

VICAR'S NOTES

"The Enemy is Boredom" — so says the Vicar of Colnbrook, a parish about 8 miles from here, and his book of this title, published a week ago, is already arousing much interest and discussion.

Things had got so bad in Colnbrook, as far as attendance at church was concerned, that on Palm Sunday, 1962, the congregation at 11 o'clock Matins consisted of only one sixteen-year-old lad. A year later, after months of hard work and careful planning, there were over 130 people present at the 9.30 a.m. Family Service and Communion which had replaced Matins.

Well, are we not attempting to do something like this here? Yes, we are — but after a quick survey of Guy Daniel's book, I am wondering whether our planning is anywhere near being thorough enough, and whether we have given ourselves anything like enough time.

Of course, as they found at Colnbrook, even the best plans may have to be altered in the light of experience, but there simply must be plans covering everything right from the start, even if many details later have to be changed.

They now have a state of things on Sunday in Colnbrook where boredom has been triumphantly overcome, and a service introduced which is inspiring and meaningful to young and old alike. This month we are thinking especially about the young, and an article on a later page considers some of the problems which have to be faced. This was written without any knowledge of the Colnbrook plans. What they did there was to provide a creche for the under-fives, with a method of unobtrusively informing their parents in church if they were needed. This was plentifully provided with toys, and a strong team of helpers formed. A great deal of care was given to the 5-12 age group. Those children already coming to church were made familiar with the music to be used over a period of three months. Then when the service was introduced, the first half-hour was adapted specially to hold the interest of the children. They then went out before the sermon, and the original intention was that they should sit quietly round and be read to. This however did not work out in practice. They desired to play games and run races, and equipment for all this was provided, and also a monthly film laid on. So the children have a very enjoyable Sunday morning, both in church and afterwards. Guy Daniel says: "It will be seen from all this that no attempt is made to 'instruct' the children during the time that they are withdrawn. My reason for not doing this is basically due to the feeling that such instruction unless superbly well given (and how many people can do that?) does a very great deal of harm to the Church's 'image' among children. Far too many children grow up bored stiff with all that goes on in and around church on a Sunday. It is in my view far better to send them home having thoroughly enjoyed themselves and wanting to come again."

We could quote other people, of course, who do not take such a pessimistic view of the Sunday School, and certainly here we have been fortunate in having devoted and able teachers who can make instruction

very interesting for young people. Parents have often told me how much their children enjoy what we do here, and look forward to coming. But it is not at all easy to find teachers like this, and in some parishes they are presumably non-existent.

While at Coventry I read a large notice which laid out in detail what they do about children there. It is similar to the plan at Colnbrook, but the 4-14 age group, instead of having fun and games, have graded instruction in classes. At St. Alban's Cathedral, they do things the other way round: the children are in classes for the first half-hour, and join their parents after the sermon. This was the idea we had thought it might be good to try here, but the Colnbrook school would say that this is the most difficult part of the service for children to understand, and how can they be kept from the enemy's clutches? Yet in some churches, children stay all the way through, and even go on to Sunday School afterwards. What about the enemy then?

Though we are far from the plight of Colnbrook in 1962, we must not be complacent, because many people, rightly or wrongly, do undoubtedly associate the Church and its services with boredom, and we want to make worship a deeply meaningful, moving and enjoyable experience for them.

A great opportunity for worship and fellowship this month is the occasion of our **Patronal Festival**. At Evensong on the Sunday we hope to have with us a great spiritual leader in the Church of England to-day, the Dean of Westminster. My wife and I first knew him years ago, when he was chaplain of King's College, and he has always meant a great deal to us. Those of you who met him on the parish visit to the Abbey in March will have realised something of the outstanding personality he is, wise, strong, loving, humorous, filled with the Spirit. Unfortunately last summer he had a severe illness, from which he has not yet fully recovered, and so far it has not been considered advisable for him to take on any duties outside the Abbey. But I know that he very much wants to come to us if at all possible.

After Evensong, we hope that you will all come to the Vicarage garden (the Hall if wet). We can cater for a very large number — if we know in good time how many to expect: so please return the loose slip enclosed.

VISIT TO COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

This outing arranged by the Social Committee was on Saturday, May 23. The party numbering 41 set off by coach from the Church a few minutes after 8 a.m. The weather was not too promising at first but very quickly cleared and we were soon cruising along the M.1 in brilliant sunshine. A stop was made at the Blue Boar, Nr. Daventry (one of the modern service stations on the M.1.) for refreshments.

We arrived in the car park adjacent to the Cathedral at 11 a.m. Having made such excellent time it was agreed we should embark for the return journey at 3.30 p.m. to enable us to have more time for the return trip by a different and more picturesque route.

