

Rotary Luncheon

REV. S. H. SOPER SPEAKS ON BOY LIFE IN CHINA.

At Thursday's meeting of the Rotary Club, Rev. S. H. Soper addressed the members, taking as his topic "Work among boys in China." Rotarian Herbert J. Russell acted as Chairman, and the guests included Rev. Dr. Fenwick, Mr. Thos. Soper, Mr. Geo. Peters, Engineer Commander Howley, Mr. J. B. Martin, Bell Island and Mr. Keyteber of New York.

Rev. Mr. Soper's address is as follows:

Boy life in China is the same as boy life in any other land, for the real boy, the elemental boy, is a constant quantity, a universal element. He is not confined to time nor race. Education and environment are more influential with him than anything he may inherit. Two boys, one Chinese and one Anglo-Saxon, having equal intelligence co-efficients, if exchanged at infancy and placed in homes of approximately the same social status, would lose many of the traits that we now consider racial. The Anglo-Saxon boy would learn the Chinese language and customs. The mannerism and culture of his adopted home would become part and parcel of his life. Conversely, the Chinese boy would learn English and English customs. He would, for instance, know nothing of Buddhism or how to use chop sticks. If you were to send him at the age of fifteen to China, he would have to begin at the very beginning to learn the Chinese language; and the Chinese boy would have to begin at the rudiments of the English language, if brought here. The same thing is true of moral and ethical values; these are not inherited but acquired. The worker with boys is ever face to face with this fact, that the boy is a very integral part of the society in which he finds himself, through no choice of his own. If the environment is of a high moral tone based on rational conceptions of life and service, it is very possible that the boy will imbibe these ideas and ideals naturally; if, on the other hand, the moral atmosphere in which the boy breathes is tainted, if the actions of his elders are immoral, or even non-moral, then the boy develops warped conceptions of life and becomes a problem to those people who have finer and higher ideals than his own.

I am sure you will agree with me that the tremendous impact of an unfavorable environment is one of our great problems in dealing with boys. If that is so here, it is increased to a great degree in a land where the boy has no rights, where the height of virtue is attained by unquestioning obedience to his elders, whether they be worthy of it or otherwise.

The first agency to approach the task of finding out what constituted a real normal life of development for a boy was the Christian Church in all lands, under all conditions, in face of strange customs, and in every language of the globe, she has made beginnings. Because she is so close to the everyday life of the boy, she is the first to admit the difficulties; she realizes most keenly the enormity of the task. I am sure that any experiment made by any branch of the Church, in any quarter of the globe, looking to a better understanding of boy life, will be of interest to Rotarians. With that sublime daring that has characterized the Christian Church, ever since she set out to establish the kingdom of God on earth, the branch of the church to which I belong has founded a mission in the most inaccessible part of the globe. Twelve thousand miles across the Pacific from where we are meeting to-day, past mountain ranges and roaring cataracts, where river floods rise fifty feet over night in a land ravaged by civil war and bandit hordes to a nation within a nation, in an area larger than France, with fifty million people in one province, in a civilization that has existed for forty centuries, costing tremendous expenditures of treasure, we have made an experiment in boys' work.

Just ten years ago, we opened our school in the city of Jenschow. To-day boys who have come through the school are scattered all over the province, they occupy positions in the

