

A SOLUTION OF THE LEAKAGE

THERE are some who see in Catholic participation in the Youth Movement a powerful means for stemming the leakage. They recognise that the Catholic club or youth organisation may well be the bridge between the school and the world. It is obvious, indeed, that there is immense gain to our adolescents when they are nurtured in a Catholic atmosphere by those who are solicitous for their spiritual welfare. It would be difficult to overestimate the good that must come from their taking part in activities directed by helpers whose outlook is necessarily apostolic.

But these good results will only be achieved if our own attitude to the Youth Movement is right. We must not regard it as a kind of rescue work, as if there had already been failure in the cultivation of the tender plant. If it is not yet a proclamation of the glorious fruition of youthful endeavour, it must not at any rate continue the artificial forcing that was begun at school, now in the form of an imposed culture and a suggested enthusiasm for social betterment. Our Youth Movement must be a real one in the sense that it is Youth which is making the movement, and not Youth being moved by its self-appointed guardians.

In short, the Catholic participation in the Movement must not be allowed to involve us in a false philosophy. On the contrary, we have in the Catholic youth organisation an opportunity of combating false ideas on "culture". We can show that any concentration on collective activities, physical and mental, points not to a material life-goal, but to an eternal one. We must emphasise that we are making no pretence to stay the time which is all too surely and rapidly running its course, but are encouraging our young people to make the best use of the vital period in preparation for this life and the next.

This certainly cannot be done, nor could the solution of the leakage be found in an atmosphere of compulsion, against which we must be strictly on our guard. Our young people, on leaving school, may resent being bludgeoned into Youth activities, even though they are told they are merely being "directed". It would be a calamity if they came to associate Catholic Youth activity with forced activity. A faith that might have survived after the child's welcome release from school discipline may yet die under a continued "education" that still has a flavour of compulsion.

Further, there must be no opposition between attachment to Catholic club life and the ideal of Nazareth: the Catholic home and family. The home must always be the ideal training ground for

the parents of the future. The difficulty, nevertheless, remains that many Catholic homes are unsatisfactory; they do not go in for ideals. The club may then become, in fact, a refuge from home. This being so, the club may well contribute indirectly to the improvement of the home. Its members are the family's components; any good they derive from the club will react on their home. Much useful work can be done in the club by inculcating home virtues. A youth leader in one of our large cities has set out to make this her main work in the organisation she controls. She makes it her business to teach her protégées that home life comes first. She will count it success if the lesson is so well learned as to result in dwindling numbers in her charge. But there will always be new recruits to learn the lesson, former pupils to report progress, perhaps, and to give a hand with the training of those in less happy home circumstances.

The Catholic club, if it is to be Catholic, must give its members something different from what the Youth Movement in general provides. We must offer them something better, for instance, than the dancing that they can get in the local Palais de Dance. It is good to see that there is already a movement for introducing into our clubs the clean, healthy, country dances that we associate with the Merrie England of Catholic days. We must, again, treat our young people to something nobler than the crooning on radio or gramophone that is banned even in circles which lay no claim to exalted ideals. Social workers know that it is responsible for false notions of love, which lead to hasty marriages and their early disruption.

We should have, in every district if possible, sufficient musicians who will give a tithe of their spare time each week to music instruction. In some clubs it has been found possible to arrange for individual tuition for piano, violin and other instruments. Bands and orchestras have been formed where the talent has been forthcoming—and musical ability is far more common than is generally supposed. But where there are no facilities for teaching to play, simple instruction can be given to groups in principles, harmony and elementary theory with practical illustrations. All this will be designed to elevate the standard of musical taste. It will mark the Catholic club as a place where low artistic ideals, allied actually to low moral standards, are not tolerated.

