

Editorial

THAT there is a teen-age problem today few would be disposed to dispute. It could hardly be more starkly or shockingly thrown into relief than it is in the recently published report, presented by a committee of the British Medical Association, on *Venereal Disease and Young People* (published by the British Medical Association, 160 pp., 5s. 6d.), which is the outcome of the great concern of the Council of the BMA over the increase in venereal diseases, particularly among young people. The figures show, for example, that for the 15-24 age group the year 1961, when compared with the year 1957, showed a population increase of 10 per cent, whereas the increase in cases of gonorrhoea treated in clinics in England and Wales for this same period showed an increase of some 67 per cent. Thus, as the report points out, "it is clear that the increase in venereal diseases among young people cannot be attributed solely to the increase in population". Again, the number of girls in the 13-16 age group increased by 20 per cent between the years 1956 and 1961; but the number of illegitimate maternities for this same age group increased by some 300 per cent. It is important to notice, also, the statement of the investigating committee that its members are "satisfied that homosexual activity contributed to the spreading of venereal disease". Evidence taken from a wide range of sources showed that premarital and extramarital sexual intercourse is now common; indeed, that over the past few years promiscuity has become "fashionable".

The report recognizes, very rightly, that these facts and figures reflect something that is far from being an isolated problem. The increase in promiscuity is a consequence, it affirms, of "a radically altered attitude towards sexual morality, and morality in general". Emphasis is placed on the importance of stable family life if moral standards are to be preserved: "Children tend to copy their parents, and it is parental example, good or bad, which largely shapes their natures". The need for teaching religious standards is stressed; but, it is insisted, "these standards must be matched by parental example, otherwise the religious point of view is regarded as merely eccentric". Accordingly, one of the doctors consulted by the committee declared: "I relate much of the decline in morals to the decline in religious faith in this country. Religious faith does train the individual in responsibility, in will and character, and in self-restraint. Many of our troubles are due to the fact that the major part of the people in this country are, for all practical purposes, pagans".

The vital importance of chastity is emphatically urged. The fact is that all too easily and frequently the consequences of unchastity are misery, humiliation, degradation, and disease. "These are considerations which may not come to the notice of the academic moralist", says the report with justifiable sarcasm, "but they must concern the practising doctor, clergyman, teacher, and social worker". The

doctrine that premarital intercourse is a sensible preliminary to marriage is dismissed. For one thing, the evidence indicates that teen-age marriages (so many of which have a background of promiscuity) are likely to prove unstable. For another, doctors, it is affirmed, frequently see patients whose sexual disharmony can be traced to premarital experimentation. Furthermore, and contrariwise, "the exercise of self-control is in itself a valuable preparation for marriage". Indeed, "the maintenance of the Christian ideal of chastity is of the utmost importance not only in combating the sexually contracted diseases but also in preserving the institution of marriage and the family unit, on which our way of life is founded. *Anything which debases this is a threat to our society*" (our italics).

The warning is given that something more than education is needed, since "knowledge alone is not always enough for the making of a right decision when faced with a moral problem". A spiritual stimulus is needed, and this religious faith can provide. Thus the impartation of the biological facts is a straightforward enough matter in itself; but if it is not coupled with instruction in Christian morality it can well do more harm than good. "In the books and pamphlets which are available for children, the physiology of sex and the functions of the reproductive organs are generally well described. But in many such books sex is not related to marriage, as though the attempt to divest the subject of all emotional entanglements had turned it into a more or less simple matter of physiological mechanics. Young people may learn about the biological processes, but end with little appreciation of what sex should mean between a happily married couple, the part marriage should play in the community, nor about their responsibility to any children they might have. We believe it is a fundamental mistake in educating children to take these matters for granted and to give them no specific emphasis. There are quite enough influences in our modern environment which tend—regrettably—to separate sex from the context of marriage and give it the status of an enjoyable pastime, and nothing else. The keystone to the teaching of the subject should be the family unit and the need to provide the newborn child with love, protection, and a stable background".

The need for a sense of responsibility on the part of those who control or participate in the production of press, radio, and television is urged, since these powerful media of mass communication of our age can do more than almost anything else to make or mar the moral tone of a generation or a nation. In this connection, we welcome the news that at a large meeting of women and girls held in Birmingham Town Hall last month a resolution was passed which condemned the BBC for the demoralizing effect of many television programmes, and demanded that the television screen be purged of undesirable material. As for the rising tide of pornographic writings and photographs, the BMA report says that "there is a special kind of crudity about these books and pictures which reveals, more clearly than any censure could do, the brutality and sadness of lust". Their effect on a young mind "can be in the extreme corrupting".

