

REVIEWS

THE PECKHAM EXPERIMENT : a study in the living structure of society.

By Innes H. Pearse, M.D., and Lucy H. Crocker, B.Sc. (Allen and Unwin ; 12s. 6d.)

This book is the third of a series of four books which record the experience and discoveries of the Pioneer Health Centre at Peckham. The two prior to this were entitled respectively 'The case for action' and 'Biologists in search of material.' The last of the series which is yet to appear is to be called 'Science, sanity and synthesis,' which will make public the principles on which the Peckham experiment was based. Most of these principles can be seen in action in the present study, which is what makes the book so instructive, not only to social workers and educationists, but also to students of social philosophy and psychology.

The following points for instance are insisted on as conclusions which have come to light in consequence of the Experiment, all of which are of significance to social workers. Education in the first place should not be divorced from the family as so often it is to-day. Again, there is too exaggerated a segregation of boys and girls by means of clubs and schools, and the raising of the school leaving age continues this segregation. Thirdly, they tell us that promiscuous intercourse and trial marriage and similar modern experiments are biologically dangerous. Also that the family is not supposed to be a closed-in society which shuts out the outer world. Another important observation is that family life can often be reformed in many of its essential disorders without any change in the economic wage of the father. The declining birth-rate, we are told, is largely caused not by selfishness or vice but by a barely conscious recognition—particularly by the woman—that the state of devitalisation which is already present in her whole attitude and conditions may be carried a stage further by pregnancy. A devitalised person tends naturally to move further and further away from any environment in which something new may confront him.

The observations just given have not been chosen at random. They are but some out of many which the Experiment shows. But these ones in particular are of significance to the student of social philosophy and psychology and also to the theologian. Their interest to the catholic theologian is particularly significant, for they give a biological justification for what we, as Catholics, hold on other grounds.

For example, the modern tendency in education is, at an ever earlier age, to supersede parental nurture by technical education. The Church has consistently opposed this tendency on the ground that it is inverting the natural order of things, since the primary duty in the education of children devolves on the parents. The

state is but the servant of the parent. The Peckham Experiment supports the traditional attitude of the Church for reasons less abstract and more proximate, namely that the family is the biological unit of society. But note the moderation of the thesis as proposed in the book: 'We do not suggest that the child should have only what the parents have to give him, but that all foreign substances and experiences should initially be tempered by the family mechanism. The implication of this is that the family should move in an ever widening circle of experience in which parents and child develop together' (p. 189).

The same points could be made about the other observations given here. Modern laxity in marriage ideals, promiscuous intercourse, trial marriage, etc., have been condemned by traditional theology and philosophy on the ground that they were against the natural law. Now the pioneers of the Peckham Experiment tell us that courtship is a process by which a man and a woman are learning step by step to function mutually as a unity. If this is so, they say, then biologically speaking such modern experiments are dangerous. This constant support of tradition in the name of biology is of considerable significance to-day and surely one of the greatest lessons the Experiment has to teach.

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LIFE TOGETHER. By Wingfield Hope. (Sheed and Ward; 6s.)

If we try to state the catholic theology of marriage to modern readers, especially the young, we have to remember that they will inevitably contrast it, consciously or unconsciously, with the romanticized passion of contemporary press and cinema. We have to show them the folly and unreality of romanticizing human relationships, yes; but we also have to try to show them the real greatness of human love as a greatness of which this commercialized glamour is in fact a thin and sickly counterfeit. This book has much that is admirable in it, sound sense and excellent advice; but one can too easily imagine the youthful reader turning with a sigh of relief to less worthy but more engaging treatments of similar themes. In the first place it is laborious reading: diffuse, repetitive, not lacking in clichés, sometimes arch and often plodding. You find sentences like: 'We must therefore at once ask ourselves: is a strong emotional attraction between bridegroom and bride necessarily out of place in the christian pattern?' The answer of course is an immediate no; but surely only a dead oyster would fail to resent the way the question is put. And in a book which sets out to describe the 'pattern' or ideal (even though it also deals, as it must, with the failures), are we to have physical love labelled 'the marriage debt?' Again, the treatment of sex is sound and useful as far as it goes but where is the emphasis on the central fact, which even naturally speaking makes sex in man essentially different from sex