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customs, the Chinese post office, in Government schools. Teachers, preachers and hospital assistants, dental assistants, farmers and artisans are included in the number. A study of the personnel of the workers in the town and of the teaching staff of the Chinese schools showed us that there was a distinct cleavage in Chinese society. The teacher and scholar was superior to the farmer and artisan. This sense of superiority was not based on the possession of any native capacity, but on the established conception that the order Si, Lung, Kung, Shang; Scholar, Farmer, Artisan and Merchant was unalterable. No student ought to be expected to do manual labour—better a long gown and long fingernails, evidencing the marks of the scholar, than large rewards from honest toil. This constituted one of the unhealthy attitudes to life that the school had to rectify. We found our students taking their exercise in a most sedate and gentle manner; all the normal physical activities were inhibited, and from our standpoint, there was a most unhealthy attitude to life. When the school announced that practical farming was part of the regular curriculum, boys and teachers were astonished beyond measure. It was with considerable trepidation that we lined up our first class on the farm. The boys came; they were the long gowns of the student; they sported the long fingernails. These were the insignia of the world of the toiler. The establishment of the Republic three years before by no means abolished the idea that the student was exempt from manual labour. Our things soon came to a head. A secret society was formed, a hunger strike proclaimed, and field work was tabooed. Kindness and co-operation in the hard work of digging and weeding on the part of two members of the teaching staff helped us to win out. To-day, the son of the rich man, poor man, beggar man, all do farm work. Many of the boys have seen that they are of more use to society as good farmers than as inferior teachers, and have gone back to carry out, on their farms, lessons they have learned in the school garden. Besides farming, we have wood working, net making, weaving, rattan and bamboo furniture-making and photography. The school has a regular social service department running a night school for underprivileged boys of the town; the religious activities of the school, including a weekly meeting for discussion of religious and social matters, is conducted by the boys; the senior boys attend a normal group in Sunday school methods, and take charge of the teaching period in the Junior Sunday School. A self-government society has been formed and a mayor and councillors are elected each term. The boys take their duties seriously and are receiving a training in democracy that will be of real value. A study of the

causes leading to these results, produced in one generation with boys from non-Christian homes, is of considerable interest.

The first fundamental fact that we face is that modern methods of intelligence testing, by such methods as the Binet Simon or the Stanford revision of the tests, have not demonstrated any inferiority in Chinese mentality. The native capacities of the race are of a high order. The question then naturally arises, if that be so, why is China so backward in the family of nations as she is to-day. The answer to my mind is two fold: first, the reason for China's lagging behind in the march of the nations, is to be found in the unfortunate assumption on the part of the official classes or educated classes that education and industry are divorced; while with us, true education has been the servant of the people, and discoveries in what we were pleased to term pure science, or pure mathematics, on the part of scholars were productive of inventions that increased the productivity of the worker. The second fact I submit for what it is worth. It is open to question in some quarters. To me it is more potent than the former; that is, that Christianity, teaching an supreme intelligent, all-wise, all-loving God, came God has rid the human mind of any doubt that the universe presents a rational system, corresponding to the rationality of the human mind. The mind of man, convinced that there is an order in the world established by a beneficent mind, is stimulated to ascertain the nature and action of these laws, and to appropriate them for the bettering of his own condition, whereas the primitive Chinese thought fills the earth, the sea, the sky, the heavens, sun, moon and stars with warring spirits; these spirits to be avoided as far as possible, and to be placated, if angry. Only the emperor could approach Shang Di, the supreme mind. The people worshipped a bewildering pantheon of deified sages, natural forces, and ancestors. The sheer native intelligence of the race, their God given native capacities have enabled them to produce with no known intercourse with western nations salt wells a mile deep, the harnessing of natural gas wells, a flaxing mill, rotation of crops, gunpowder, the use of the wheel, printing by movable blocks, a steam cooker, a compartment boat, a balanced rudder, the mariners compass, a varnish impervious to boiling water and a host of food preparations that have enabled the race to subsist self contained and independent longer than any other single aggregation of humans. To help China overcome the handicap caused by the divorce of education and industry, to show her a sane healthy view of the world, the choicest portion of which has been assigned to her, are our reasons for doing boys' work in that far off portion of the globe.

Clearing the ground of false conceptions is one of the first essentials of progress. To understand the mind of the Chinese boy, we have to understand what conceptions are in the minds of his parents and what their wishes for him are. The Chinese mother knows how to capture the soul of the child. The visit to the city-god temple is an event in the boy's life; it is a dress occasion, and the Chinese boy is no more adverse to the influence of new and pleasing clothes than is his western cousin. The mother cannot enunciate the principles on which she is working, but she knows as well as does the psychologist that actions resulting in satisfying experiences tend to be repeated, and dissatisfying experiences tend to be discontinued, so she takes with her, in a copious pocket, a sesame-seed candy or a piece of succulent sugar cane, so dear to the boy's heart; then, mat in front of the idol, she rewards him with a delicious morsel. Then she takes him around the inside court of the temple, and shows him the wheel of transmigration; she shows him the diabolical master of the wheel; she tells him that the filial son is sure to come out in a next world as an official, the unfaithful son will come out a bird, a reptile, or a beast. And there, portrayed before him is the wheel, and the actual transmigration taking place. Then she takes him to the torture chambers, where the unfilial are seen in eternal punishment, being torn asunder, flayed alive, roasted, crucified, dacing on burning plates, scalded in boiling oil. All this she associates with the ultimate things of life; beyond this there is no order, no rationality. In the home, the necromancer is the man of power. The boy sees him called on all important occasions; the words of Confucius, the great sage, are incorporated with the gibberings of the soothsayer; the lines on a tortoise shell, the markings on the entrails of a chicken, lucky and unlucky stars, the white tiger, all green dragons are currents of power running through the earth. All these are in control of the necromancer and geomancer, and the boy is taught that the gods in the temple, the master of the wheel, the influences of wind and water, can be tugged and offset by cunningly opposing them with counter forces. His allegiance to these has been purchased by appeal to his terror of the dark, peopled with vampires and disembodied

