

What is a Mum? asks a famous advertisement

Our Contributor, seeking to describe what some people would say was a Father-figure, asks . . .

What is a Housemaster?

B. A. M.

A HOUSEMASTER—make no bones about it—is a mad saint, a father confessor and Aunt Sally all wrapped in one. You can see him blue with cold on the playing fields if not of Eton of equally celebrated institutions any week-end. If you should ask why he should be blue with cold, the answer must lie in the fact that Housemasters are sensitive people, and while they themselves would be content to be wrapped in sheepskin coats, mittens and woollen balaclavas, they are not unaware of the meaning of the ribald comments which would arise from their charges if they dared to be so attired. If the Housemaster himself should be playing he will have a black eye and sundry other bruises—but he will keep quiet about that too.

His role is a difficult one for he is everything and nothing. His progress is a study in itself. As a novice saint your new Housemaster will be hopeful and full of human warmth. He will advise his Governor concerning the correct approach to training and will be duly advised in turn what to do with his correct approach. In his early days he will

find himself subject to numerous invitations to go on camping or canoeing courses, or to take charge of Youth Hostelling, and to be sure to make a good job of it at the Hostel.

Our novice will become frustrated dealing perpetually with difficult, not to say impossible people. His job is the care of souls, and no one will have told him how. He will turn to the literature and find that delinquents are mostly mesomorphic but less often ectomorphic* and from the sociologist learn of the norms of subcultural differentiation, and he will wonder how this learning can help him to deal with encopresis.

He will develop a voice capable in one breath of quelling a riot and in the next beguiling the most aristocratic of the Board of Visitors. His world will revolve round a small number of questions endlessly repeated—"When do you think I'll get out then?" "Do you think I'll get it this time?" "When can I have a change of

*Apologies to SHELDON & ELEANOR GLUECK.

labour?" He will coax, cajole, scold, beguile and watch like a hawk. He will advise the Governor, and go round the parties in the morning, write abscond reports in the afternoon, be Jack of all trades in the evening, and then chase absconders into the early hours. He will hear so many lies that he will feel like a lie. He will learn to cope with any criticism, including that most devastating comment delivered *sotto voce* from one borstal boy to another on the Housemaster's approach "Look at the strength of this then?"

He will receive letters from lads long since left, and will feel like a God, but many times he will be so tired and dispirited he will feel like a whipped dog. He will be Father Christmas on Christmas Day, and grand inquisitor later. He will shrewdly assess visiting parents whilst chatting glibly to them

about the weather, and watching for the ten shilling note he knows they are going to leave for their little Willie. He will learn to tell them when Willie is likely to be out without actually telling them, and he will watch the car that they intend to take him off in anyway.

He will learn to appear supremely composed under all circumstances and this will be difficult, because at the same time he will learn to suspect everybody of everything. Emotionally he will become very, very self-contained, and he will develop a frantic sense of humour because he must. In fact he will become just a little bit mad, and because he cares, just a little bit saintly, and because he is these things he will begin to enjoy this far-flung, impossible and wonderful job, and he will be glad he joined.

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