

IN PARIS OR THEREABOUTS

By M. M. St. Agnes Hartung

whose educational articles from our schools in West Africa will be remembered by our readers

It is 8.30 a.m. in rue Perronet, Neuilly, about a quarter of a mile outside Paris.

We are in a district of tree-lined boulevards, old stately houses and up-to-the-minute apartment blocks. Children in grey uniform jump out of cars and breaks; others are seen on the pavements making their way to school here or between rue Borghèse and boulevard Victor Hugo.

Beginning Early

At 47 rue Perronet the garden is full of life. Little people of three and a half and upwards are hurrying towards the far door of the long, modern, pink-brick building on the right. By the north door, quite close to the street, grown-up students are entering. The children will soon

fill the large classrooms at the building's south end and be working at varied montessori-type apparatus or tackling individual problems in French, arithmetic or history. Very small members of **Kindergarten** are sure to be already telling Mother Mary Claudia their home news while they are taking off their coats and changing their shoes. Some of the eldest children (seven years old, perhaps already eight) can be seen at the windows, Forms VIII, IX, and X upstairs, where nature specimens and apparatus fill the broad sills.

Training College

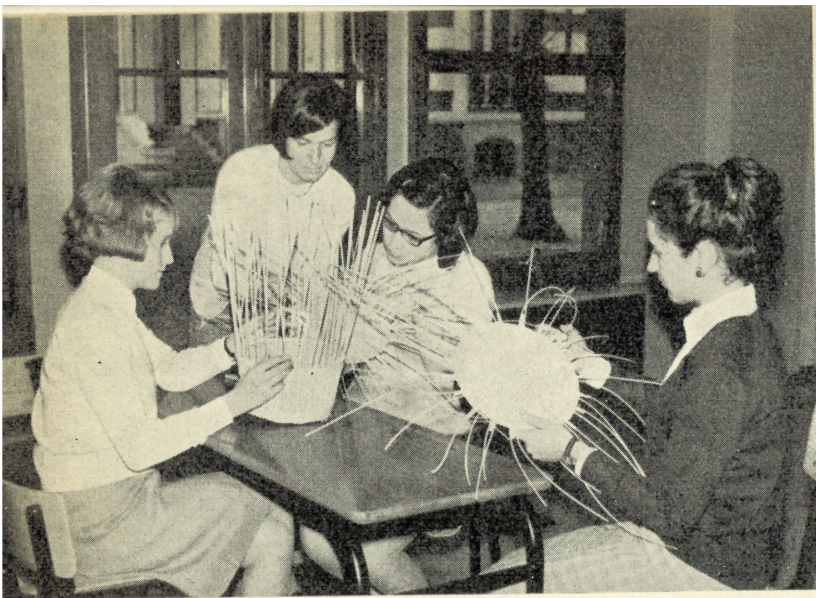
The students belong to the *École d'Éducatrices* which is under Père Faure of the Institut Catholique de

Who doesn't need relaxation after a Montessori problem?



'Entrez donc!'

Mademoiselle Bonneville teaches her students to be good craftswomen



Paris. They are doing a two year course which will qualify them to teach classes up to "Cinquième" (i.e. children up to twelve or thirteen years old), and all the mistresses of the junior classes were once of their number. Mother Marie St. Louis is walking in with one of them. She is their Vice-Principal, librarian and

lecturer, and is also a trusted friend and scholastic adviser.

You see another nun, whose habit you do not recognise: she has come all the way from Brazil to study educational methods and is going to observe class-work and to discuss teacher-training with Mlle Bonneville, the Principal of the College.

The making of teaching apparatus demands a lot of ingenuity and endless patience



S.H.C.J. Neuilly of the Past

Two of the students happen to be going over to the Senior School.