All who value the time-honoured biblical standards of Christian morality will be most grateful to the British Medical Association for

this perceptive and outspoken analysis of the present disturbing situation. We must hope that it will prove to be an effective antidote to the subversive and scandalous pronouncements of certain clerics who have set up, or been set up, as spokesmen of the church and, on television or elsewhere, have advocated a "new morality", which is neither new nor moral and would if generally adopted be disruptive of decency in both church and society. Tragically, there are large numbers who will have assumed that theirs is the voice of authentic Christianity, when it is anything but that. No doubt it is too much to expect that this report will be given an equal measure of publicity; but we may thank God that, perhaps unexpectedly, the medical profession has stepped in to remind us forcibly of the crucial importance of Christian moral standards for the welfare and indeed survival of civilization. And if the advocates of promiscuity are none the less determined to pursue their course, let them at least be honest enough to tell their hearers that promiscuity, as this BMA report states, increases the risk of venereal disease—a truly ghastly harvest for any man or maid to reap or any child to inherit.

While the teen-age problem is mounting in seriousness in England, it would seem to have reached even more alarming proportions in the United States of America. This is the conclusion to which one is driven after reading a book entitled *Teen-Age Tyranny* by Grace and Fred. M. Hechinger (Duckworth, 259 pp., 21s.). The American pattern may well, in fact, be the shape of things to come in England. But if we are wise we will be forewarned and take steps to avert further deterioration on our side of the Atlantic. The joint-authors, who write with wit and perceptiveness, point out that what worries them is "not the greater freedom of youth but rather the abdication of the rights and privileges of adults for the convenience of the immature". "American civilization," they say, "tends to stand in such awe of its teen-age segment that it is in danger of becoming a teen-age society, with permanently teen-age standards of thought, culture, and goals. As a result, American society is growing down rather than growing up". They complain that the worst excesses of crime and violence are made easily accessible to children on television and in print, and that "the adult world's frustrated and juvenile obsession with sex saturates the adolescent world with inescapable and distorted images".

Increasingly, we are told, American Society is becoming child-centred in its orientation. "Self expression" is the key to the transatlantic philosophy of education: children must be free to express themselves, not to be coerced against their wills, but to do what they want to do; whereas the proper function of education is for the teachers, out of the wisdom and experience that they have acquired over the years, to guide and instruct the young in the right way. The child has neither the wisdom nor the experience to know what is the best and most profitable thing for him to do. In American schools, it seems, the democratic principle has run so wild that decisions affecting the class are taken by committees of pupils, with whom, if they are included at all, the teachers are no more than equals. Children are being forced to act as though they were adults and are being robbed of the innocent pleasures of childhood. If this is so, it is not to be wondered at that

there are problems. Self-expression is no substitute for the learning of self-discipline.

The most objectionable manifestation of this premature conformity to adulthood is seen in the social custom of "dating", which is characteristic not only where it is to be expected among adolescents who are approaching maturity, but even with small children whose age has not reached double figures, let alone the teens; and this is done to the accompaniment of parental encouragement and approbation, so much so that failure to "pair off" is coming to be regarded as an indication of abnormality which may need the remedial intervention of the psychological expert. "Glamorous, exciting, daring, bare-bosomed or intriguing, clinically frank or insinuatingly hinted at—sex is omnipresent. It must appear to teen-agers, raised in modern America, as the only yardstick of manhood and femininity. It is linked with the hero-symbols in society and Hollywood. It pervades the cosmetics advertising and the come-ons for attire, from foundations to accessories". Youngsters are given to understand "that they must learn by experimentation rather than through the transmitted experience of their elders. Then—suddenly—they are expected to apply judgment and self-control to their emerging interest in sex—the area of human behaviour in which even adults find it most difficult to practise wisdom and self-discipline". Statistics show that no less than 40 per cent of all babies born out of wedlock in the United States are born to mothers who are in their teens—a figure, of course, which does not take into account the girls who, on finding themselves pregnant, take refuge in hasty marriage, and the others who resort to the horrible practice of abortion, often with disastrous consequences to themselves. Premarital pregnancy, in fact, has ceased to be merely or mainly a problem affecting college or university students: it is now an all too frequent problem among high school and junior high school pupils. And, as in England, the increase in promiscuity has led to an increase in the incidence of venereal disease among the young. Moreover, the children concerned are from well-to-do homes and good class families even more from slum areas and impoverished circumstances.

