

# THE PYLON

THAT CARRIES THE LIGHT  
 PUBLISHED WITH ECCLESIASTICAL APPROVAL IN  
 THE INTERESTS OF THE MISSIONARY WORK OF  
 THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS  
 IN NIGERIA, GHANA, AND CHILE

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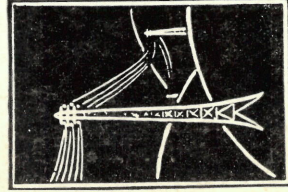
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'Today

the theme of our prayers will be peace'

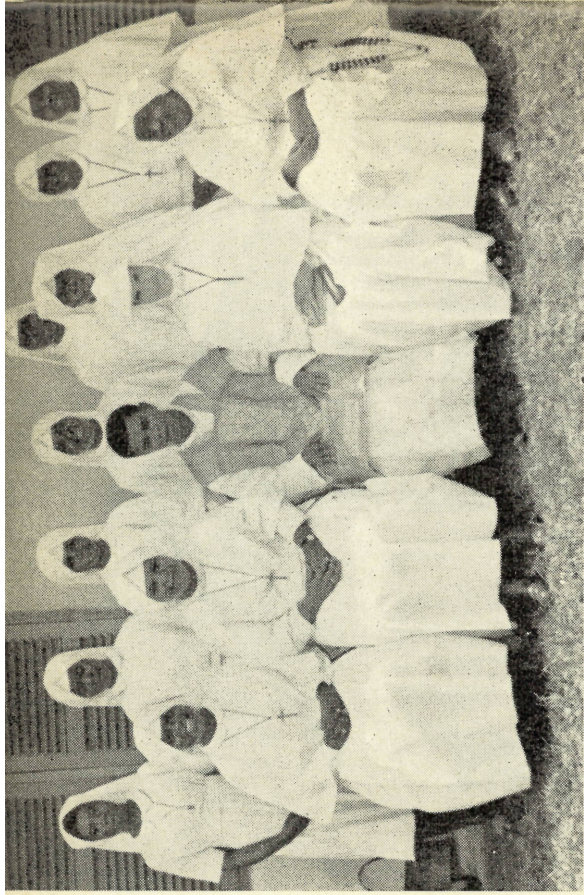
Paul VI

# THE PYLON





Father Sylvester Udoh, the first priest to be ordained in Essene. M. M. Fintan and M.M.M. Ignatia (seated on right)



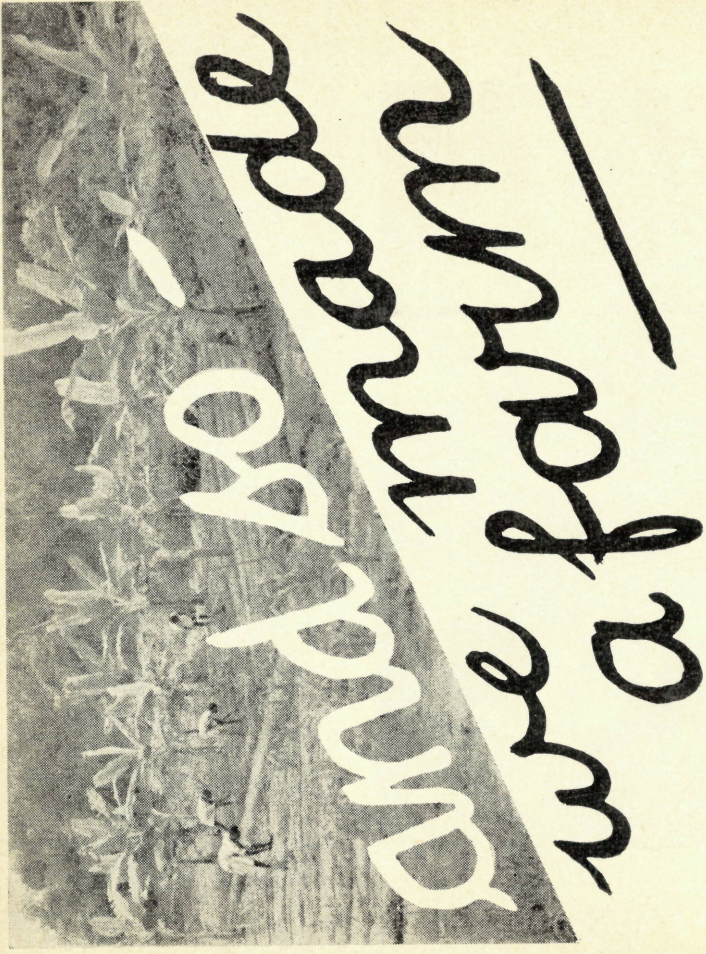
A great spiritual harvest awaits Fr. Udoh. Our stories of farms can be read as symbols of what is going on in a realm where tilling, planting, reaping and binding must be carried on simultaneously and without rest