In other serious activities, such as dramatics and handicrafts, there will be a similar, though unadvertised purpose. Dramatics train in self-expression and development of personality. So, by different methods, do handicrafts, which also satisfy to some extent the creative ambition, and teach co-ordination of hand and eye. Nor must the Catholic club be diverted from its chief pur-

pose of training its members by the lure of mere competition with other clubs, which may vitiate much of the good that might be done. It will be fatal to the club's real aims if the members are pressed on, just as they were in school, to compete with others, pass tests, and gain certificates of merit. The best work is done quietly, slowly, to the glory of God, without hope of gain. If the club is to provide the solution of the leakage, our young people must learn to be animated by a spirit different from the sordid materialism that seeks only to do better than the next man.

The club, if it is to be Catholic, must enthusiastically and largely engage in specifically Catholic activities. There seems to be none more suitable than work for the Missions. Fostering of mission interest in the young may well be one of the chief factors in solving the problem of the leakage. It can hardly be otherwise, with its graphic picturing of the life of the Church all over the world, and the consequent appeal to the imagination. It provides the antidote to narrow selfish interests; it gives knowledge of the larger world-needs which, although they are in the spiritual order, are presented in a concrete and attractive form. Such an appeal, moreover, is necessarily infused with adventure, and thus carries an added sanction for being placed before the youthful, for girls as well as boys are appreciative of hazardous enterprise. All this teaches a Catholicity which is far from being bounded by school or parish.

It may be objected that this sounds well in theory, but that we have to account for defections, sometimes numerous, when young people leave schools in which mission interest has by no means been neglected, and that if the school has been unsuccessful in giving the required bent, the club can hardly hope to do so either. But we may question whether the fostering of mission interest has really yet been tried as it should. It is the glory of our Catholic schools that religion is never taught as a "subject"—indeed, how could it be? It is an all-absorbing interest, which informs the whole curriculum. This fact is the reason for the perennial stand by Catholics for their schools, and the dilemma of the educationist "reformers".

Mission interest, to be properly instilled, must not be merely an added one. It must be as all-absorbing as the interest in religion because inseparable from it. Too often it is associated in the mind of the child with money-giving, excellent and necessary in itself, but unfruitful for the giver unless inspired by a larger motive. And this again can only come about by a fuller understanding than that of the mere necessity to give. The campaign for the missions should be not so much for the direct gain to themselves, but for the enlarging and developing of the spiritual life of those induced to aid

them. It follows, of course, that there will in fact be a gain to the missions from the creation of an enthusiasm for the growth of the Church.

In the Catholic club the campaign begun in school can be continued. The mission circle for the collection of cash need not be much in evidence; club members should certainly not be canvassed to join. It should arise voluntarily and naturally from the emphasis placed on the need for missions. One or more of the members, or an adult helper should be known as promoters. The less said about money the better; on the other hand, too much cannot be said about the need of the missions for prayer. Take care of the prayer, and the money will take care of itself is a maxim which has been proved again and again.

A vital feature in the club campaign for the missions is the film or lantern lecture. And those who regard the magic lantern as out of date may be surprised that many prefer it to the moving pictures. With the commentary of a capable lecturer it provides the warm human touch which is not so vivid in the duller film picture; nor is there competition, except by contrast, with the cinema.

Literature is another method of arousing zeal for the missions. One or more of the missionary magazines should be taken regularly for the club reading room. And even in these times of severe paper restriction there is a healthy stream of books about the missions. Many of these are written with the younger reader in view, and some have entered the ranks of recognised best-sellers. Books do not sell unless there are readers for them, and as some seed is almost sure to fall on good ground, we may confidently look, if school pupils and club members are trained to be mission-minded, for many more mission vocations.

The ideal: "Every Catholic a missionary" may seem an exalted one. But it was set by His Holiness Pope Pius XI. And, because every man is our neighbour, it is no more than the keeping of the two great commandments. Its realisation may well look hopeless, but it must be attempted. And it is the young who are the most likely to respond, for they have not yet learned the false maxims of the world. To become mission-minded is to become apostolic, and the making of each new missionary in spirit is to give to one more at least a direction which will solve the problem of the rival loyalties of an often deluded adolescence. It will give back the home, the starting-point of apostolicity and vocation, its proper place, and emphasise its priority. Thus will the Catholic Youth Movement become the solution of the leakage. C. J. WOOLLEN.