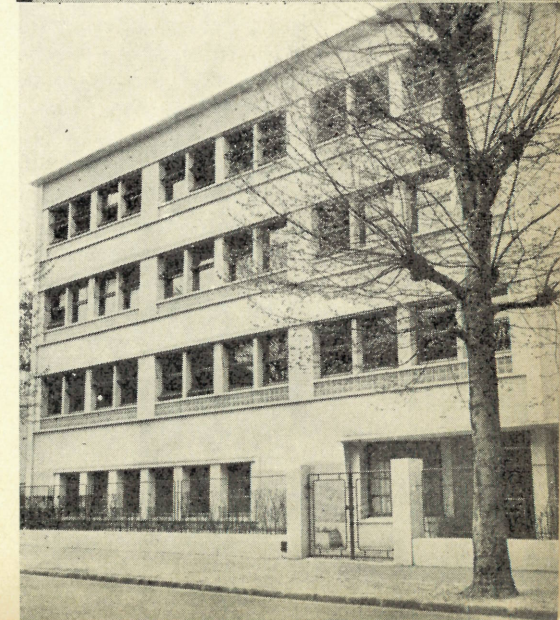
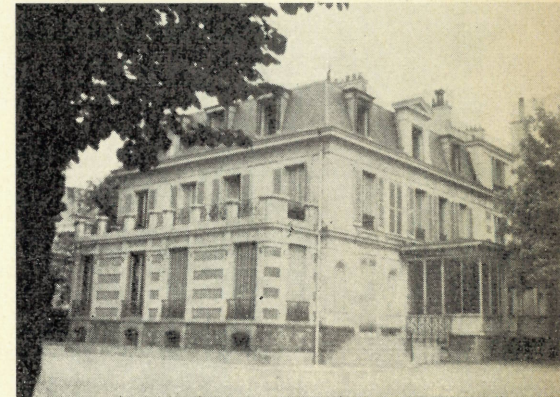
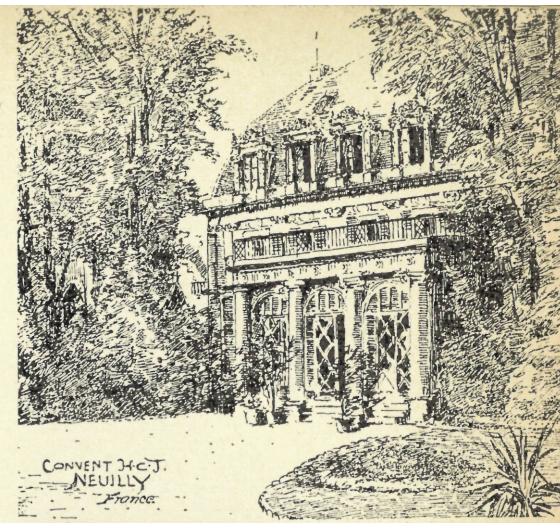
As you go, with them, one tells you that her mother was at "47" when it was a finishing school from 1923 to 1939. She can never forget the way Rev. Mother St. Maurice, Mother St. Teresa, Mother Marie Odile and the other nuns made it, not a "finishing" school but a wonderful beginning for adult life. Then there were the high lights of Mother Marie Osmonde's visits from Nigeria and the vision she opened up of the great work there. I think that girl could relive her mother's whole stay at "47" but my other companion cuts in: "Now it's my turn! Do you know my great-grandmother went to boul. de la Saussaye very soon after Mother Connelly bought it? That was a full-range French school but it always had a fair sprinkling of girls from Holy Child schools in England and America. They used to go into the class that suited their knowledge of French regardless of age and then were promoted to another class as soon as they could cope.

This school was closed, to the immense regret of so many loyal and devoted friends, when all religious had to leave France in 1904."

Three Neuilly Houses of the Holy Child

1. The "Petit Château" of the Duc d'Orléans in boul. de la Saussaye was Mother Cornelia Connelly's last foundation, December 1876.
1. 47 rue Perronet, 1923, gift of Madame la Duchesse de Maillé.
3. 90 boul. Victor Hugo, 1961.

THE PYLON





Above: Mother Marie Jehanne, Mistress of Studies. Right: Mother Marie Geneviève, Directrice, with two older members of Cours Holy Child.

(Pictures by courtesy of Madame Radkai and Madame Snozzi.)

I am just wondering whether this girl has heard anything about Mother Connelly's own visits. But here we are at boul. Victor Hugo in front of the new class-room block of the former Institut Barral, since 1961 the **Upper School of the Holy Child**. Mother Marie Geneviève, its *Directrice* or Headmistress, meets you and takes you in. She tells you that many of the children have come up from the Junior School at rue Perronet and that since last year the Senior classes are government approved and aided under the *Contrat d'État*.

The girls here, young and old,

have to study very hard as everywhere in France. But *chez le "Holy Child,"* where possible, as in the younger classes, methods are freer than is traditional in France. In fact, the whole trend of French educational reform is in this direction today.

As we go up the main staircase we notice on the walls attractive specimens of the children's work in drawing and painting; we pass spacious classrooms with children hard at work. We meet Mother Marie Marthe as she leaves her class and Mother Marie Jehanne, who is mistress of studies. Mother Maria





Mother Marie Cécile and Mother Mary Claudia with two of their young gipsy friends at Bezou. The caravan has often to serve as classroom.

Assunta has stayed late to teach English and her children speak to us with a surprisingly good accent. We see some of the secular teachers and we chat with Mlle Martin who has taught here since *Holy Child* began and with Barral before that.

Up and up we mount till at last we stop to admire the new, fourth-floor science block with its modern apparatus. The parents will be coming to inspect it at their general meeting. Parent-teacher relations are very close and fruitful and so parents' group-meetings are frequent, taking place every week, class by class, near the beginning of the school year. Offices close late in Paris, the family meal is late so meetings begin officially at 8.45 p.m. and because of the keen interest of the parents they are often prolonged.

The Villa & the Foyer

Coming down you ask, perhaps, "What are those older buildings that we see across the garden?" In the Villa there are libraries, dining-rooms and the chapel. The other block contains classrooms and students' rooms. We have not seen any resident students because during the day they are in their schools all over Paris; from 6.30 onwards they begin coming home; off the *Métro*, calling at a shop or two or hurrying back to supper, or to change and go out again. They belong to twenty-two nations and come to Paris from five continents.

