

NUNS IN THE HOME

THE NEED

THIS Modern Age with its Radio, Cinema and extended educational fields has caused the working people to desire increasing improvements in their living conditions. This in itself is good, but coupled with a growing materialism it has become of too great an importance even to Catholics. But the fact is undeniable that we do set a great store by our creature comforts these days. And Catholics should be the last to cry down any attempt at levelling up as opposed to the all-too-frequently expressed desire for levelling down.

The fulfilment of this desire for a nice home, well dressed children and other amenities of life has, especially among the great and increasing lower middle-class, caused new and exceedingly grave problems to appear. To understand these problems it is essential to understand the mental attitude of those to whom they apply.

These people are the great suburban dwellers, with their small but well appointed houses which they, very naturally, love. The non-Catholic parents of, perhaps, only two children find no great problem. They have raised their families to suit their own wishes and their means, and often not for several years after marriage. The possibility of more children with the added expense and the greatly added work does not arise. They have the means to prevent any such unwelcome additions to the family, so they live as they have chosen to do, and have the time and the money to bring their children up well, materially at least, and still maintain a high standard of living. Their house is favourably compared to any in the street.

Let us now look at the Catholic parents' point of view. They wish their home to be as beautiful as any in the row. Possibly, given the resources, they would desire a larger family than two children, but they are not given those resources, so their choice is by no means a simple one. If they have a large family this will mean severe overwork for the wife in the home, in a vain endeavour to maintain their chosen standard, and considerable straining of the husband's finances.

Alternatively, they can reduce the family by rigid self control, or by the use of contraceptives. Nature is very weak and the temptations very strong, and doubtless a great deal of the leakage in the Church is due to this vexed question. I feel the question is so well known among the poorer working families that there is no purpose in going into great detail, except to remind readers that the difficulty

is as acute in the middle class. It is sufficient to say the choice is indeed very hard.

There is another aspect to be considered. Since servants are unknown in this class of people, once the Catholic couple have been blessed with children, their opportunities for any enjoyment or relaxation outside the home together are ended for many years. There is always the problem of 'Who will mind the baby?' The young couple are full of life and vigour and long to go out for an evening together as they did a short while ago, during their glorious courting time—and how very natural! Or again, their Communion together on a Sunday morning, that God-given source of strength and comfort they so badly need at this time—generally they have to go at different times or perhaps they take the child along with them, which proves a source of distraction to the parents and the rest of the congregation. Altogether a most unsatisfactory state of affairs, and one to which a solution should be found.

There is also the question of Catholic friends. Usually amongst this class the next-door neighbour is the friend, and it is unlikely that two Catholic families will be living next door to one another. The children and the continual housework make any long visits impossible; as a result these Catholic parents are sadly lonely for friends of the same faith. From their non-Catholic acquaintances the difficulty of the Catholic position is made more apparent still.

THE REMEDY

For the reasons given above we think that great and Christian service would be rendered by a body of women who would be willing to devote their lives to helping these hard pressed Catholic mothers by visiting in the home as the trusted and familiar friend, always ready to give a hand with the multitudinous duties and domestic tasks. It is felt that it is essential that these women be nuns, because their assistance is not only to be material but also spiritual. To give advice on the many problems confronting the Catholic parents, especially the wife, and to do this effectively, the Nun will require spiritual training as well as a very sound knowledge of the difficulties a modern wife has to overcome. Also the laywoman would never be accepted completely in the home, especially by the husband. It would always be felt that there was a spirit of competition in skill of homecraft, and they might be looked upon as interfering busybodies. The habit of the Nun and the profession of life that it stands for would immediately put her beyond any such suspicions. Both the parents would feel also that there was no danger of the family affairs being gossiped about by the Nun.

Part of their work would be to release the parents for Mass on Sundays by looking after the children, and cooking breakfast. She could occasionally come in for an evening to allow the couple to go out together for a while. It is to be understood that these Nuns are not to be trained nurses, but to be somewhat skilled in the nursing of children and simple ailments. In short, all round domesticated women. The work would be mainly limited to the one class, as the needs of the really poor are entirely different and already in the hands of many Orders and Organisations. A different mental attitude is needed to contact the middle class.

The spiritual gain to both the parents and the children of the presence such a friend in the house should not be overlooked, and if the spiritual life of the parents will be benefited, how much more so that of the children. They would be brought up in a truly Catholic home and would find in it the fulfilment of the faith they are taught in the schoolroom. Thus we should find the next generation of Catholics stronger and more virile champions of the Faith than the preceding generation has proved itself to be. Since the child is father to the man we should, by this fortifying of the Catholic home and family, become ever stronger in the faith of our Fathers.

The question of vocations to the work should not prove itself insuperable. At the end of the war, millions of women and young girls, now conscripted into the Forces, the factories and other war work, will find themselves discharged and with their whole life to remould. Tragically enough, we must assume that numbers of these will be widows, whose experience of married life will suit them for this work. From such as these, surely, many would feel drawn to serving God in this way, if they knew of the project. It is certainly not desired to form a new Order, if any other course is available. It is hoped that one of the existing Orders could undertake to branch out in this work, but the obvious difficulties in starting an entirely new sphere of work as a primary objective renders this hope somewhat tenuous.

This is only a short outline of the scheme, as it is not possible to go into any kind of detail at the present.

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