

ON THE RE-EDUCATION OF GERMAN YOUTH

AMONG the causes which have contributed to the tragedy of modern German history the decline of family life may safely be considered one of the most important factors. This decline has, indeed, affected almost all European countries, but, if Russia be excepted, none so deeply and powerfully as Germany. It may, perhaps, sound strange to non-Catholics that the condition of a healthy family life should be the esteem of virginity: for the Church has often been falsely accused of despising marriage, because she demands celibacy from her priests and religious. But even in the ancient Western world the family was nowhere stronger than in pagan Rome, where the Vestal virgins tended the sacred fire, the symbol of the home, from which springs all true civilization. It is, therefore, not surprising that the beginning of the disruption of German family life can be traced to Luther who, himself a monk who had broken his vow of chastity in order to marry a runaway nun, to the scandal even of many of his devoted followers, officially sanctioned the bigamous marriage of Philip of Hesse. The case of Luther may serve to illustrate the fact that, if virginity is not valued, there is no reason why continence should be esteemed in a wife or husband, except perhaps in the former to ascertain the parentage of the children.

But there is another side of the matter. St. Thomas links virginity closely to the contemplative life. 'The end,' he says, 'which renders virginity praiseworthy, is that one may have leisure for Divine things.' And moreover the integrity of the chaste mind is necessary for the loving perception of truths that are beyond reason. The Germans are a naturally contemplative race—the names of St. Hildegard, Master Eckhart, Tauler and Suso are ample evidence of that. When they were refused their natural, or rather their supernatural, activity in a chaste life consecrated to Divine contemplation, which would have refined and softened also the savage instincts of the newly converted Slav elements, they fell back into indolence and drunkenness; and the centuries which witnessed the triumph of mysticism in the Spain of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross and in the France of St. Francis de Sales, were marked in Germany by a return to barbarism in culture and art, that would have shocked a St. Mechthild or a St. Gertrude. When, at last, Germany had recovered from the shock of the Reformation and the wars following in its wake, Christianity, and with it morality, had suffered inestimable losses.

Then, in the 18th century, Goethe, the 'great pagan,' glorified Gretchen, the murderess of her illegitimate child, and Schiller, in *Kabale und Liebe*, proclaimed the rights of passion over parental authority. These plays soon became classics and were read and discussed by generations of German boys and girls in their most receptive years. It is small wonder, then, that their moral sense gradually became perverted, and, under the impact first of the materialism of the 19th century, and later of the Great War, revolution and the crises of inflation and unemployment, was almost destroyed. This process, most noticeable in the big cities, was greatly aided by a pseudo-science which informed the masses that failure to satisfy the sex instinct inevitably leads to neurosis. Thus it was not an isolated, but rather a typical, case, when shortly before the advent of Hitler a Scripture mistress at a Protestant Church school in Berlin, treating the Sixth Commandment, was informed by a thirteen-year-old girl: 'But I think you've got to do that if you want a divorce.'

There is, therefore, an urgent need that over and above the demand for political re-education of the Germans the religious and moral one may not be forgotten. But this is a task so delicate and demanding such psychological understanding that it can be undertaken only by the Germans themselves. There is no shirking the consequences of the fact that there is no longer a common outlook on life among the European peoples, as there was in the Middle Ages. The nationalism which has grown to such formidable strength especially in Germany cannot be disregarded in any schemes of re-education, if they are to get down to the root of the evil. And this root is, surely, the neglect of the Catholic principle that reason must govern instinct, not vice-versa. It was the fateful mistake of such modern psychologists as Freud, Van de Velde and others that they taught men to follow their instincts instead of governing and restraining them. Unless the instinct for the propagation of the race, which is the strongest after the urge for food, be brought under the mastery of reason, such lesser ones as the natural love for one's country and the desire for power will continue to claim to be laws to themselves. The sex instinct—and this fact ought to be faced squarely—has been allowed to develop unchecked in Germany even in its most perverted forms for the past decades. When Hitler was informed that unnatural vice was rife among his storm troopers his only reply was: 'My S.A. is no kindergarten.'

This state of things will never be remedied by prohibitive legislation. The only remedy for love gone astray and debased to lust is the redeeming Love which changed the public sinner into a con-

templative. But how is this love that converted the Magdalen to be instilled into the misguided youth of a whole nation? Prayer and penance, of course, are the foremost requirements on the supernatural side. And naturally these are not to be restricted to the Germans themselves; on the contrary, an essential contribution will have to be made by all non-German Catholics as well in virtue of the indestructible unity of the Mystical Body. As far as English Catholics are concerned, it may perhaps be suggested that it should be made especially through the intercession of St. Boniface, the British-born Apostle of Germany. As to the German Catholics, little short of heroism will be required of them. There will have been much suffering during this war, and there may be even more to come in the future, when a defeated nation that has aroused the hatred of the whole world will be subjected to punishments that will inevitably include the innocent with the guilty. But it will be an extraordinary opportunity for German Catholics to accept these sufferings in a spirit of humility and penitence, and thus to transform material defeat into a spiritual victory. Thus it could become a powerful source of purification and grace not only for their own nation, but for the whole world.

