



Cherwell Edge has seen many of Mother Connelly's spiritual daughters through three or four years of Oxford University life.

To achieve the desired results Mother Connelly realized that the nuns would have to be trained, for most of the young women who joined her in the '40's and early '50's were, to all intents and purposes, uneducated. "To instruct ourselves before attempting to teach others" was made by her a point of Rule.

Since she had at first only one good teacher, Mother Emily Bowles, she engaged secular mistresses in the parochial schools who could give the nuns hints on teaching methods. When the work of the Society really began to get under weigh, she took the unprecedentedly bold step of sending in nuns for the qualifying examination of the Committee of Council, once more to the scandal of the righteous. Her two attempts at starting Training Schools had the needs of the nuns very much in view; and by 1863 she had worked out the methods elaborated in the *Book of Studies*, which established a *system*

Cornelia Connelly

Her Educational Principles

Continued from THE PYLON, Spring 1960

By

Mother Marie Thérèse

S. H. C. J.

on which the Society was able to work for years. In the "Order of Studies" every subject is graded and teaching methods minutely indicated; the very time-tables are worked out, with the appropriate time to be given to repetition and learning of new work. Memorizing was the backbone of education at the time, but Mother Connelly ensures first that the lessons to be learnt are not too long and within the pupils' grasp, and secondly that

Study can be toil and joy combined, as many a novice destined for teaching will discover.



"... as amusing as possible..."

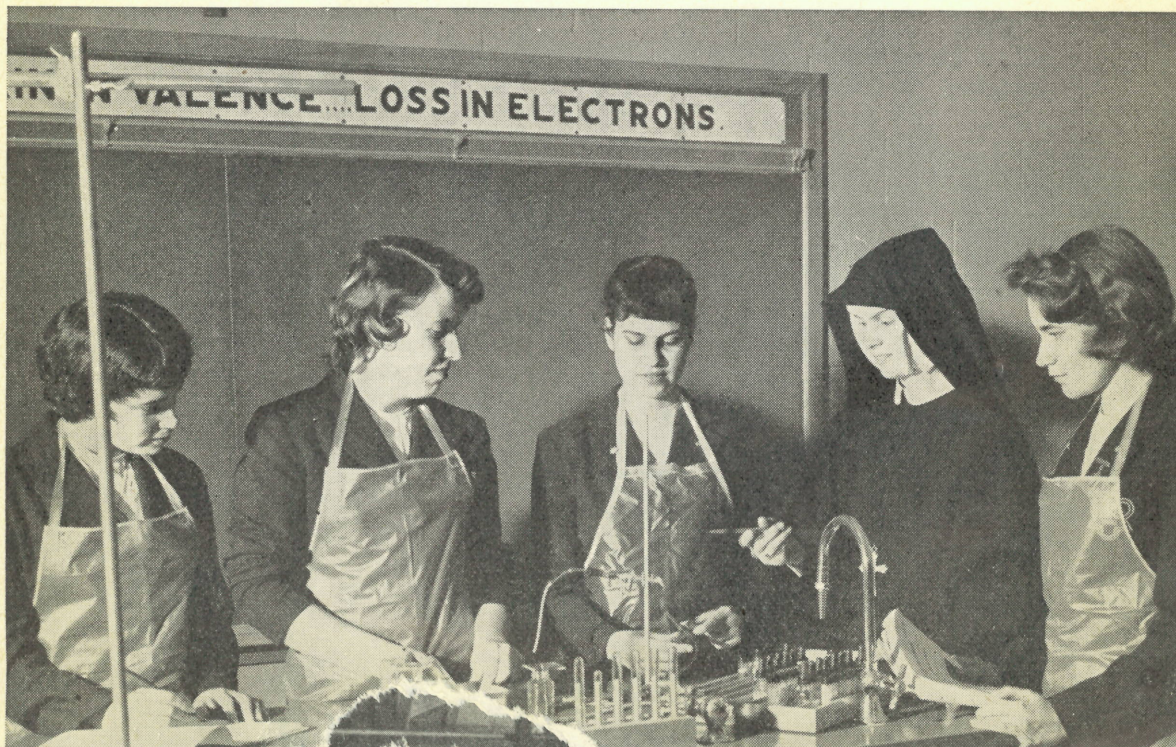
- at St. Kentigern's Parochial School, Blackpool, Lancs.



