

ST. JOHN BAPTIST

CHILDREN'S HOME

Newport, Mon.

REPORT

1935

St. John Baptist Children's Home Newport, Mon

It is some years since any occasional paper giving news of the Home has been published. and we owe it to those friends who still give us their help in various ways let them know how the work progresses. They will forgive us, if, for the sake of newer friends, or of friends to be, we repeat ourselves and make a short survey of the history of the Home from its beginning, now some fifty years ago.

The Community of St John Baptist began Mission work on Newport at the request of Mr Mitchell and other devoted laymen. His wife, whose delightful stories some of us remember in our childhood, wrote the first occasional paper in 1881. This describe the purpose of the Home then just started as outcome of the Mission Work. To many at that time it was a shock to realise that a 'Refuge' for children under eleven could be needed, but such was actually the case. The need was so urgent that for a time, children were received into the Mission House itself. Soon, however, a larger house was procured and, with roomier quarters. the numbers increased - not now of children from the town itself, a' such cases proved to be better provided for at a distance, but with others just as deserving from further away.

In 1907, this second house was finally vacated for the beautiful Home, in which, as the fruit of many prayers and much begging, had been built close to the new Church of St. John the Baptist.

The situation at the top of a hill with lovely views from the windows and a few minutes walk from real country, has proved ideal, and the fairly long walk twice a day to school is an unmixed advantage, insuring as it does air and exercise in all weathers. The House is very large and roomy with beautiful dormitories, capable of holding about fifty beds.

The character of the work has not changed since its initiation, except that now we are able to have children whose home-surroundings expose them to serious risk as well as those who have actually fallen into bad hands. At the moment of writing we have forty-one children and girls, several of whom are taken quite free. We take children from five (the school going age) up to twelve and keep them in order to give them as good a training as possible in the house, laundry and kitchen, until the age of sixteen, seventeen, or even eighteen, when they go out to service. At one time it was possible to make a fair income by taking in laundry work, but this was in the days when we had larger numbers and could make full use of the beautiful laundry which has been the admiration of successive factory inspectors. With our present numbers we can only manage the washing for the house, that and the house work and kitchen, gives the girls sufficient occupation, as we cannot let Jill become a dull girl by giving her only work and no play! So play she has, which includes net-ball in the Quadrangle and expeditions into the country. There has been one glorious expedition to the Wye Valley besides various lesser picnics. A change of work in the shape of Red-Cross lectures provides a particularly useful form of recreation.

Within the last few months, a large addition to our family has been made in the shape of 12 children from St Margaret's Home, Roath,

which the East Grinstead Sisters have been obliged to give up. They bring with them a very good tradition and have settled down happily in their new surroundings.

Early in the year we were asked to take two children from the neighbourhood of Bristol, whose mother had died leaving her family of little girls and one boy to the care of a drunken father. By dint of much persuasion he was induced to send Joan and Jean to us, Jean's first letter to her father ran thus-"This Home is a real Home," which we hope is meant as a compliment! In any case they seem more than content with their surroundings, though Jean, aged eight, firmly announced at the start, that she intended running away. Now they have been joined by the other two sisters, for whom we receive no payment. About six months ago we took in, just before her fifth birthday, Edna, who is the youngest but one of a family left motherless in very tragic circumstances - with a father out of work. She came to us looking like a little old woman. skinny, bow-legged, squinting and dour and given to much squealing. In this short time she seems to have experienced an entire conversion, the little legs are quite straight, she has plenty of flesh on her bones (put on at the rate of 1 lb. a week for 8 weeks), has been entirely detached from the perambulator which used to take her backwards and forward to school and the squint is far less sinister. The present anxiety regarding her is, lest she should be completely spoiled by the attentions showered on her by the staff of the school, where she is in the proud position of being the youngest baby. This position she will have to relinquish when a younger five year old comes next week!

It is very encouraging to find that at School our children bear, as a rule, an excellent character and do really well, even entering from time to time for Scholarships. One child who left school in the Summer and who held the post there of Head Prefect, is still regretted by the Staff, who pronounce her discipline and influence to have been as good as that of a 'Grown-up!

One little person lately explained that she and four others were in the Scholarship Class and that she 'did so hope they would do well, so that the Home should have a good name!'"

