

## WHITHER WOMEN?

*A woman must always remember that she is a woman. She must dress like a woman, talk like a woman and walk like a woman. For the enrichment of her personal life, her personal happiness, she must observe the purely feminine attributes and feminine virtues. . . . We have neglected the special education which girls need to become good mothers and good wives and we must give it to them.*—Olga Mishakova, Secretary General of the Russian Youth Organisation.

*It may well be that economic necessity makes a supply of female helots an inevitable part of our industrial life.*—John Newsom, County Education Officer for Hertfordshire.

ALL education is due for overhauling; and that of women, being least concerned with the vital needs of its victims, is justly answerable for the most uneasiness. Papal pronouncements having frequently dealt with the kindred points of heaven and home as the magnetic poles of civilisation, there is no need to reiterate the teaching of the Church on the subject. But because the integrity of the English home is to all intents and purposes a forlorn hope, and the English heaven strikes one as being unlikely of attainment without it, the reviewer proposes to survey two books, one American, one English, and neither of them Catholic, which exhibit a novel awareness of our danger and offer some practicable suggestions for averting it. In the brief space at her disposal, she has almost entirely ignored the unhelpful aspects of the books in question.

The common butt of *Teach Them How to Live* (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.) and *The Education of Girls* (Faber, 8s. 6d.) is what we know as 'the School Cert.'; examinations, imposed not by the school but from without, which determine not only the victim's future, but what is far worse—for, after all, the pupil may kick over the traces on leaving school—the whole of his or her education during the formative years of life. Apart from their common scorn for the schedules and products of the last fifty years, the books differ considerably. The American one, Mr James Hemming's, is concerned with the secondary education of youths and maidens destined for the Universities. It tells how a group of thirty private and state schools were permitted to offer their own leaving examinations as substitutes for the entrance papers of twenty-five Universities and Colleges—men's, women's and co-educational. These academic bodies were of the first rank, such as Harvard, Bryn Mawr, and

the University of Chicago. The book is critical—it tells you why the experiment was undertaken. It is constructive—you see how the thing was done. And it is conclusive—in so far as it gives you the results, over eight years, on the pupil at school, the undergraduate at college and the more or less mature product in the world.

The subject of the English book, Mr John Newsom's, is the education of women as women. To this end he even suggests a Modern Greats' course with a specifically feminine bias. Equality of opportunity should not, he is convinced, entail identity—the more so as, unlike most 'youth' experts, he looks well ahead. Joubert, one remembers, said 'educate for forty'. The Rt. Hon. R. A. Butler, M.P., observes in his introduction to Mr Newsom's book that there are still fifteen thirty-year-old women at home to five 'working'. ('At home', among educationists, is always contrasted with 'working'. That is one of the attitudes Mr Newsom is out to end.)

The University woman—say Roedean and Girton—usually takes to domesticity, when she marries, like a duck to water. She has usually been brought up with a good home background. Therefore Mr Newsom confines himself to the Grammar School girls and those of the Secondary Modern Schools, who, on leaving, become wage-earners of one sort or another as a prelude, they hope, to matrimony. Because the majority do marry it is obviously unwise to bias their education against the skills and accomplishments of the home. Moreover, as aspirants to wedlock, they are not worth training for expert work; and, apart from the quasi-maternal careers of teaching and nursing, they seldom do get trained. They constitute the 'helots' alluded to by Mr Newsom—*the matière presque inerte, irresponsable, du déterminisme économique* of M. Bernanos. What Mr Butler describes 'in view of our present limited man-power' as 'resources'. Obviously industrialists would be sunk without them. But why not let them sink? On the other hand men might work harder and squander less if they could spend all they wished on their families and if the women ran their homes as well as they used to do. In any case the Christian home comes first; and until you can envisage our Lady in a cosmetic factory, the Holy Child in 'nursery school' and St Joseph queuing for his mid-day meal at a canteen, you have no right to condemn 'the least of these' to a sub-human life. Mr Newsom remarks, with appropriate acidity, that none of the planners who direct our girls to mass-production envisages such a fate for his own daughters. The point of his own book, as it should be that of Catholic education, is not how we can best supply industry's spare parts and leave a few hours off for heaven and home,

but how we can train the future mothers of English children to make the best of their lives here and hereafter.

Before reverting to the two books and their programmes, the present writer should perhaps indicate her own standpoint. So far from agreeing with Mr Hemming and Mr Newsom that we have too little of what is known as education, she would herself argue that we have far too much. As Professor Whitehead once said, 'there is only one subject for education and that is life'. Mr Hemming in the most eloquent passage in his book paints the training for life 'adequately supplied' fifty years ago 'by life itself' as gone for ever. Life trained, he says, in the most natural way of all, 'by offering examples of skill and action for the young to imitate. . . . Daily life was educational in the best sense: it imparted knowledge, it taught the value of co-operation, it gave an outlet for self-expression. Father, mother, neighbours, elder brothers and sisters—all were teachers of the children in the true sense. . . . Of course school learning was a useful addition . . . but it *was* an addition. . . . The need for the rural or small-town communities to be self-decorating and self-entertaining added art and culture to the content of the living text-book that was life. Sunday's sermons, significant festivals, and parsons' or ministers' visiting, turned people's thoughts regularly away from over-absorption with the utilitarian values. . . . Fifty years ago the whole world—in so far as the group experienced it—was waiting outside every child's front door; today, often enough, very little of value is at hand.'

