

source of all the stories repeated by witnesses at the process about Bridget's effulgence and levitation derive from one man, the witness Brother John of Pornaccio, the 'spiritual' from Todi. And every here and there we come upon a phrase in this book which does show Bridget to us as she really is, 'a voice, quiet and strong, stern and gentle, saying: "Oh, thou sinful being, turn back, for thou art walking in peril, and because thy heart is dark thou seest not the dangers of the road".'



AN EDUCATIONAL CENTENARY

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ON August 1st, 1855, when the riots which had greeted the restoration of the Hierarchy in England were still a lively memory, a middle-class boarding school for boys was opened at Netherton House, Clapham. The needs of its four pupils were catered for by a Community of nine Religious, three of whom were already teaching in the primary school attached to the Redemptorist church. All nine of them were French, Brothers of the Christian Schools, an Institute founded by St John Baptist de La Salle in the seventeenth century and now making its first English foundation. The renting of the house on Lady Day seemed to augur well for the future of this initiative in the land that had once been Mary's Dowry. And so it proved. In May this year, 1955, some 250 Brothers and nearly 7,000 pupils in thirty-one educational establishments in England and Scotland, not to mention innumerable past pupils, relations and friends will be celebrating the centenary of that event. In Malta, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya and China, Brothers from England are at work, while an even larger Irish Province which has sent its members to these parts and to South Africa and Australia as well, is also the fruit of this same humble beginning. Such has been the mustard growth of one seed sown in the hey-day of England's Second Spring.

St John Baptist de La Salle (canonized in 1900 and proclaimed

Patron of Teachers in 1950), had been born when Cromwell was putting fresh vigour into the persecution of English—and still more of Irish Catholics. Having renounced the opportunities of social and ecclesiastical careerism which his noble birth opened out to him, he gave away his fortune and devoted himself to establishing a religious order for the education of the poorer classes. He soon enlarged his scope to include the middle class, realizing that their needs in this respect were hardly less acute, and his charity reached out even to the nobility when he provided schooling for the sons of the Irish gentry who had followed James II into exile at Saint Germain. When he died on Good Friday, April 7th, 1719, his Institute had spread to twenty-two different French towns as well as to Rome, though not without the opposition and reverses which usually greet the saints in their work for God and souls. Steady progress was maintained throughout the century and in 1789 there were 121 communities in France and six in other countries, but the *débâcle* of the Revolution swept away the former along with all the other religious Orders in France. Many of the Brothers were imprisoned and some martyred, one of whom, Brother Solomon, was beatified in 1926. Restored by a Decree of 1803, the Institute gradually recovered and adapted itself to the exigencies of the educational systems of nineteenth-century Liberalism. In 1838, with the appointment of Brother Philip as Superior General, it entered on a period of great achievement, and it was on the tide of his extension drive that the Brothers came to England in 1855.

With such a record behind them, and in a country in which voluntary effort in education had almost a free hand, they may have expected their course to be plain sailing. If so they were doomed to disappointment. 'Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone.' They came at a time when the State's kindly interest in voluntary education, as evinced in the grants for fully trained teachers, was soon to give place to its assumption of ultimate direction and control first of elementary education and later of secondary. Their progress was to be through set-backs, disappointments and apparent failure, and their story gives as it were a cross-section picture of the difficulties and struggles of the denominational schools under the 'Dual System'. But their achievement reflects that of the whole Catholic body in its struggle to defend 'the unity of "religious"

and "secular" education, clearly conceived, translated into action . . . and defended and extended at the cost of any sacrifice'.¹ That is why this year's centenary offers occasion for a more than merely domestic celebration and thanksgiving.

This is not the place to give even in outline the life and work of St John Baptist de La Salle or the progress of his Institute in this country. That has been admirably done in a series of books by one of his sons whose literary and academic distinctions are an excellent advertisement for the educational ideals which he represents.² But it may perhaps be of interest to dwell for a moment on one or two aspects of that ideal which received special mention in a Brief issued by the Holy Father in 1954 on the subject of the mission of the Institutes of Teaching Brothers.³

At the time of the International Health Exhibition at Kensington, in 1884, the contribution of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to the educational section came in for a good deal of admiration and publicity, earning for them tributes in many secular publications. In one of these, the *Journal of Education*, the writer concluded: 'The Brothers, from their Founder downwards, have adopted their calling, not to make money or to get promotion to fat livings . . . but from pure love of the work. Teaching to them is not a trade but a profession, or rather a vocation.'⁴ The problem of career, i.e. means of livelihood, versus 'vocation' in the narrow sense of religious vocation, is not unknown among the difficulties which beset Catholic education. But in the wider sense of the word the formation and instruction of youth is a vocation of the highest importance both to the Church and to civil society; and unless it is approached in the spirit of dedication and unselfish zeal (of which a perverted form appears in totalitarian states), it is unlikely to achieve its real purpose.