There is a very healthy feeling of 'esprit de corps' among them and that 'noblesse oblige' should be an acknowledged principle is a matter for great thankfulness and even wonder when the histories of the individual children are remembered.

After school leaving age, the training for service begins and the girls have rather unusual experience and practice in that they have to wait upon and housemaid the St. John's school boarder, who live in the house adjoining and communicating with the Home. This is better and more practical training for them than they would get if there were only Sisters to be worked for.

The Holidays bring a visit either at Easter or in the Summer to the sea. At Marcross, on the Glamorganshire coast, we have a large furnished cottage where we are able to send all the children and girl in batches for a holiday. It stands at the top of a beautiful flower-filled wooded coombe about five minutes walk from the sea. If weather permits, and it usually does, the children are out practically from morning until night (having meals on the beach or on the verandah) and came back looking as one would expect after such a holiday.

Our friends could help us, perhaps by making known the existence of the house and the fact that we are glad to let it, with its seven bedrooms two large enough for dormitories) and three sitting room, at a very moderate rent for any length of time when not in use for the Home Children, A reading party, small Summer School, Guide or Ranger Camp, or large family, would find it very suitable quarters. The Sister Superior would gladly supply any further information

about it. The transporting there of our large family in instalments, means a good deal of money, which though it is well expended is hard to come by these days and to let the House would greatly help in the matter.

Financially, this has been a very difficult year, as the Balance Sheet, If out of time for publication, will show. The outside of this very large house had to be done' up and this involved an outlay of over £100. The kitchen boiler burst just on the eve of our Associates Retreat and necessary extensions of the heating' and hot water apparatus have involved much expense, But there are many ways in which help can be and has been given, among these gifts in kind, For many such in the past year we have cause to be very grateful. One kind friend sends us yearly a delightfully chosen outfit for a girl going to Service. A Parish in the Wye Valley sent us over 600 eggs as the result of an Egg Service in Lent and a few weeks ago the Priest of the same parish, brought us the offerings from the Harvest Festival. The passage was full of sacks of apples and pears, vegetables of all kinds and prize pumpkins and marrows which form the staple of much of our jam for the coming year. Many other generous gifts of fruit and vegetables have been received and for several months a daily supply of milk lessened our dairy bill, And we cannot be grateful enough to our good doctor and dentist, both of whom give their professional services free.

The Annual Sale (the next will take place in the Autumn), is one of our main means of making money, and this year it is very important that we should do well. As there are stalls of all kinds, contributions of any sort are welcome. The Sisters, for their stall for Christmas presents, would be especially glad of help, as there is little time for making things. Orders for home made sweets we are always glad to have and those who give them are invariably satisfied; jams marmalade, chutneys and pickles made at the Mission House are also very popular, to say nothing of Christmas Pudding and mince meat.

Subscriptions, however small, are perhaps the greatest help. The subscription list is dwindling; old friends have died or are unable to give as much as they used and we do badly need new ones.

'Lets' for Marcross is another way in which we hope for help and if the house and its beautiful surroundings were better known we should I am sure have no difficulty in letting it all through the Spring and Summer' until quite late Autumn.

And please don't think we have given up wanting old clothes and 'Jumble'; for us 'Jumble' spells something towards much needed money and people would be surprised to find how adaptable grown up outworn garments are to mall folk. One other need is a disused typewriter. This would be a great boon. Especially if it were a 'Yost'.

The Chapel has for many years now been used by our Associates and other for an Annual Retreat. It may be that some of those who have used it may like to know that we are now trying to make various improvements in it as it has never seemed to us worthy of the rest of the building. Any little help in special donation for this purpose would be most gratefully accepted.

During this Summer, just before St. John Baptist Day, four children were Confirmed and made their First Communion on Feast itself and two others have lately been baptised. On the Spiritual side, of which it is not easy to write, lies the greatest interest of the work, and there is cause for intense thankfulness in much that has happened, especially when we remember the very unpromising material with which we have to deal.

There are great difficulties to contend with owing to the kind of atmosphere which surrounds children in a Day-School. where within the last few months, even the daily prayers in the Assembly Hall have been stopped. Many of the teachers are personally religious and

certainly do care for their pupils, but no definite religious teaching is given. So we ask most earnestly for the prayers of those interested in children and young people, and more particularly of those who have a special place in their affections for this Home and the work it is trying to do.