Arriving at the porch of the Cathedral you are confronted by the "West" wall which is of clear glass so that you can immediately see the interior. This glass screen is engraved with figures representing prophets, apostles, saints, etc. It is worth noting that the Cathedral is built with the altar at the geographical North end, thereby differing from the customary situation of the altar at the East end — notwithstanding this, tradition is maintained by referring to the altar end as the "East end."

One first comes on the left to the Chapel of Unity and this belongs to all christians of Coventry, regardless of denomination. The windows here were a gift from the West German Republic. Going further along the "North" aisle we discover the nave windows at intervals on both sides of the Cathedral, stained glass from floor to ceiling, fitted in angled recesses all directed towards the altar — each pair of windows is coloured to portray a stage in life — only when one reaches the altar does one see the whole cycle, therefore en route one cannot see the future but only look back on the past.

Above the choir stalls and the Bishop's Throne are canopies of "thorns." We now pass underneath half of the organ, the other half being sited on the "South" side. The free standing altar is exceedingly simple in design, being in the form of a flat concrete slab, which has been processed giving the appearance of granite. The High Altar cross is made of gilded silver and is suggestive of the charred wooden cross made from the beams of the old Cathedral, which stands on the altar of the ruins (which is at present on exhibition in America and only a copy is in the remains of the old Cathedral).

Hanging down the full length of the "East" wall is the famous and controversial tapestry, 79 ft. high and 38 ft. wide. At first sight it is difficult to believe that it is not a painting such is the fineness of the weave — it was woven in France and the magnitude of the work is apparent from the fact that it contains seventy million stitches, or twelve to the inch.

As we go toward the "South" aisle, on our left is the little chapel of Christ in Gethsemane. Looking through a bronze screen shaped as a crown of thorns, we see an angel holding a chalice bathed in bright light — to the right of the angel are the sleeping disciples. Then there is the chapel of Christ the Servant which depicts the link between the Church and Industry.

Returning down the "South" aisle, we pass under the other half of the organ to the Baptistry — this features the great window which is made up of wonderfully coloured glass symbolising the power of God midst the conflicts of mankind. The Font could not be more simple, being a rough boulder brought from the hills of Bethlehem.

Leaving the Cathedral to the left we descend St. Michael's steps where we see the statue of St. Michael overcoming the Devil, by Epstein.

This great edifice bears no resemblance to the ancient and ornate cathedrals to which we are accustomed, the architecture and internal decor though simple bear witness to the care and forethought which the designers exercised in the formation of their ideas. I wonder how many people find difficulty at first in accepting the new as compared with the old? The contrast sets up a conflict of thought, but on full reflection I feel the new is no less worthy.

Promptly at 3.30 p.m. we set off for home and what a lovely ride it proved to be. Through the ancient town of Warwick with an hour's stop at Stratford-on-Avon — here two of our elegant young ladies were missing when the party "embussed" but were happily soon located purchasing ice cream. The route now took us through the lovely countryside of the Cotswolds, and Oxfordshire — a little before 10 p.m. we were home again and we had all enjoyed a wonderful day and experience. I am sure I express the sentiments of all in saying thank you to the organisers, the driver of the coach (who did a wonderful job) and Bill Robinson who so ably stage-managed the trip.

R.W.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

The new Family Service starts on September 20: the first major change in a hundred years of the church's history. This is an altogether welcome change, but it creates this problem (among others): What is to happen to the morning Sunday Schools? At the moment, the answer to this is that they will be held at 11 a.m. after the service. But the service is intended to include the children, if not for the whole, at least for the last part of the service. All the children should be there to kneel at the altar with their families and receive the blessing. Do we need a creche for the toddlers? Should the infant school children be withdrawn for part of the service? At what age should they be able to stay the whole time? If we had more premises it might be better to withdraw the children for a time for Sunday School teaching. The questions lead us inevitably to the basic one: What are Sunday Schools for?

"My children spent only five weeks at Sunday School and I am glad to say that it had little or no effect on them," said the wife of the Bishop of Woolwich recently on television. I find this a somewhat depressing remark since I spend a part of each week preparing for the kindergarten Sunday School. Fortunately I had read Mrs. Robinson's contribution to the "Honest to God Debate" and remembered that behind this remark was her view that Sunday Schools are run by unqualified teachers, with out-of-date methods in inadequate buildings: therefore the Sunday School compares unfavourably with the day school the children know; and anyhow, the proper people to teach religion to a child are its parents. With this last point, of course, I completely agree. All children, especially young ones, learn mainly by imitation and they will imitate most the people they see most of and from these, consciously and unconsciously, they will take their standards.

However, the comparison with day schools is completely beside the point, or at least beside the point for St. James's Sunday School. We know that Gospel stories are well taught at our local schools; we try to give basic Church teaching — this is not **allowed** to be taught in local schools — and, far more important, to give the children an opportunity to worship and pray together in a way they can understand. This is doing something important together, something which we hope will be a foundation for a life-time's practice.