"explanation of every lesson to be learnt is to be given fully before the memory is taxed... The explanation should be given in a clear concise method, and it should be made as amusing and interesting as possible." The teaching methods, though now out-dated, produc-

ed efficient teachers at the time and enabled the pioneers in America to speak of "introducing our system" into their schools. In the *Rule* Mother Connelly says: "As teaching is the chief employment of the Choir Sisters... every care should be taken to secure that the

"And as interesting as possible" - at Summit, New Jersey. Mother Connelly could hardly have envisaged the training in science and technology which may lead to a vocation today.



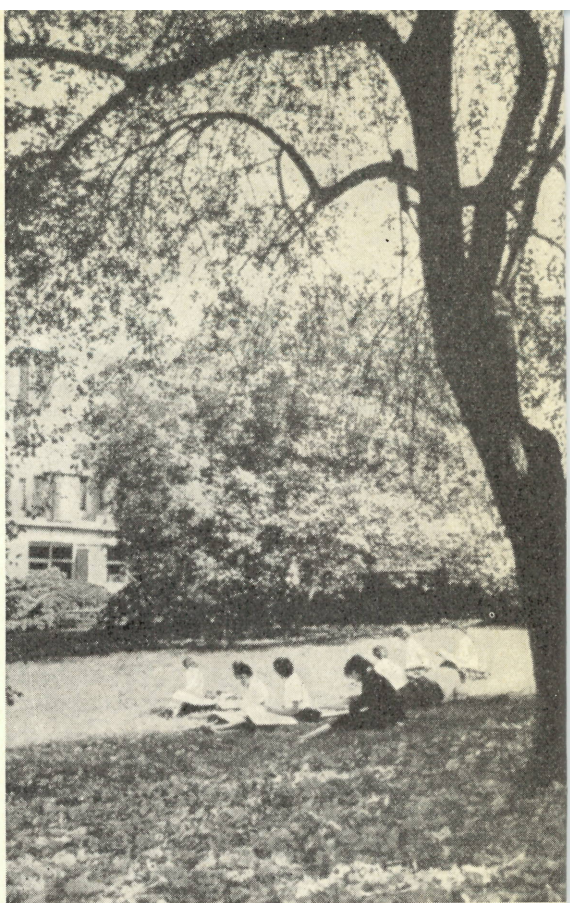
**Scope for sketching at St. Walburga's,
Rye, New York...**

Sisters apply themselves seriously to their studies, in order to be able to give to their pupils a solid education as well as a sound religious training. (*Solid* and *sound* are two adjectives which she often stressed.) Therefore classes shall be established by the Superior Provincial for the instruction of those Sisters whom she knows to possess the requisite capabilities." She planned out the nuns' studies herself and, even in the middle of letters of spiritual direction, would encourage them in the learning of such things as French verbs.

These classes are now represented mainly by Universities and Training Colleges, in conformity with modern requirements, but the principle remains the same: "to act in unison with the Church and to meet the wants of the age, while leading our children to true piety and solid virtue."

Art and Drama

There were two activities of school life to which Mother Connelly attached much importance in the



training of character. These were Art and Drama, and here again she was a pioneer. She would not allow Art to be treated as an "extra" or mere accomplishment. "Drawing," she writes, "considered first as an essential part of education, is second only to the faculty of speaking and writing... In this the eye is educated in the variety and beauty of the visible world and everything in it; and knowledge of forms and colours leads to a knowledge of their use and qualities. It gives the habit of observation, which obtains this knowledge..."

Of course, the teaching did not take the form of encouraging free expression in paint as it does to-day. The *Book of Studies* draws up a

.. and at Mayfield, Pasadena, with
help from Sr. M. Marcellus.


Hand-made programmes can bring a high standard of finish to the service of school drama. From Edgbaston.

Carefully graded course ranging from drawing from casts and copying (a holiday occupation) up to painting in oils and water-colours, illuminations and ivory miniatures. Very full instructions are given for each stage, and the useful art of scene-painting is included. Two scenes, painted under her direction and with her co-operation on the end walls of the school halls at St Leonards and Mayfield, remain to this day, though at Mayfield the old school hall is now the community room.