## Nigeria Re-Visited

by M. M. FINTAN PHELAN (Cape Coast, Ghana)

Recently, I was able to travel in Nigeria and to see all my old haunts from Essene to Ikot Ene, Ututu, Afikpo, Ikom, Ogoja, and to end up at Abakaliki. Greeting old friends was a delight and it was remarkable to see the progress being made everywhere by the Church.

At Ifuho, I met Mother M. Ignatia, H.H.C.J. who told me that she was going to Essene on the following day for the ordination of the first priest from that area, Reverend Sylvester U. J. Udoh. Essene is very dear to me because my brother, Father Fintan is buried there. We arrived in Essene just before dark and I made a visit to the beautiful new church, and to the grave of Father Fintan quite near it, to thank God for the unexpected



By Nina, a Holy Child School Farmerette

Sixteen months ago, on a high wave of enthusiasm, we started a farm at Holy Child School, Cape Coast. It was (and still is) a multi-purpose farm intended to:

a) give the children healthful occupations, and understanding of the farmer's problems;

b) help to supplement the diet for the sick and poor in the nearby villages of Queen Anne's Point and Moree;

c) provide demonstrations in scientific farming methods for local farmers, and make good seed available to them.

To date, our farm has achieved fully only one purpose — to give occupation to the children and much occupation to its originator, *Mother John Cantius*. And we have gained some slight insight into the problems facing the backbone of Ghana's economy — The Farmer.

For instance, we met (to our horror) a subtle creature named *enblemma admoia* that killed 500 of our 503 eggplants. Then, last season we thought we had a prize in a half acre of corn. It went, every lush, juicy kernel of it, to fattening the monkeys in the neighborhood.

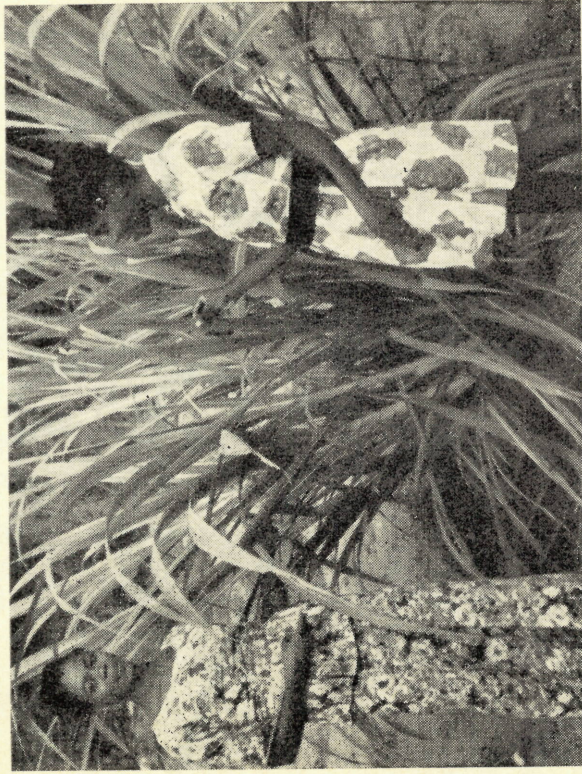


The following are a few excerpts from the Farm Diary which will give some idea of what the small farmer in the tropics experiences in his day-by-day work . . .

*Sunday.* When we went to water the onions, we found them greatly reduced in number. Quantities of crickets were hopping about with a decided "oniony" smell . . . On

cultivate the pineapples. Some children were left over and went to work on their private plots. Philomena made herself *two* parallel irrigation ditches instead of one . . . We noticed in passing that four of the banana trees are bearing fruit; ninety-six are not . . . Killed thirty-seven grasshoppers.

