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CITIZENSHIP WRIT SMALL

Young People's Clubs as Corrective to Delinquency

THIS was meant to be a formal interview, but actually it was, to me at least, just a pleasant and interesting conversation with a remarkable Englishman and his alert wife and fellow worker. Mr. and Mrs. Basil Henriques, who are visiting New Zealand under the aegis of the British Council, have worked for the greater part of their lives among the boys and girls of East London, running Youth Clubs. Mr. Henriques is impressive not only in height and bearing, but also for his kindness and informality.

"Perhaps I had better start at the beginning and tell you how I came to be interested in Boys' Clubs," he said. "As an undergraduate at Oxford I went down to the Bermondsey and Oxford Mission run then by Sir Alexander Paterson. He was a great Borstal man, you know. I was amazed at the Christian life of fellowship that was lived there, at the men who, knowing that they had something to give, were prepared to live in the poorest parts of London to help their fellowmen. There were men like



THE HENRIQUES—"You learn to give loyalty"

John Stansfeld—you must have heard of him—he was the generation before me—he did a tremendous work starting the Bermondsey Mission. He was a medical man and he got the boys who came into his surgery. He made them gargle and then asked them 'Do you believe in God' and while they were still gurgling and spluttering joined them up for his club. Sounds crude, but it worked. In those days the Public School boys and Varsity undergraduates came down believing that they could do a great work by living Christian lives with the poor."

Two-way Traffic

"And is that still so to-day?"

"To-day it is rather different. In those days they came to give. Now they come to share and also to learn. It's a two-way traffic. But to go back to my story. I was amazed at the fellowship based on Christianity shown by the Mission workers. It was a challenge to me as to whether Judaism could produce the same returns. In 1914 I opened a small boys' club in Stepney—just a little room and 30 boys. At the end of the year I felt that the girls needed the same outlook, so I asked the young woman who was doing the First Aid in the Club to start a girls' club. That was in 1915. In 1916 the inevitable had happened." Mr. and Mrs. Henriques smiled at each other over the long vista of 32 years of work shared and enjoyed.

"And our family grew—to 3,000 members. Oh yes, all sizes and ages, Infant Societies to Burial Societies—from the cradle to the grave. Now we have 400 children of old members and four grandchildren—our great grandchildren, we call them. In 1930 we were given £65,000. We changed our name to the Bernhard Baron Settlement. Eighteen of our original members still come up once a week and I need hardly say that the old boys and girls of our Club are the valued leaders of to-day. I was very proud of our boys during the war. We had 600 boys from the Club serving in the Forces and 38 per cent. became

officers or N.C.O.'s. You know they started with a handicap—mostly Jewish."

"Is that a handicap in Britain?"

"Yes, if you have a foreign-sounding name."

"And have you still mainly Jewish members?"

"All sorts. We have a lot of Negroes and West Indians to-day who have recently settled in the dock areas. They join—all sorts, all races, all creeds and denominations. They all have to live together and get on together—and they do."

"Have you found comparable clubs in New Zealand?"

"Not for girls," said Mrs. Henriques. "There are the Church Clubs and the Y.W.C.A. Clubs, which I am sure are very good, but I doubt whether they get the girls that would ordinarily be out on the streets at night."

Sports Clubs to Start With

"We saw a very fine boys' club in Christchurch," said Mr. Henriques. "And you seem to have plenty of Sports Clubs. That is very good, but they should cover a lot more than just sport. Every club could start as a sports club—that's a good bait—but the goal of the club should be the right use of leisure. It should train citizens for the kind of state in which they live. I'd like to use an expression—only my wife is tired of hearing me say it." He glanced sideways.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Henriques, "I'll stop my ears. It's worth saying even if he does say it a bit often."

"Well then, membership of a club is citizenship writ small. You learn to give loyalty. You learn how to govern and be governed. A Nazi club will train its young people in the ways of a Nazi state. We believe in democratic ways—quite different and very important. That is why sports clubs are not enough by themselves. We virtually continue school for young people who have left school

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