The painting of scenery was ancillary to the production of plays, in which activity Mother Connelly braved the conventions of nineteenth century girls' education, at least in Catholic circles, and it is interesting to observe that even with the nuns she had to overcome a certain amount of hesitation as to the moral value of dramatics. As late as 1871 there is a careful record of a meeting to discuss the

*At half past six of ye Clocke upon a
Friday evening ye twenty eighth day of
November, A.D. MDCCCCLVIII
certain young ladies of this Establishment
will most tastefully render*

DIDO AND AENEAS



*An Opera composed by
the late lamented Mr Henry Purcell,
Sometime Master of ye Kings Musick*

matter. "The opinion of the Sisters is that the children are rather injured than improved by the plays," she notes. Apparently they encouraged flightiness and vanity. But she argues, "If they are properly used are not the



A few
years ago
Mother
Connelly's
murals
at St.
Leonards-
on-Sea
were
cleaned
and
retouched
- out of
sheer
necessity.

Alf
Reynolds



A moving performance of Euripides' *Alcestitis* at The Old Palace, Mayfield, Sussex.

children led to know their own vanity at a time when the correction can be applied, and when they are safe from the snares of the world? Are they not there prepared to meet the temptations of the world and to know how to conquer them?" The plays were chosen from impeccable authors - Shakespeare, bowdlerised, Milton and others perhaps equally dull to modern taste, with classical French and Italian authors, Racine, Metastasio. The making of dresses "in classical taste and knowledge",

the study of harmonious colour schemes - "a large pink dress is ruinous" - all had educational value and moreover afforded exciting occupations for the holidays, most of which were spent at school. "Let us examine the past effects on our children before we come to any positive decision," is the conclusion reached in 1871; and by and large the effects must have been considered not too harmful, as the tradition of play-production in Holy Child schools continues to this day.

The training of the spirit

It has already been said that the end of studies as of all school activities was to Mother Connelly the training of character. That is only true as far as it goes. The most important work that any Catholic school has to do is the training of the *spirit*, and this naturally has priority in all Holy Child schools. We have seen how Mother Connelly inculcated the *gradual* development of "solid virtue"; in

the same way she trained the spiritual life of the children, not by putting it into a water-tight compartment but by integrating it with the whole of their life. "Our dear Lord and His Mother, our Guardian Angels and the Saints

A Christmas play in a Holy Child school is even more training of the spirit than drama. Children of St. Patrick's, Wadsworth, Illinois, re-live the story.



The
"Come, Little
Children"
TV Program,
Philadelphia,
proved so
instructive
and so
spontaneous
that Mother
Mary Urban
had an
ever increasing
"class" of all
ages, stages,
and
denominations
in 1958-59.



were mixed up with our daily life in a happy, loving spirit, which never made devotion tedious or distasteful," wrote one in her reminiscences of St Leonards in Mother Connelly's day. She loved the Liturgy and made the children love it too. They learned to follow Mass in their Missals, and also Sunday Vespers and Compline. Processions and novenas pointed the year and made them familiar with the Church's feasts and seasons. The children were taught to think with the Church; one section of the Needlework syllabus was devoted to the embroidering and making of vestments and altar linen. In the *Book of Studies* the course of

Religious Instruction is carefully elaborated and includes Scripture, Doctrine and Church History. Methods of teaching according to the age and mental development of the classes are given in detail, and great stress is laid on this subject as the foundation of Catholic Education.