*Tuesday.* Now two of the men

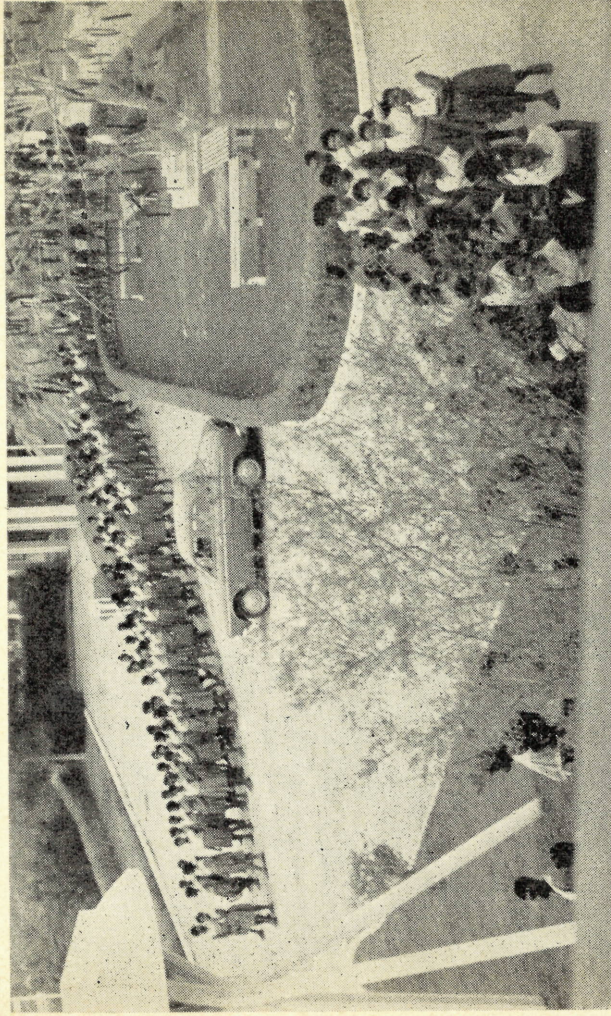


*A plant to be proud of . . . Sugar cane grown from a small eight-inch piece of stem*

to the pineapples; the recent rain has packed the soil so we must recultivate and mulch . . . Knocked down some mangoes. Scored four direct hits out of seventeen tries (now have a sore arm.)

*Monday.* Twenty-seven of the thirty-one Monday farmers were present at activities. We were divided into groups to collect, mulch, and

have almost finished clearing the hillside for the corn. We hope to fool the monkeys this year by setting up tins that rattle in the wind . . . The pepper plants are heavy with red fruit . . . I wonder if the watch we traded for that wheel-barrow is still working . . . The Brick-makers were delayed with their work today because Victoria fell down the



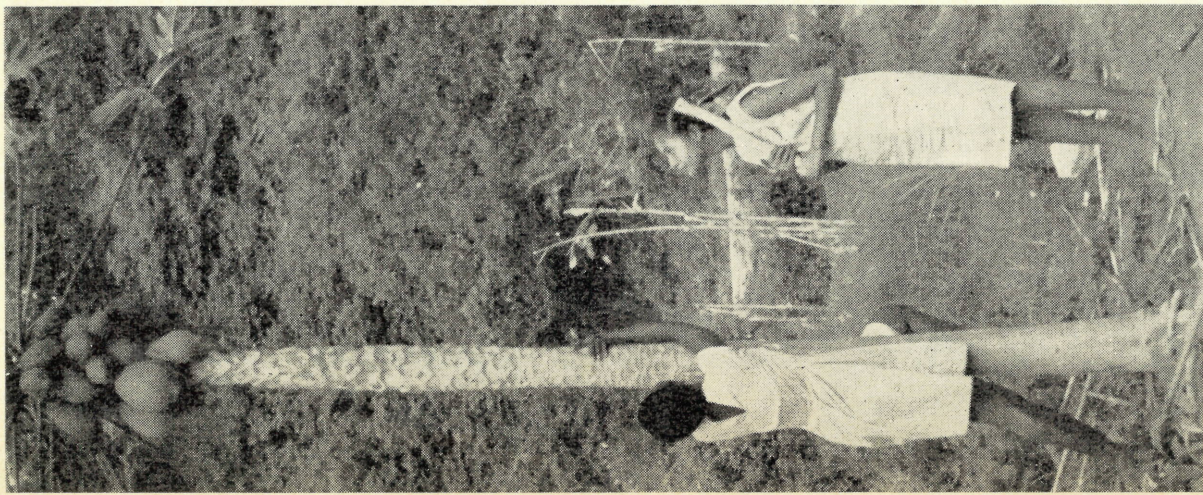
*The Holy Child School in Cape Coast, Ghana is a large boarding school with 355 children. Here, the Upper Line and the Lower Line are shown leaving the assembly hall after a concert*

*Here, a row of farmers follow string guides to help them lay out the garden beds in straight lines*



*THE PYLON*





Two farmers trying to reap a harvest they have not sown by shaking down a ripe fruit from the paw-paw tree

farm steps, one hundred feet; they washed her off in the grand new water tank they made to help us irrigate.