It will be their task to instil into the hearts of the German youth, so susceptible to ideals and capable of self-sacrifice, the love of Christ and of the Kingdom of God in the place of the Fuehrer and the Third Reich. This, however, can hardly be brought about in one generation. It took Hitler ten years to establish his National Socialist State: but our Lord spent three centuries in building up His Church within the Roman Empire. Therefore the men and women whom, we pray, God may call to the work of converting their country, will have to be patient and indifferent to quick results. It will not be easy to implant the love of humility and charity in a generation brought up to regard pride and hatred as virtues. The greatest temptation for those engaged in the work will be to become discouraged; the contemplation of Calvary and the lonely Figure on the Cross, so obviously a failure in the eyes even of His own followers, may often be the only source of strength left to them.

This work of personal devotion, which will require so many sacrifices, may be greatly aided by natural means; and we may take the opportunity of adding here one important example: a revision of the literature usually selected for reading in the upper forms of German secondary schools. There is no reason why the bloodthirsty *Nibelungenlied* should not be replaced by selections from Tauler and Suso, and Grimmelhausen's crude *Simplizissimus* by the often beautiful poetry of the 17th century Jesuit Friedrich von Spee. The Ger-

man classics—so unfortunately pagan in outlook—might be accorded less time, and the teachers would have to make prudent selections, stressing such Christian elements as are there, e.g. in Goethe's *Iphigenie* and Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*. The German Romantics, for the most part Catholic and undeservedly neglected, might profitably be revived, for there is fine poetry as well as a Christian view of life in many of the works of Eichendorff and Brentano, Lenau and Goerres. For the modern period, selections from Rilke and Ruth Schaumann and such striking work as Werfel's 'Song of Bernadette' might well help to open the eyes of the younger generation to the fact that Christianity is still a living faith, far removed from the transitory shallowness of political creeds and scientific fashions.

But the problem, of course, is how to find teachers fitted to give such an education. It will hardly be possible to provide them in the present generation in anything like sufficient number. But here Catholics might take a leaf out of Hitler's book and set up clubs, hostels, discussion groups and similar institutions where boys and girls of all denominations could meet in their leisure time. This would serve the double purpose of taking them off the streets—a very desirable thing while normal family life is disturbed—and of opening their minds to subjects hitherto withheld from them. Here, too, they would learn to value chastity and to despise the pernicious amusements that pander to the lower instincts, and would gently and tactfully be made acquainted with a new world, the world of the supernatural. For this world has been closed to the German Protestant youth and, it is to be feared, to many nominal Catholics too, by that Rationalism and Naturalism which would only trust the statements of scientists. Yet the desire to penetrate into the world of the unseen is deeply rooted in every human heart, so that the boys and girls of the Hitler Youth would dance round sacred fires, invoke the ghosts of the dead heroes of the 'Movement,' and occasionally even profess a more or less genuine belief in the old 'Nordic' gods which Boniface had come to conquer.

Yet, even in the minds of the Hitler Youth all these are really no more than shades conjured up from a long forgotten past, to help to fill the void left by modern unbelief, which even hero-worship of Hitler, the demi-god, will hardly satisfy. There is only one way, both to fill those who hunger for spiritual food and to pacify Europe, the way of Him who called Himself the Way, the setting up of the rule of Christ the King in the troublesome and troubled heart of the continent. It will be uphill work and demand many sacrifices, and an almost unlimited capacity for patience and understanding from those who would devote themselves to it—but seeing these hundreds

of thousands of young souls in danger of being lost for ever, who would not wish to act on our Lord's words: 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth labourers into the harvest.'

H. C. GRAEF.

THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

THE youth movement has received an enthusiastic reception from the Press and little adverse criticism has been made. There is, however, much criticism that does not come into print and it is the purpose of this article to examine objections to the movement and to suggest remedies where criticism is well founded.

The prevailing attitude of the objectors is suspicion derived from the national abhorrence of uniform and regimentation together with the example of dictator states and the débacle of British Fascism. But on the whole fears are aroused, not by what the movement is, but by what it may become; to some the exploitation of youth for political ends is a potential danger that may well develop with the extension of central control. This danger is a real one and is bound up with the question of vested interest within the movement itself.

At the moment the activities of youth clubs are somewhat decentralised and organisers are given a free hand. This is good; initiative and individuality can play their part by modifying activities in accordance with the needs of the neighbourhood. Should the hand of bureaucracy fasten down on the movement, control may deprive it of its freedom and elasticity and result in its becoming a soulless and regimented function of the State.

There is no place for social (as distinct from economic) regimentation and control, which are the prelude to exploitation of the individual, the simplest but most dangerous way of dealing with the complexity of modern life. Whatever case may be made for economic control there is none for the control of personality or social behaviour; desirable qualities cannot be inculcated by force.

There are critics who assert that the movement has accomplished little to date, that it has not decreased juvenile delinquency and that no betterment in behaviour has resulted in its members. While much of this criticism is hasty generalisation, we shall see that it has