This incitement of young people to play at being grown-up without first growing up is creating a high tide of problems which every year it is becoming more difficult to stem. Teen-agers are being rushed from childhood into adulthood and in the process are being defrauded of the exciting discipline of maturing into responsible manhood and womanhood during the wonderful years of adolescence. This can only be described as a cruel and crippling form of social surgery. In many areas of society it is now coming to be accepted that what adults are able to do teen-agers must be free to do also. The smoking of cigarettes, the drinking of liquor, and the possession of automobiles are regarded as symbols of independence and maturity. Cashing in on the current image of teen-agedom are a horde of dead-beat and off-beat purveyors of tawdry literature and entertainment who couldn't care less about the depraving effect that their wares have on the youthful mind. It was Ernest Hemingway who said: "We are deluged with writers who can't write, actors who can't act, and singers who can't sing—and they are all making a million dollars a year". The bathos of the situation

is underlined when grown-ups of middle years who ought to know better, indulge in sessions of twist and rock 'n' roll and any other indignity that they hope will prove they are "with it" and at one with the younger generation. They even try to dress like teen-agers, and few things could look more fatuous than that! Astronomical sums are spent annually on advertising commodities for the teen-ager—the latest in dress, in hair styles, in deodorants, in cosmetics, and so on and on *ad nauseam*. It is common for newspapers to have special teen-age sections. Children who are enduring the agony of not having reached the status of teen-agedom at least have the consolation that they are now described as sub-teens, and sub-teen girls, although they have no more of a bosom than Gandhi had, are comforted by being able to buy and to sport their own special sub-teen brassieres and bikinis. When parents have so far abdicated their responsibilities as to let their children have whatever they ask for, whether because they have allowed themselves to be persuaded that to deny a child anything will have a traumatic effect on the juvenile personality, or because they are determined that their children must at all costs keep up with the Jones's children next door, or simply because they are unwilling to face a "scene", then the situation is serious indeed, not only for parents but also for children. No wonder our joint-authors declare that American teen-agers are "the advertiser's dream-come-true". And no wonder the tragedy is being enacted of children growing up without joy, without security, without values, and without goals. What is developing in our day is nothing less than a vast and unscrupulous exploitation of the child, as disastrous in its results (let us not delude ourselves) as was the exploitation of children for cheap labour in a past age.

The nonconformity, indeed the rebellion against conformity, which to the casual onlooker may appear to be a characteristic mark of teen-age behaviour is in fact no more than a façade and, on the part of the teen-ager, a self-deception; for conformity is of the essence of teen-agery, every member of which is expected to conform precisely to the nonconforming pattern. Teen-age fads, from unconventional dress to obscure language, are in reality, as the authors of *Teen-Age Tyranny* observe, "conformity reduced to absurdity. For while the teen-age fads, often totally incomprehensible to the adult world, may seem distinguished by their daring difference from society, this is an illusion. Since teen-age society is a fortress unto itself, the fad within it is as solid in its conformity as the behaviour of the most housebroken Organization Man in suburbia. These adolescent conformists have been trained in their own sub-culture to do the bidding of the group. They will emerge as the perfect replacements of their conforming elders". And they conclude their study with this admonition: "The task now is to make it clearly understood that adolescence is a stage of human development, not an empire or even a colony. The mission of the adult world is to help teen-agers become adults by raising their standards and values to maturity rather than by lowering adulthood to their insecure immaturity. The task for the adult world is to make adolescence a step toward growing up, not a privilege to be exploited".

This is a task at which both church and state should work together

with unity of purpose. Blatant exploiters of youth should be punishable by law. But above all it is necessary to recover the fundamental concept of parental responsibility. In these days of socialized democracy parents are yielding to the temptation to shrug off their responsibilities on to the shoulders of the welfare state. They are persuading themselves that the training and upbringing of their children is not their duty but the duty of the state to whom they pay taxes for the care and education of their offspring. This attitude can only undermine the basic structure and stability of society. Mothers need to be reminded that their proper place is in the home, where they should be available as a focus of love and security for their children, not away in some office or factory earning extra money for extra luxuries. In our churches the hearing of the ten commandments has virtually been replaced by the summary of the law ; but it is important that young and old alike should repeatedly be confronted by the plain commands of God for society : " Honour thy father and thy mother ", " Thou shalt not kill ", " Thou shalt not commit adultery ", " Thou shalt not steal ", " Thou shalt not bear false witness ", and " Thou shalt not covet ". These precepts have a directness of impact that the more general summary of the law is less likely to carry. Sermons should be preached on the mutual duties and responsibilities of parents and children, in the spheres of the home, of church, and of society in general. And Christian parents must be concerned to ensure that the education their children receive is in the fullest sense of the word, *Christian* education. It is worth considering whether one of the most effective contributions to the solution of our present problems might not be the establishment—or the restoration—of parochial day-schools. That such schools, which have played so significant a role in former generations, should have been allowed to die off, or been handed over to the secular authorities, has gravely impaired the influence of the church. The way back to spiritual, social, and moral health is the good old way of the Bible and family worship in the home coupled with the teaching of God's law and Gospel in our schools, united worship in God's house on the Lord's day, and the public acknowledgement by the state of its duty to honour God in all that it seeks to do. P.E.H.