*Wednesday.* It rained today . . . good for the five hundred plants we have just set out on high ground but not so good for the beans which are in a tiny valley. Mother John Cantius and two of us slogged around in boots trying to save the beans from being drowned.

*Thursday.* This was "private plot" day. All the children came down on time, each to work on her own special bit of land, twenty feet by four feet. Most of us plan to plant a variety of vegetables including garden egg (eggplant), radishes, lettuce, carrots, okra and corn.

*Friday.* Did not go to the farm today.

*Saturday.* We were able to get 2200 square feet cleared for the tomatoes because of two noisy dormitories. The house mistresses sent the children to the farm to repent and amend . . . We gave each girl ten square feet to dig and fertilize . . .

*Sunday.* First real harvest from the farm . . . We were able to take several bushels of red peppers and other vegetables, plantain and paw-paw to Queen Anne's Point today. The poor villagers welcomed us as if we had dropped down from the sky with all that food to supplement their scanty diet . . . Just to see the smiles on their faces was worth every bit of the effort we have put into the farm . . .



The proposed house for farm tools. The roof, explains M. John Cantius, will be of bamboo, but the brick-makers are more interested in counting the number of bricks

## Bricks Every Tuesday

by M. John Cantius McCann

The idea of brick-making here in our Holy Child compound was born, actually, after reading an article in the *Readers' Digest* back in 1964. The title of the article was "Blocks Dirt Cheap."

With great gusto, the writer told about a little manually-operated machine that made building blocks 12" x 6" x 4" from local soil bound with 5-10% cement. The enthusiastic tone of the article was catching. The machine seemed the answer to the problem of poor

housing in local villages — as well as to a closer-home problem of how to use to greater advantage the steep hill on which our school is built.

After much letter-writing, and invaluable help from Mr. Tracy, Mother M. Ignatius' father, a Cinva-ram Block Press was ordered from Colombia, South America. It left Colombia in February, 1965, but owing to many amazing circumstances, did not reach us until the following September.



First of all, the soil has to be screened through  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wire mesh. Then it is mixed with cement: nine head-pans of soil to one head-pan of cement. And all this, amid puffs and huffs, is mixed with twenty litres of water. The mixture is tested by squeezing the soil in the hand. If the clump does not break when the hand is opened, and there is no moisture on the palm, then the consistency is correct. The mixture is put into bags; each bag holds enough for one brick.

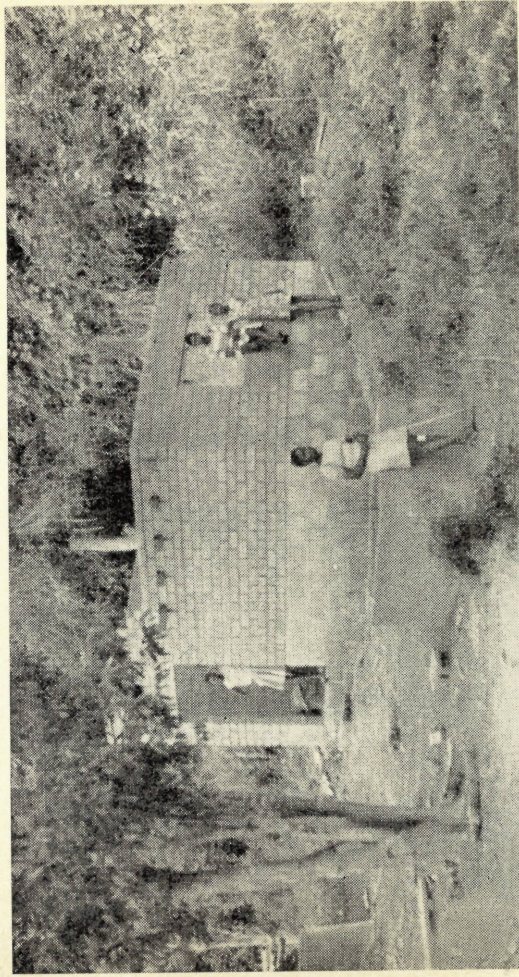
The machine itself is manned by nine children. One empties a bag of the mixture into the machine while another spreads it in the box to make sure that the corners are filled. (This same worker is responsible for oiling the machine after every seven bricks). Five children are needed to pull down the long handle to make the brick for

this is a very hard part of the job. The eighth member pulls the handle to open the machine and release the brick. Then the ninth removes the finished brick and carries it away to cure.