In all the Church's teaching Orders, the work of education becomes the material of that complete consecration and dedication to God in which religious profession consists. But this is especially apparent in an Institute of men such as the Brothers of the Christian Schools who, in the words of the Holy Father,

¹ A. C. F. Beales in his Introduction to *The De La Salle Brothers in Great Britain*, by W. J. Battersby, PH.D., Burns & Oates, 1954.

² *De La Salle: Pioneer of Modern Education; De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer; De La Salle: Letters and Documents; De La Salle: Meditations* (Longmans), and *Brother Potamian, Educator and Scientist* (Burns & Oates), by W. J. Battersby.

³ Apostolic Brief dated March 31st, 1954.

⁴ *Journal of Education*, July 1884.

'by a special divine vocation, renounce the priestly dignity and the consolations that are derived therefrom', so as to devote all the energy of their consecrated lives to the work of the education of youth. They are not 'spoiled priests', nor would they be better educators if they were priests as well, nor more useful to the Church if they were priests instead of educators. St de La Salle was himself a priest, yet he insisted that all the members of his Institute should be explicitly debarred from aspiring to the priesthood. To remove possible sources of temptation they were even forbidden to read or to teach Latin (a prohibition only removed from the Rule by the personal intervention of Pius XI in 1923), or to take anything that might be interpreted as a clerical part in ecclesiastical functions.

Yet the Brothers are far from being anti-clerical. The Holy Father mentions with pleasure the 'powerful aid' brought to the Church by the number of clerical and religious vocations from the Brothers' schools and the Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers comments: 'Let us not forget that the blossoming of clerical and religious vocations in a Christian school is the unequivocal sign that it is a garden of the Lord, as it ought to be, a garden where it is quite normal to see the development of the calls which Divine Providence makes to generous souls'.⁵ Does this criterion of the success of a Catholic school always receive such priority? The Brothers of the Christian Schools, at least, pass the test with flying colours. In England at the present day they count among their Old Boys one Bishop (Bishop Siedle, W.F.), 385 priests and 145 seminarians; while for the Institute as a whole the grand total of major clerics alone is: 14 Cardinals, 33 Archbishops, 126 Bishops and eight Superiors General of other Religious Congregations.

But if the Brothers aim primarily at turning their pupils into good and even perfect Christians, they are not for all that out-of-date or 'other-worldly' where secular education is concerned. Quite the contrary. As their Founder was in the van of educational development in his day, a pioneer in such matters as the direct method of teaching in the vernacular and in the establishment of training colleges for teachers and of industrial schools for delinquents, so the Brothers in England have been in the forefront of the development of Catholic education during the past one

⁵ *Administrative Circular*, No. 344, p. 24.

hundred years, always ready to step into the breach when some new initiative was called for. They have concentrated on middle-class and special schools because here the need was greatest, and today they direct eleven grammar schools, two secondary modern schools, and ten Home Office Approved Schools, as well as one of the country's two Catholic Training Colleges for men. As the crowning glory of their contribution to the civic life of the country they can count among their alumni a Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Dunn, a Mayor of Westminster, Sir John Gatti, and a Chairman of the London County Council, Sir John Gilbert. But the Brothers are surely no less proud of a tribute paid in the name of the Home Secretary to one of their members who had devoted his life to the work in Approved Schools: 'It is impossible to overestimate the value of that form of service to society which lies in reclaiming boys from a course of conduct that leads to crime'.⁶

The domestic centre of the centenary celebrations will be St Joseph's College, Beulah Hill, the lineal successor of Netherton House. But the high-light will be the Solemn High Mass in Westminster Cathedral, sung by Bishop Siedle with the Cardinal presiding, and in the presence of the Apostolic Delegate, a number of bishops, and Her Majesty's Minister of Education, on May 24th. In such a gathering for such an act, may we not see the symbol and source of past achievement and a confident pledge of future success? *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam. Ad multos annos!*



THE PARISH VISITORS OF MARY IMMACULATE

A. J. REILLY

ONE of the marks of the living Church is its ability to inspire leaders in every age especially fitted to meet the needs of the age. Never has there been a time when the spiritual soil was so infertile that it was unable to produce valiant

⁶ *The De La Salle Brothers in Great Britain*, p. 59.