Admittedly, this experience could best come in a service that is for the whole family and this is one of the objects of the new Family Service. But while we are encumbered with a 17th century liturgy which still contains — however beautifully expressed — some medieval and outdated theology, this is not a perfect solution. (There are hopeful signs that before long we shall be able to use a revised form of the liturgy — Ed.).

What, then, is the answer for the children, next generation churchmen? The Sunday School teachers and the Church Council would very much like to know the views of parents. C.H.B.

THE YOUNG WIVES' GROUP

The speaker at our May meeting was Mr. T. C. Hughes, Headmaster of Hampton Hill School. The Junior or Primary School seems to be somewhat of the Cinderella of the educational system today. We hear much of the Infant School and the modern ways of teaching, reading, etc., also of the secondary schools, be they grammar, modern or comprehensive, but the primary schools work on, often unheralded and unsung, although many people think the years spent at these schools are probably the most important in a child's school-life. Mr. Hughes gave us an extremely interesting history of primary schools, taking us back to the 1880's when many children left school at eleven years old to go to work. The Church pioneered better schools, and soon these ideas were accepted and adopted in Council Schools. Prior to 1903 about 18% of the men and 25% of the women in this country were illiterate. 1926 brought many improvements in education, and the war cut down the size of classes in highly populated areas owing to the evacuation of children to the country. In the post-war building programme primary schools did not keep pace with secondary schools and the classes have become larger and larger. Mr. Hughes went on to tell us of the club activity and school visits to places of interest which are encouraged to-day, and, in due course, the inevitable question of 11-plus selection was put, a very clear, concise and satisfactory answer being given by our speaker.

I am sorry to report that we are once again losing Betty Harrison's services on our committee after only one year, but this time she is leaving us for good as she and her husband are moving back to their home county. We wish them a happy resettlement and thank Betty for the help she has given us.

Mabel Anthony, of Ringwood Way, has been co-opted to the Committee to replace Betty, and we are pleased to welcome her.

Our Baptismal Party was, once more, favoured with warm, sunny weather, and about twenty mothers of recently baptised babies came along to take tea with the committee and other members. I also had several requests from young mothers who came last year and enjoyed it so much that they were eager to come again. It was nice to see them and to note how much their babies had grown since last year. To those who were invited but were unable to come, we extend an invitation to come along to our monthly meetings and meet those other young mothers they were unable to meet on this occasion.

At the time of going to press the form of our July meeting has not been arranged, but come along on July 29 to Wayside at 8 p.m., and find out for yourself.

M.S.

SOME DATES TO NOTE

- July 1.—2.30 p.m. Mothers' Union: Service in church followed by tea at Wayside.
- .. 2-4.—Flower Festival at St. Mary's, Hayes.
- .. 5.—Sixth Sunday after Trinity: Holy Communion at 8.0 a.m. and 12.15 p.m.; Sunday Schools 9.45 a.m.; Matins 11.0 a.m.; Evensong 6.30 p.m.
- .. 6.—8.15 p.m. Centenary Committee (30, St. James's Road).
- .. 7.—10.00 a.m. Editorial Board (52, Park Road); 8.15 p.m. Sunday School Teachers' Meeting (Vicarage).
- .. 9.—8.0 p.m. Youth Club Management Committee (W).
- .. 10.—Hampton Council of Churches: School-Leavers' Conference, 10.00 a.m. — 4.30 p.m., in the Methodist Church Hall, Hampton.
- .. 12.—Seventh Sunday after Trinity: Holy Communion at 8.0 and 9.0 a.m.; Sunday Schools 9.45 a.m.; Matins 11.0 a.m.; Evensong 6.30 p.m.
- .. 13.—Hampton Council of Churches: United Prayer and Discussion Group (All Saints', Hampton).
- .. 19.—Eighth Sunday after Trinity: Holy Communion at 8.0 a.m. and 12.15 p.m.; Sunday Schools 9.45 a.m.; Matins 11.0 a.m.; Evensong 6.30 p.m.
- .. 20.—8.0 p.m. Hampton Council of Churches: Quarterly Meeting (All Saints', Hampton).
- .. 25-26.—PATRONAL FESTIVAL:
- .. 25.—St. James's Day: Holy Communion at 9.0 a.m.
- .. 26.—Sunday after St. James's Day: Holy Communion at 8.0 and 9.0 a.m.; Matins (Family Service) 11.0 a.m.; Holy Baptism 4.0 p.m.; Evensong (Preacher: The Dean of Westminster) 6.30 p.m., followed by "At Home" in the Vicarage Garden.
- .. 29.—8.0 p.m. Young Wives' Group (W).