For the training of the children's interior life Mother Connelly relied on the Sodalties, in particular on those of Our Lady and the Angels. She wrote out very definite rules for the Mistresses of the Sodalties, which show that she regarded them as nurseries of the spiritual life and not merely school societies with a certain amount of privilege and kudos attached. For instance, the



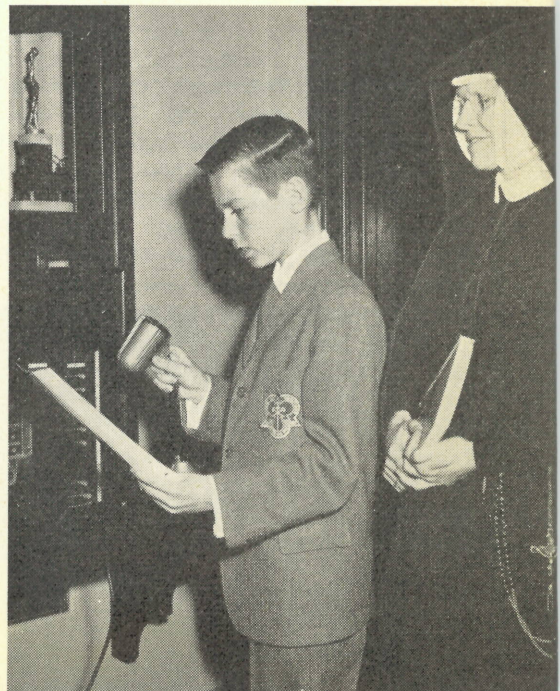
Left: At Edgbaston, Birmingham. The spiritual maturity and sincerity, in both prayer and action at which our Lady's Sodality is aiming today, must be entirely after Mother Connelly's heart

Mistress of the Sodality of Our Lady "should always keep in view the necessity of virtue to strengthen piety... She should form the habit of mental prayer in her children.. " The members of the Sodality of the Holy Angels were evidently regarded as Aspirants to Our Lady's Sodality." They will generally require to give proof... of general resolution to fight their passions and inclination before being admitted to the Sodality." The members of both Sodalities were required to give proofs of their good will by *doing* something, being faithful to some practice of self-conquest, and in the case of the Children of Mary by acting as sacristans or taking charge of the Lady Chapel. Life in a boarding-school in those days did not provide opportunity for Catholic Action in any form except care of the altar or making clothes for the poor; still, even that aroused a certain apostolic spirit and sense of social responsibility; the poor were very much part of the Victorian scene. The Sodalists were the élite of the school, and with their privileges

went their obligations. They had a high ideal to work towards and their training was austere. "They must be gradually more and more tried in bearing humiliations, in resisting temptations and in helping and watching over others, and especially in a more solid and faithful obedience on the grounds of faith alone."

All this sounds rather bleak, just set down as a matter of principle, and we look for some human touch or softening influence. What kind of woman was this who was capable of so spartan a philosophy, and how

Below: At Fleetwood, Mount Vernon, New York, Rev. M. M. Daniel lends her moral support as the 1960 Mission Drive is launched over the microphone.



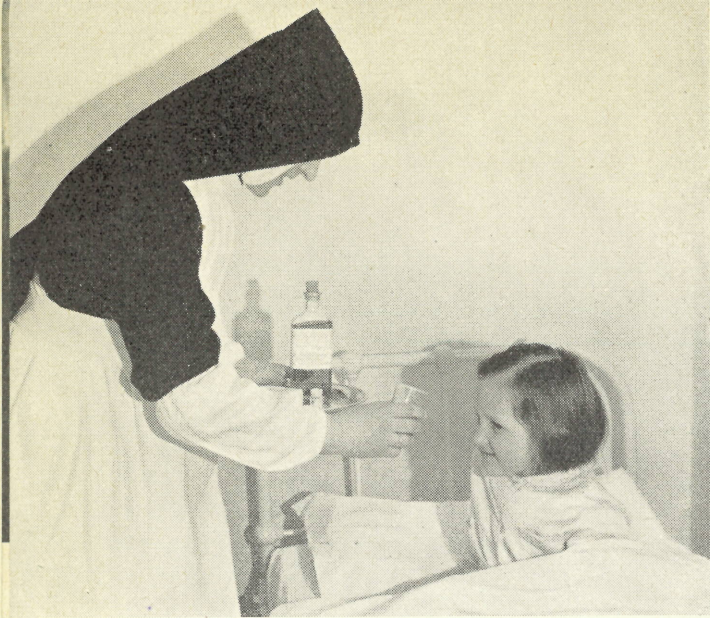
Members of the
Preparatory
School, Cavendish
Square, London.
“Mother, isn’t
it boring always
teaching the same
thing?” “But we
don’t teach things,
we teach
children.”



did she apply it in practice? The first perhaps unexpected thing about her was that she was above all a *mother*.