This process goes on continuously through the hour's activity and the children now average fifty-two bricks a week. One Saturday morning, in an extra spurt of enthusiasm, they made 108 bricks but were ill-tempered for the next three days.

So now we have a small water tank for the farm AND a house for the farm tools which is nearing completion. We're hoping that before the rains fall, the house will be roofed and serve as a small monument to the children's grit and determination as well as an example for the village people — that they, seeing what can be done, will want to follow.

**All ready but the roof . . . The tool house becomes a reality and the brick-makers are justly proud of their work**



## CORNELIA BELONGS TO EVERYONE—

**BUT MOST OF ALL TO CHILDREN. SHE GAVE HERSELF TO THEM.**

The very diversity of Cornelia Connelly's states of life makes people say that she belongs to everyone. This is true, for instance, of children who early in life have lost their parents. It is true both of the happily married and of the problem home. She has many friends and admirers among bishops and priests. As one expressed it: "We owe a great debt to Cornelia because of all that she suffered for the priesthood." Others consider hers to be an "ecumenical" Cause because Cornelia was sent to England as "the female counterpart of Newman and Faber" (1) and, amid the hopes of the Oxford movement, she entered upon a life of intense suffering for the *Faith*. And many love her because her way of life was "ordinary," filled, not with great visions and ecstasies, but with great faith, hope and love, all three expressed by unshaken trust in God's will.

If Cornelia has many admirers who desire her beatification, critics have never been wanting, usually those who know her story by hearsay.

(1) See Fr. J. Walsh's article, pages 3-6, *The Pylon*, Winter 1961-2.

There are, in fact, two main criticisms levelled against her.

First, it is said that **Cornelia broke up her home**. Is this tenable?

*Cornelia Connelly loved her husband, Pierce*, with emotional intensity as is proved by letters to him, especially by one from Natchez, 22 September, 1835. There is, moreover, Mary Peacock's statement that "they are and always have been about the happiest couple that ever breathed."

On October 13th, 1840, Pierce Connelly asked his wife to be a nun so that as a priest he might continue the ministry that he had relinquished with the Episcopal rectorship of Natchez. Despite the excruciating cost to herself, she eventually said "yes" to a plan the first mention of which nearly killed her. In that moment she had only managed to say, "This is something very serious: do think about it deeply and repeatedly. But, however, if God asks this sacrifice, I am ready to give it to Him and with all my heart." (1)

(1) Translated from the French account given by Fr. Abbadie, S.J.



When she felt she had arrived at certainty of conscience, she added to her note book on September 17th of the following year: "Vocation examined. Decided."

Cornelia so loved Pierce that she could not stand in the way of what all advisers believed to be the greater good for him, a greater good which acknowledged *the paramount claims of God upon him*, justified in his eyes by the words of Christ: "And every one that hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my name's sake..." (Matt. 19:29)

Had this young woman convert stood out against so many good and learned priests, bishops, and eventually Pope Gregory XVI himself, who judged Pierce to have this unusual call, might this not have been a sign of pride and spiritual rashness rather than the virtue of prudence according to her state of life? It would have been quite out of keeping with her desire to "think with the Church." And, one must remember, had Cornelia stood out against Pierce's *fixed idea* of his call to the priesthood, it is hardly likely that the children would have enjoyed a happy and contented home.

*Cornelia so loved her children* that home life had seemed almost too good to be true, something so wonderful that it had to be placed in a prayer of oblation. The death of her three-year-old son, John Henry, was such agony for her mother's heart that she could only think of one Mother whose suffering had been greater than her own.

*Cornelia so loved God* that when everything went awry she still kept faith with Him. It is on this score that many, and especially the victims of broken homes, consider her an outstanding example for themselves. When peaceable separation turned into bitter litigation (and how many today have a like experience) she did not lose her HOPE. When Pierce poisoned the children's minds against her, she who had pondered during nine or ten years the mystery of Mary's sorrows learnt how to stand beside this cross. In fact, it was especially at a time like this that people noticed in her a light of joy coming from the kind of peace which the world can neither give nor comprehend. She became able to suffer "with the tears running down the back of my nose" and to be merry for the sake of everyone else.