These lost values are rendered all the more irretrievable because free education has efficiently ended freedom to educate. The parents who first shifted their responsibilities on to others—beginning with catechism and ending with cocoa—forfeited not only their own rights but the rights of the more independent and far-seeing minority. Education, as distinguished from propaganda and 'conditioning for control', is the relation between one who wishes to learn and one who has the knowledge, skill and magnanimity to teach. In the nature of things, example tells most. Good mothers rear good mothers, good nuns good nuns, fully-qualified teachers fully-qualified teachers. No amount of lip-service (or even generous desire) to fit girls for homes will ever take the place of the home itself as the inspiration of other homes. A good home, plus facilities for acquiring extraneous knowledge and skill, would seem, in every walk of life, the ideal. St Thomas More, despite, or because of, the fact that he favoured co-education, would have girls educated at home.

Lest Mr Newsom or Mr Hemming might be considered allergic to convent education, it should be pointed out that this is not so. Mr Hemming does not build on religious foundations. Mr Newsom, apparently an Anglican, puts in a good word for convents. Property and affection—according to Aristotle the two most powerful prompters of human interest and attachment—are incentives that cannot be encouraged in convents, or in any other schools, as they can at home. Mr Newsom, however, soundly remarks that girls are more impressed by women who have voluntarily renounced homes and husbands than by those who have failed to secure them. On the other hand it should be noted that the boarding-school regime is hardly an ideal preparation for matrimony. The uncritical eating of dull or badly-cooked food, the uniforms, the childish games, are unnecessary handicaps. An intelligent interest in cookery, clothes and the use of leisure cannot be acquired in a day—even a wedding day. The neglect of home music—every woman should be able to accompany her family's songs—is hardly atoned for by the long hours spent over plain-chant. With Joubert's 'educate for forty' in mind, compulsory choir and compulsory hockey would vanish together.

G.K.C., one remembers, described the school as thwarting a natural appetite for learning; and the edge the school has blunted life is unlikely to resharpen. There has been no enthusiasm, as Mr Newsom says, for service education. 'They've had it.' His *animaux économiques* have forgotten what they did enjoy in their class-rooms in the industrial interval between leaving school and marrying. Their growth is permanently stunted. They have little sense and no taste whatever. 'What we call "natural good taste" has almost ceased to exist, as the result of the increasing complexity of existence and the powerful forces, both financial and commercial, which have destroyed it for their own purposes. An immense number of ugly, inefficient and shoddy goods are purchased daily by tens of thousands of women, and . . . the effect of these purchases is to create an environment for living less conducive to civilised life than if such transactions had never occurred.' One may note in parentheses, that toiling to buy this synthetic rubbish is usually known as 'keeping up the standard of living'.

These brief notes, which are only designed to send new readers to two extremely interesting books, may well end with the two authors' own indications of the types they seek to produce.

Mr Hemming wants 'well-equipped democratic citizens, abundantly themselves; fully aware of their world; adjusted to twentieth century life; capable, flexible, self-assured; co-operative in attitude;

fearless in the face of life; sensitive to beauty and high ideals'. The ideals, one notes, come last; and no philosophic consideration is provided for them. While you are adjusting youth to the *zeitgeist*, a new panorama is rapidly unrolling outside the schoolroom window. All the 'flexibility' in the world will hardly suffice for the Protean transformations demanded of the perpetually up-to-date. Perhaps the atom bomb may send the rest of us gratefully back to Mr Hemming's 1850—or even further.

Mr Newsom, on the other hand, believes that the grace of God is the only indissoluble link between the teacher and the taught. His estimate of women, as they are, is extremely low. His view of women, as they are meant to be, is exalted.

'Women create men', he says, 'not only physically but spiritually'; and they alone can preserve 'the homes and the family and therefore what we call western civilisation. There is a need for a clearer realisation of the vital influence of women as women, of the fact which Rousseau was groping to express—and for which he received such obloquy—that women civilise men and thus preserve civilisation. . . . To work through others is not derogatory to human dignity, nor do the restrictions that Almighty God has imposed upon himself to work through mortals detract from his Majesty. This mission of women is a far greater one than can ever be fulfilled by attaining the minor political and professional successes which in the past generation they have imitatively adopted from men as a criterion of social influence, a tendency fostered by those who have failed to perform—not necessarily through any fault of their own—the essentially feminine function in society.'

For a man who believes that there is no educational philosophy worth mentioning nowadays, Mr Newsom has done well. At any rate, he has made more of his incomplete revelation than we have of our complete one.

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