever before the urgency and the splendour of the missionary obligation. Our young people now have more meetings and take more joint action with those of other Protestant denominations—always, so far as my experience and observation go, with a resultant deeper respect not only for the faith of the other man but for their own. Summer Schools have given to their members a lovely fellowship of a new depth as well as a new range that has greatly enriched their conception of the Christian Church. Perhaps nowhere do our young people gain a greater conception of the Christian Church and a deeper love for it than at those big international World Congresses where they see young men and women from both hemispheres, from both camps in the last war, from both sides of the present curtain, wrapt in deep adoration of the one Lord and Saviour.

It is gratifying to note the adoption of an improved technique for much of our work for childhood and youth. The best educational methods of the day-schools are examined and, where relevant and possible, brought into Christ's service. It is significant that the new Agreed Syllabuses of the various Local Education Authorities closely resemble in essentials the British Lessons Council courses used so widely in the Free Church Sunday Schools. Discussion, debate and drama, flannelgraph, strip and movie film, have all been pressed into the service of Christ. In the building and rebuilding of churches more consideration is now given for the requirements of the junior organisations than was given thirty years ago. In all these regards the Church is often straitened, but that relates to her resources not to her intention or desire. Moreover, the Church's work for her young is achieved by the leisure-time service of unpaid workers and nearly all expense (and like everything else

it has increased) is paid by them. A retrospect covering twenty years induces a caution with regard to techniques. That which is born of the technical is technical. Of itself it can produce no good nor evil result. A graded lesson was acclaimed by a few as the panacea of all Sunday School evils and by others as a profane mechanisation of the glorious Gospel. The introduction of the film in the Christian work for the young was resented by some as a profanation of the House of God by the methods of the cinema; others were so enamoured as to feel that though they spake with the tongues of men and of angels and had not their 16 mm., they became as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Thank God most of our workers are neither frightened nor infatuated by a new technique and will feel that their adoption of such is quite compatible with the deepest dependence on the Spirit of God.

A review of a period in which great development in method and technique has taken place emphasises the need of a double-edged warning. There are those who disparage the technical as such. They profess an exclusive concern for the spiritual, but fail to see that the spiritual may be "straitened" in its mode of expression and that what they really oppose to the new technique is not the spiritual as such, but the old technique which they so take for granted as not seriously to take it at all. There are others who place an exaggerated reliance and expectation on the technical as such. Spiritual failings can be all explained as due to inadequate premises or requisites, or success can be believed to be just round the corner of a new grant for equipment. Steering between this Scylla and Charybdis, the wise teacher or leader of youth will present himself at his best and his finest method and equipment in complete dependence on the Spirit. We have said that education in British schools seriously lacks a clearly conceived ultimate purpose. This is not a defect of church organisations for youth, especially the Sunday Schools. Their aim is appropriately to present every boy and girl perfect in Christ Jesus. This aim may be imperfectly realised. In fact, so far as results can be ascertained, we still fail lamentably here. It must be allowed, of course, that the full fruition of the Sunday School can never be measured by the number of scholars who become church members. Many who never do so will bear in their character and conduct in later years the good effects of Sunday School teaching and worship. But this fact should not lead us to condone our failures to win for Jesus Christ and His Church so many entrusted to our care. This applies to all organisations and so far as statistics go, and they are only indicative and not precise, there seems to be over the twenty-one years under review,

little or no improvement in this regard. Thus roughly we lose, so far as church-membership goes, eighty per cent of those who at one time were under our care. There is nothing in the message of the Gospel or in the nature of the adolescent that makes this inevitable. Jesus Christ has as great appeal for the lad of seventeen as for the child of seven. Moreover there are so many glorious exceptions to the ratio of loss mentioned above—whole classes deciding for Jesus Christ—that prove there is nothing inevitable in this loss, and our friends in the Southern Convention of the U.S.A. have recorded for years an accession to the membership of their churches of seventy per cent of their Sunday School scholars.

Looking out on the life and culture of the world in general, we note the amazing technical advance with an entire absence of any equivalent moral advance. Even in the Christian service for the young we may improve our technique without any equivalent improvement in spiritual results, for that which is spirit is born of the Spirit. This points to the immense importance of the cultivation of the spiritual life of all who lead and teach the young. The leader cannot lead others to where he does not go himself. He cannot teach others in what he has never learned. There is no place here for platitudes or stunts, slogans or a misty spirituality. As far as possible all teachers and leaders should get some kind of training and our Young People's Department offers many facilities for this. We must, as far as circumstances permit, make all agencies for childhood and youth in our churches subordinate to our own aim to win others to Christ and His Church. We must give careful study and cultivation to the religious life of the pre-adolescent. We should register, inform, and direct, as our teachers in the Southern Convention do, the decisions of such young people. Firmly refraining from presuming that these imply more than they do, let us not underestimate what they do mean.

We are not alone in declaring we must win the young. Commerce has an eye on the pocket of the young. Broadcasting at special periods calls for the ear of the young. The cinema often appeals to the eye of the young. Some countries have their children's newspaper. Political parties have their junior organisations. Germany had her Hitler Youth. Russia has her great anti-Fascist youth movement, the Konsomal. These all in their way put the child in the midst. The One who is our Master asks: "What do ye more than these?"

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