

When regulations outgrow the society in which they exist, such regulations are usually changed or eliminated altogether. This action is only intelligent adjustment to the times in which we live, most men agree. Too often, however, even intelligent men fail to make intelligent adjustments. With a plea for understanding of the society in which we live we present this month's THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE as a part of the theme around which the issue is organized.

The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham

DO WE DARE?

THIS IS A TRUE STORY. It is not a pretty story, for truth sometimes has a way of being far from pretty. It is an old, old story yet it lives among us today. Of course the name used and some particulars of the setting are disguised.

There are those who may feel that it is in poor taste to put this story in print in an educational journal. If they who make this claim are right, then tragedy is in poor taste, and education should deal only with the bright surface of life, avoiding the somber realities.

It is only chance that this is a story about a teacher. It is also the story of a secretary, a salesgirl, a nurse, a writer, an artist, a college girl, a high school girl—a story of many, many girls.

This is not a story with a moral, for a moral implies that we know the right answer, and maybe we don't know the answer. It is a story which raises questions—questions which we rarely face squarely but which have a depth and reality which make it criminal for us to ignore them.

This is the story of June Bailey. Miss Bailey is now about thirty-five years old. Her fellow teachers say she is hard to get along with. Her principal reports that she is stubborn and uncooperative. She doesn't often express her point of view, but when she does, people begin to suspect that she is "radical." Some even whisper that she is a communist and an atheist. A few somewhat more sympathetic people say she is bitter, but they aren't quite sure what about—just things in general and all of society in particular.

Everyone must admit, however, that when

Miss Bailey is left alone in her classroom she is a superb teacher. The children in her room are happy and they make remarkable progress. Even the "problem" children grow and blossom.

Her fellow teachers used to try to find out why Miss Bailey is such a difficult person to deal with, but have given up at last. She is merely tolerated and chalked up as a queer one. I wonder what they'd think if they knew her story?

June Bailey has not always been a queer one. When she started out as a young teacher she was gay, popular, and in love. She and a young law student were engaged to be married, but the date for the wedding had to be set far ahead, for a law student can't support a wife, and June knew she would lose her job if she married.

Shortly before he was to graduate from law school, the young student died. A few weeks after his death, a doctor confirmed what June had suspected. She was to have a baby. She wanted the baby, desperately. She felt it would be a part of that which had been dear and beautiful. Yet, if she did have the child, she knew she couldn't continue in the only work she was trained to do, and would have no means of supporting herself and the baby. Moreover, she felt that teaching is important, and that as a teacher she could make a significant contribution.

She was caught in a strange dilemma. Society said she could not have the child, and at the same time said she could not, within the law, take steps not to have the child. There was not a soul she knew to whom she could turn for advice. Educators are sup-

posed to be people of human understanding, and sympathy, but among her fellow teachers June knew of none from whom she could expect other than shocked censure.

If she could have produced a marriage certificate, even though it proclaimed a secret marriage, there would have been friends aplenty to offer sympathy and help. But she didn't have the necessary slip of paper. If she were to marry, she might, through deceit, make herself and her child socially acceptable. But she couldn't bring herself to this. Finally she went to a midwife of whom she had heard and arranged for an illegal operation at an exorbitant fee.

She can't talk of it now, but we can guess the anguish of those weeks—the fear of society's pressures, the fear of the hazards to her life in submitting to unlicensed surgery, the remorse of giving up the baby she wanted, the mixture of resentment and shame, the desperate loneliness.

Yes, today June Bailey is a queer one. She is stubborn, uncooperative, down on society, bitter. Who should have helped prevent her tragedy? Where lies the fault? With the teachers who think her queer, without knowing why? With the board of education which failed to ferret out her secret and prevent her from teaching? With June? With the law? With society and its rules and pressures? With June's family? Her church? Her education?

Wherever the fault, can educators remain blind and indifferent to the problems? There are those among us who say that problems of this sort are too "hot" to handle. Are we then to ignore them and pretend they aren't there because we put our own security above our responsibility? Who is it talks of needs? If ever there are people with needs to be met with understanding, they are the June Baileys.

But what can we do? Many things. The following suggestions are but a start.

1. Take steps to abolish rules, imposed by any occupational group, which forbid a man or woman to marry. Start at home. Education is the worst offender.

2. Use your influence to get adequate maternity leave *with pay* for women in any occupation.

3. Help establish medical, psychiatric and counseling clinics which will be open to all and within the means of all. The counsel provided may help some people to face society in full payment for mistakes. In some cases, it may protect a young person from the unduly severe sentence society may seek to impose.

4. Attempt to extend the practice of subsidizing students and their dependents. The G. I. Bill of Rights has made a good start. If we extend similar subsidies to *all* students, none need be obliged to make a choice between a normal, happy married life and the education with which he hopes to better himself, his family and his society.

5. See to it that every young person has an opportunity for adequate sex education.

6. Examine the laws concerning medical practice to see if they are to the best interest of individuals and society. If they are not, campaign for better legislation.

7. As an educator, let it be widely known that you have sympathy and understanding for all, whether or not you condone their acts. This would apply to youngsters who make mistakes in personal relations as well as to those who steal, cheat on examinations or play truant.

It is an old, old story, yet it lives among us today. If people are important, if educators are people of integrity, of human understanding and sympathy, if education is concerned with reality even though unpretty, and with respect for human dignity and the worth of the individual, do we *dare* ignore the problem of June Bailey and her sisters?



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