Here is a French group followed by a Chinese girl who is making graceful gestures as she explains a point to a student from South America.



France, Martinique, Dahomey and Gabon enrich life for one another.

Gipsy Apostolate

Behind the students are Mother Marie Cécile and Mother Mary St. Agnes returning from an afternoon with the gipsies in one of the Paris outer suburbs. During a long afternoon their work has been listening, thinking, teaching, trying to imagine a mentality and situation so very different from their own and how best they can really help. With the aid of parents and children they have obviously found things to do on the practical side. This morning they left home carrying a carton containing a warm blanket knitted in the school to help an old gipsy granny to sleep well tonight and a set of clean and carefully-mended clothes to lessen the worries of a poor young mother-of-eight.

More students are coming along; a mixed group this time, two Africans and a trio from Holland, England,

and U.S.A. We follow them into the old house in the middle of the garden that seemed so still this morning. There is a busy *va-et-vient* and a hum of voices. You notice groups according to nations and races, but you hear newcomers remark a friendliness that is quite general:

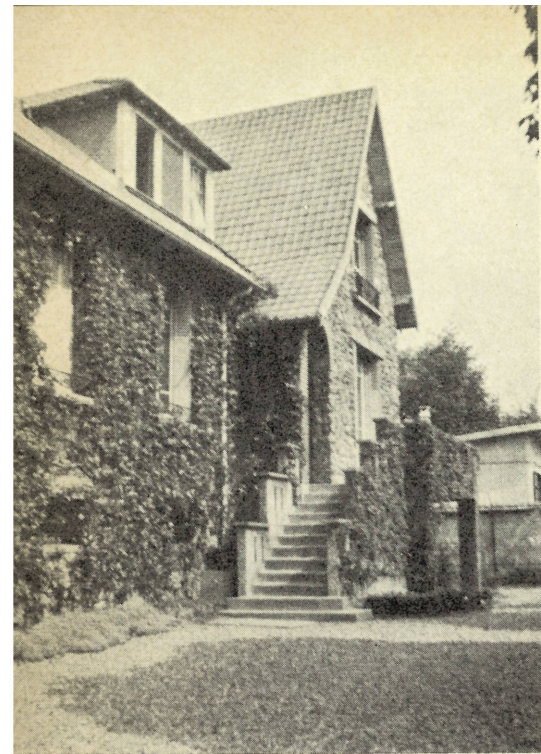
"I didn't expect to be able to exchange ideas so freely with girls of so many other nations."

"I noticed the friendly atmosphere at once."

"I was surprised to find on the first day that the foyer was my home" — a French girl from Marseilles made this remark.

"Those of us who come from far away find in the nuns something that reminds us of our homes," said a tall slender girl from the French Cameroons.

Here as in the school one can feel an atmosphere of work but not of strain. The Holy Child Spirit —



The diminutive convent, complete with chapel, at 9 rue Octave-du-Mesnil, whose community is at the service of Créteil's children.

essentially a family one — seems a good counterbalance to intense intellectual training.

Did you ask to see the Créteil convent of the Holy Child as well? It takes over an hour to commute by Métro and bus. Yet we belong together, and the Parish school in the new industrial suburb, under Mother Marie Noel and her busy community, is worth a separate visit another day.

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Arriving at CRÉTEIL, south-east of Paris — Neuilly is north-west — you plunge into quite a different world. The bus drops you at the 13th century church of Saint-Christophe in old Créteil where our school is situated close to the parish grounds.

There are some genuine classrooms for the children age 7-11 but *les petits*, age 4-6, crowd into an

It is never too early to learn courtesy, even if
'it is much less than courage of heart or holiness.'



Mother Margaret is tireless in making sure that hungry children and French cooking make a happy encounter at the end of each school morning.

old "pre-fab" while their elders, age 12-15, have a new one. A converted garage acts as a canteen for 140 school dinners in two sessions, and the other 220 go home to the great city blocks towering all around the area — Mont-Mesly, "*les Planètes*," "*les Bleuets*," etc., and before long they will also be going back to "*le carrefour Pompadour*" where a whole town is coming off the drawing-board.

Ours is the only Catholic school in the district and with bursting sides it can manage to hold 360 children. What of the faith of the 12,000 other children in state schools? We tackle this problem as best we may on Thursdays, which is the

free day for French schools. All day long these children pour in — legions of them — to be prepared by two of the nuns for their *Communio Solennelle*. Some are from the parish of Saint-Christophe but others are from Saint-Michel, the ultra-modern "*chantier du Cardinal*", or from Saint-Pascal Baylon, an underground church built below a block of flats. Now, a cathedral is to be built in the new city as Créteil is one of the four new sees of the Paris region. Let us hope *the means* of apostolate will grow in proportion.

"The harvest, indeed, is great. . ."

There are five of us.

(From an account by Rev. M. M. Noel)