\* \* \* \* \*

Secondly, is it accurate to say that **Cornelia abandoned her children?** Mercer, like many 19th century children, was already at boarding school (Stonyhurst College, England) during about eleven months of the year. It was understood that Adeline was to stay with her mother and, as for Frank, whose education was ensured by Prince Borghese, she was glad to write: "I am so happy that the good Father de Villefort thinks Frank ought to stay with me till he is eight years old. I think so too, but I am so much afraid of having any reserves with God." (1844) It was just before the Society began at Derby that plans for the children

were altered over *Cornelia's head*. Sister Aloysius, one of her first companions, could write:

Never shall I forget the struggle of that separation. It was, I think, one of the greatest sacrifices she had to make. Still there was never seen a cloud of sadness; the generosity of her heart was marked on her countenance so that it was noticed by all around. It was at this time I first knew her, and watched her as I would a saint.

Adeline was sent to the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Newhall, Essex on October 8th, 1846 and Frank was despatched to Hampstead. They both remained at school till January 1848 when, without one word to their mother Mr. Connelly removed them. Within a few weeks he had them with him in Rome being used as a decoy — *the strongest possible decoy* — in the hands of one who had every reason to know the strength of her maternal love.

All this part of the Connelly pattern is a help to those whose married lives have, for any reason, brought them face to face with the keeping of hard promises and with the prior claims of God, where *one* must be faithful for *two*. Few however are asked for fidelity on such an heroic scale.

Had the Connelly's plan worked out differently with Pierce the perfect priest and, as they both rather naively hoped, the children all three good religious, is it likely that this would have created a rush from hearth to cloister? Though the actual story stands as a cautionary tale for future decisions of this kind its *supernatural* fruit has been fully recognized and given the Church's formal approval: the Society of the



**Cornelia Connelly, foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, was born at Philadelphia in 1809 and died at St Leonards-on-Sea, England, in 1879**

Holy Child Jesus was declared a Pontifical Institute in 1893.

May we therefore, glimpse something of the mystery which led the Connellys to make the choice they did, firmly believing it to be God's will for themselves and their children? The fruits of Pierce's decision were short-lived, of only three and a half years' duration. Those of Cornelia still endure.

The direct fruits of her "Yes, Lord" are concerned with education and character-training, above all with



the forming of Christ the Child in thousands of children: first, in the young victims of Derby's 19th century Industrialism and next in that strata of Victorian England where the young were "to be seen and not heard". Then in the 20th century world, where certainly love of children is fashionable but often secondary to personal comfort and convenience; it is not always — to use Cornelia's own words — "a love that is noble, tender and disinterested" (*disinterested* and *uninterested*). Mother Connelly left a legacy whereby Holy Child convents became dearly-loved second homes for countless young people who would learn there many things about home-making on the pattern of Nazareth. She was able to show better than the average nun the blend of the two womanly vocations to which she had been called and to pass on their spirit to many of her spiritual daughters. The Church counts on convent helping family and family encouraging convent, to the spiritual enrichment of both. But, in this case, was not the personal cost of Cornelia's legacy: "The thought of my children never leaves me"? Her happy married life was transmuted into a "thrice-blessed religious life" — to use her own expression — and she received a mandate from the Church to be involved in "the great work of training children" (*Rules, S.H.C.?*)

Surely few people have had such a wide and deep preparation for this work, even though Cornelia had more of a hunch about the academic subjects than personal possession of them. She knew a Christian humanist when she met one, and she had an almost unlimited faith in the educability of human nature. She loved life and if she spoke of it at times as "a little dream" this was only because she knew we have not here a lasting city. She took infinite pains, down to the minutest details, to see that all under her care could put the most into life and get the most out of it. Everything was important to her because she had a quite extraordinary sense of the "pilgrim Church" tramping or, better, running "with ardour in the way", to the even greater reality of its true home.

Whoever talks glibly about the Church renouncing the struggle and the stand for Catholic education would do well to study this story of the many strands which Providence interwove for the making of an educator, and a family of educators. The family is only too well aware of its limitations but it is also more and more alive to its heritage. Much of what Cornelia had to give came to her *the hard way*. But she gave easily and unstintingly.

M. M. Ursula Blake

Next Issue Winter 1967-8, will be a

CORNELIA CONNELLY SPECIAL NUMBER

Please tell *her* many friends in good time!

## APOSTOLATE on YORK STREET

by M. M. Sophia McIlhenny and M. Gerard Majella Bracken

Mother Mary Edwardine leads out the Eighth Grade of St Edward's School, Philadelphia, which has an enrolment of about 1,200

