

The Boy—The Church

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THE other day I asked the question, "What is a boy?" One answered, "the beginning of a man," another, "a bunch of potentialities." Would we be any nearer if I said, he is a many-sided creature, "having budding tastes, clamorous appetites, primitive likes and dislikes, varied interests, an idealist and hater of shams, a bundle of contradictions, a lover of fun, but a possible lover of the best, a loyal friend of his true friends, impulsive, erratic and alarmingly impressionable." Another said, "A creature of God, for God, for service." These are all good. If he is a creature of God, for God, for service, there must be a revealed agency for showing him God and helping him nearer to God.

The Bible is the revelation of God's will concerning His creatures, while the church in its different departments is the means to bring him into communion with God his Creator.

Mr. Foster of the *S. S. Times*, says—
"What the boy thinks of the church may be more important than what the church thinks of the boy. What is the church to the average boy? A building, a kind of a service. To the adult it is an institution with an influence practically illimitable. The building may have a real influence upon the boy's life, though only too frequently it does not. Plain and unpretentious it may be, but if he learns to associate it with uplifting thoughts and holy aspirations it may be in his memory a holy place.

It has also been learned that the boy's idea of the church may be found in his impression or opinion of a man, e.g., a prominent layman or minister.

The church stands immediate to him. Whether he likes it or not may not be the most important question but it is the immediate one. The church must be liked

so as to help. Let me illustrate. A boy is in a boat which capsizes. He cannot swim. Now the great issue of his life is not changed by the accident. It is as it always was, viz., his relation to his God. But the immediate thing is to get him safely out of the water.

It is the church's business to so surround him with goodly and true influences that he will not be swallowed up by the waters of sin.

In other words, the church must speak to every side and phase of life in this many-sided creature. Phillips Brooks once said, "He who helps a boy become a strong and good man makes a contribution of the first order to the welfare of society."

As in the individual so in the group. Then how much more should the church as represented in the Christian group exercise this influence.

But before touching the church's responsibility permit me to say that the first institution is the home. How alarmingly true are the words of Francis G. Peabody, when he says, "The great overshadowing peril of a boy's life is not bad

companions, books or habits, but rather that of homelessness. Not the state of being without bed or room of one's own, but that isolation of soul, that absence of kindred loving spirits to fellowship with. The boy is a gregarious animal and like all things in nature abhors a vacuum, and if his home is lacking in love and sympathy he will abhor it." The church must be found in the home. Religion is a real life beautifying an ennobling character.

1. The church must touch the boy's animal nature. Dr. Josiah Strong says, "the impulse to play is as natural and normal as the inclination to eat or sleep. If God gives the impulse man ought to provide the playground."

"Teach a child to play fair in tennis and he is not likely to cheat in business, bring a boy to the point where he will obey the rules of baseball and he will not likely be a law-breaker. The boy who will sacrifice personal recognition and applause for the good of his team is in a fair way to become the sort of a man who will not hesitate to surrender per-



"WHY DON'T THE HENS LAY?"

sonal considerations for the good of the community." Let the church provide for her youth the opportunities needed along these lines, and at least one phase of his life is made accessible.

2. Show the church say anything about his reading. By all means, yes! are not our S. S. libraries and E. L. reading courses a partial answer to the question? But even here we fail. The average boy reads what he pleases. We would not think of letting him eat what he pleases, for that would hurt him physically; but to let him choose his own reading even to the possibility of seriously disturbing his thought life—Well! what can we do? Is it because a jaundiced liver is more easily diagnosed than a yellow streak in the boy's thought?

Some one may say, "but there are boys who will not read anything." There may be, but I have yet to meet them.

Would it interest you to learn that the probation officers of juvenile courts have found themselves able to help delinquent boys by a selected course of reading? If the average bad boy, often lacking intelligence, can be reached and

helped, how much more help can be rendered those within our reach? What better companions than these quiet friends? Let us see to it, so far as we can, that they shall learn to read and that with increased discrimination and interest.

3. It is the church's business to provide a social life for her youth. Yet how often you hear it said, "the church is not a social club." The church must be interested in the youth's friends. He is a social being craving company. What crowd shall he go with? At the school and on the street, friends he will have, but may the church not make it part of her business to see that the friendships in the church are so strongly entrenched that his outside ones will be of secondary importance? Satisfy his longings and meet his interests in the church, and he will have little need to go farther afield.

4. To what extent is the church interested in the boy's education?

Most boys have homes, some are touched by the S. S. and E. L., but almost all are sometime brought into contact with the public school system, and so it is important that all of us should be interested in securing for him the very best possible educational advantages. Huxley said, "The business of educational administration is to provide a ladder reaching from the gutter to the university along which every child may have the chance to travel as far as he will." The school teaches the "what to know." Should it not also teach the "how to live?"

Some time ago, it is said, a woman was serving tea on Fifth Avenue, N.Y., and in the midst of this solemn ceremony was greatly shocked when her little son marched into the room, holding by the tail an old dead cat. "Mamma, he said, "here is a perfectly good cat that I found thrown away in the ash barrel." Well, it was a good cat; it had feet, and head, and a tail, and fur on it. But it had one lack or fault—it had no life. Is it not somewhat true that our educational system is turning out by the thousands, boys who are perfectly well educated,—they know things, and many can do things; the only thing lacking is they have no life. I.e., spiritual instruction. That alone will send them out to win the fight of self-control, or help them to assist others in the great fight of life.

For character is the basal purpose and should be the primary one, but often it is submerged and becomes secondary.

These are only some things of interest. Let us in these and other ways give them the highest ideals. What kind of men will they make? The kind we want if we want it in real earnest. "I have only one life to live and that one all too poorly lived, but I have a vision of a better life that some man coming after me may live. I spend my time, energy, thought, money, my very self in imparting this vision to the boys. They see it, live it, and my life, weak and faulty, is reincarnated in them stronger, finer, greater than I have ever dared to be,—and surely that is worth while."

"A boy must be trusted if he is to become trustworthy."