Cornelia Connelly had two vocations from God and the first was to the state of wife and mother; in that she had expected to live out her life. She loved her own children passionately and the scar of their loss never healed. Then it would seem that in her second vocation all the power of love and sympathy which could no longer envelope them was poured out on the children who were given to her spiritual motherhood. “My dearest child,” she writes to one, “my sweetest darling,” “my dear one,” with all the affection of a heart which sorrow had widened to take in all who came within its orbit. It was not for nothing that she gave the title of *Mother* to the finally-professed Choir nuns. In an undated letter from Paris she writes: “The children expect to find mothers in the sisters, and indeed we cannot expect them to be attached to the place unless they find this motherly care.” Her own

power over children of all ages was very great. There were the frightened babies she took on her knee; the children to whom she gave rides in the little pony carriage while discussing seriously all their childish problems; the child she rehabilitated with a kiss after the teasing she had suffered for her queer needlework; the small girl with whom she debated the alternatives of a husband named Edward or a religious vocation. In the Rules for the Mistresses of the Schools she enjoins on the nuns that they should have “a truly maternal love” for the children in their care. That maternal love is to extend to body, mind and soul. In these days the needs of the modern child oblige the nuns to follow them into regions of the psyche that the Victorians never dreamed of, but, true to the spirit of their Foundress, they accept this as part of the total sacrifice of their religious vocation and pray and strive to lead the children “with a noble and disinterested love” safely through these labyrinths into a wholesome and integrated view of life.



In boarding schools "motherly care" has as many facets as there are things to be done and children to be loved. Here, S. M. St. Roch's patient at Layton Hill, Blackpool, seems to need a little coaxing.

In the early days of the Society Mother Connelly, besides being Foundress and Local Superior, had, until she had trained the nuns, to be practically Prefect too. Besides organizing the studies she regularly examined the work and very largely superintended the discipline of the school. She was strict, she could be stern, she was unchangingly kind, but one characteristic was noted and appreciated by all; she was eminently just. She had the great gift of seeing all round a problem and understanding other people's point of view, and she

ruled not only with justice but also with equity. The unruly knew that they would be given their due, the difficult "problem" children that they would get a fair hearing; indeed Mother Connelly had a special penchant for these awkward characters, "Reverend Mother's diamonds" as the nuns called them, and was able to bring out qualities unsuspected even by the individuals themselves.

Taking it all in all, the memories which have been preserved tell of the joy and fun of school life under this firm and kind rule. There were



"the joy and fun of school life" continues. After the Glee Club Concert on Laetare Sunday, the Fourth Seniors serve tea for the Parents at St. Leonard's, Philadelphia.



This game at Winckley Square, Preston, Lancs., would have been a great help to Sheelagh who said confidently, after a month at school: "Oh Sister dear, I am so glad that you are not as tall now as you were when I first came!"

four recreations daily, *free* recreations when the children were encouraged to run about and play ball games, often with the nuns; there were quite frequent half-holidays for the great Feasts of the Church and occasional unforgettable excursions to Fairlight Glen and other Sussex beauty spots. It was one such expedition that was responsible in the long run for the acquisition of Mayfield.

Mother Connelly's personality as well as her high standards have left a stamp on every Holy Child school. Whether it is a parochial school, an English grammar school, an American high school or an African bush school there is an almost tangible atmosphere that gives each its special character. Attention to detail and finish, an attempt to create artistic surroundings and achieve definite standards: these and, above all, the attitude

of the children – trustful, friendly, co-operative – are Mother Connelly's legacy.

I cannot do better than end this account of her educational principles and practice with a quotation from the *Life* of 1922. "Mother Connelly's moral training was a spirit rather than a system – firmly rooted in unchanging principles, yet varied in application and elastic in detail... Many things have altered since the days when she was the life and inspiration of the school at St Leonards. This is what she herself would have wished. She knew that education must be dynamic, in vital contact with contemporary social life."

The latest news of the Cause of Cornelia Connelly is given in the four-page bulletin, THE CORNELIA CONNELLY CHRONICLE, which can be obtained from Holy Child Convents.