spirits. To attack these is to attack his mother and father and the principal men of the district. To express disbelief in them is to show oneself ignorant of a great mass of information that has been handed down to his family from past ages and is to call down on one the scorn of the boy who is loyal to his family and community and elders. Then again, the ground of the boy's mind is occupied with the idea that the sacred order of scholar, farmer, artisan, and merchant ever remains, and it is only necessary to attain to the dignity of the scholar to be forever rid of the drudgery of labour. How lead him to see that honest work might be the pathway to scholarship, and in the process teach him the duty scholarship owed to labour was no small task. We could at least be as wise as the boy's mother, we could apply the satisfaction with the experience of labour and depend on the tendency of satisfactory bonds to establish themselves. So we saw that all income from the sale of farm products was paid in cash to the boys' savings account. It worked, there were no more hunger strikes. In working for a very considerable savings account the boy was gaining full vigorous physical exercise, he was gaining confidence in himself. He planted the seed, he harvested his crop, he marketed his product, he handled his money, he was given the advice of his teacher in spending it, he was independent in supplying himself with books or clothes purchased out of his own earnings, he learned a lot of practical botany that helped him in his examinations; chemistry ceased to become a lot of names and formula to be memorized, he saw it working in the soil and the feeding of his plants. He was admitted to the realm of law and order in the universe; it only meant a suggestion that behind the very well established laws of chemistry there must be an orderly mind, else what is the origin of these things, how could the farmer and the artisan will begin to invent means for the alleviation of many of the hardships of life and an increase in earning power, a raising of the standards of living and the consequent spread of education and reduction of illiteracy.

But there is another side of the boy's life that must be considered and that is his relationship to the larger group, the society of which it is to spend his life. For weal or woe China is a democracy, and a democracy she will remain. When the boy passes out from the school he enters a society that is struggling to organize itself on democratic lines. The great sage Confucius taught that the well being of the people depended on the integrity of the ruler. To-day the teaching of the sage is ignored and the positions are sought and exploited for private ends. So insidious and widespread is the system that no one entering public life can escape its influence. No amount of teaching of ethical or social principles will take the place of learning by doing. Consequently the school life is organized around this principle: the boy learns of the need of honesty in business because he is a working partner in the profit sharing system used on the farm and in the shop; he learns to have orderly conceptions of the universe by his studies, but he must learn also that the organization of the school life is the only preparation for a larger life in society in order that the knowledge gained in the school may be transferred to conditions he will meet after his leaving the school. We have organized a students' self-governed society. This society started in the organization of the farm work, it is gradually extending to sports and studies. A boys' court has been set up in which judges and officers are appointed by the boys, the decisions of the court are final. A board of control is elected and the school is modeled after that of a well organized town.

It is a far call from one school thus organized in a population of a million to a reorganization of the millions of China, but it is only one of a great number of schools. In Sze Chuen alone there are twenty thousand students of all grades under Christian instruction. It is in such schools as I have tried to picture here to-day that the Chinese people are to learn to meet the new world conditions that are forced on them over night. The church at home is allowing her representatives to build foundations that are solidly laid in the boy life of China, and the day will come when even in far distant Sze Chuen Rotary will line up as it lined up here with all real attempts for the establishing of a better world order for the coming generation. Let us continue to stimulate each other till we have established national purity and international good will, the very kingdom of God on earth.

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