

GROWING PAINS • N.J.T.

THE MOST ENCOURAGING feature of *Adolescent Problems: Their Nature and Understanding* is that this symposium is the joint work of six authors from different professions. Dr. Ogden, representing the Prison Service, combines with a psychiatrist from a Child Guidance Clinic, a doctor from a Mental Hospital, a probation officer, a minister and a Health Service officer in a University, to analyse the teenager in his different settings. It is worth 12s. 6d. to find that the Prison Service has not only been prepared to discuss its problems on a common basis with others, but that it has been accepted as having a contribution to make to the discussion.*

That the labour was more rewarding than the child matters little. After all, the flight from the state of dependence in the parental nest to independence in the wide world has never been easy, and goodness knows how much has been written about it in the last few years. It is disappointing to read some of the hoary old clichés backed with so little evidence—widespread lowering of moral standards, increased delinquency from mother's going out to work and father's loss of influence in the family (did father ever really rule the roost?). Nevertheless the book shows genuine paternal concern, tinged with perplexity, for the young.

Top of my pops is the probation officer. The problems she faces "when dealing with adolescence are the normal problems of adolescence, only to a more marked degree." Her probationers are "human beings in distress, adolescents with personal problems which cry aloud for solution. . . . They will for some time try us out, try to shock us, but if they keep coming and *do not reject us*, there is some hope that we can help them through the period when they have to find out for themselves by trial and error." Borstal and Detention Centre officers please note.

The adult-youth struggle is highlighted in each setting. The borstal boy veers between dependence on staff, and testing them out by misbehaviour or absconding. The 14-year-old girl in the clinic challenges the psychiatrist about why she should be in at 11.0 p.m. The undergraduate complains of financial restrictions and petty regulations and cannot see how university education fits into the social context of his life. The young man is faced with the choice between Church and sex and gives up the former because "you cannot prove that God exists." Mental Hospitals admit so few adolescents, not because there are few in need of treatment, but because such youngsters have a disturbing effect on the older patients.

*Published by Hodder & Stoughton.

This accepting-rejecting conflict is basic. "The adolescent's primary urge is not so much to assert himself as to eradicate his conflicts." I wonder if this is true? If so, we ought to be doing something about it..

What? The answer given by the minister is that we should fill the gap which is caused by the fact that the adolescent so often meets no one who is able to discuss intimately his ideas with him. In all matters, including sex, adults must be prepared to answer questions; even initiate discussion and present values which can be the standard against which the youngster can measure his behaviour. Our penal institutions provide us with an opportunity we often evade.

The reason for this evasion, says Dr. Nigel Walker in *Adolescent Maladjustment*, is that adults are too divided to provide a realistic guidance. Faced with no clear sexual code and so little assistance, adolescents make surprisingly few mistakes.

Dr. Walker's booklet, which is the eleventh Charles Russell Memorial Lecture, (1s.6d.) presents a complete contrast to the previous book. As one would expect from the Reader in Criminology at Oxford, he presents facts and figures. Here are no unsupported clichés. There is more drunkenness among adolescents—but also among all other age groups. Illegitimacy is increasing in the last few years, but is still not as frequent as in 1938. Suicide and psychoneurotic illness

are on the increase, but mainly among older people.

Dr. Walker seeks to distinguish between what is pathological behaviour and what is part of the normal process of maturing, between what is maladjustment and what is mere adventurousness or the result of often justified boredom at school. This should be read by anyone who has to talk on teenage crime.

Perhaps the key to the adolescent problem is in the third book, *The Challenge of Middle Age* by J. H. Wallis (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 12s.6d.). As Training Officer of the National Marriage Guidance Council, Mr. Wallis has met many parents who appear to be having difficulty with their children but are in fact having trouble with themselves.

As the children reach adolescence, the parents are facing a loss of physical attractiveness, receding hair, middle-age spread, back-ache or the approach of the menopause. Responsibilities at work are increasing; possibly the growing independence of the children leaves the mother more time on her hands than she wishes; the cosy glow of marriage is lukewarm. Yet this is the time when the children are buying new clothes, making dates, spending freely and exercising a freedom which the parents cannot remember having enjoyed themselves.

Perhaps most of the writers on adolescence are middle-agers anyway. And perhaps they're jealous.