

Concerning Boys

COMMUNITY IDEALS AND BOY LIFE

I.—UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES.

By J. W. Storey.

The world war made it necessary for people, churches, organizations and governments to work together for a common purpose, and it has forced back upon the Canadian people the persistent question: "If a co-operative programme is essential in the time of war, why is it not essential in the time of peace, if we are to bring about a better world and a better community in which to live, work and play?"

The war has awakened a spirit of unselfishness, and organizations are determined to undertake concrete and definite tasks which will hasten the day when the world will indeed be safe for democracy. They want to make a "motor reaction to the world challenge."

Individuals as well as organizations have discovered the futility of each organization in the community building up its own organization and programme, unrelated and without a joint comprehensive conception of the community wide needs. The lack of this in the past has meant duplication and overlapping, as well as entirely overlooking certain community needs.

There is also an increasing conviction on the part of character-building organizations that a programme of activities is not sufficient, that along with that programme there must be a consistent as well as persistent effort to remove the causes of evil affecting character, individually and collectively. For too long a time have organizations been salving their consciences by promoting a multiplicity of activities which have been good in themselves but could not, by themselves, entirely eliminate the causes of evil which handicapped the larger development of character. In other words, we have been planting seeds of activity only to see them dwarfed by the weeds and poison vines we have failed to tear up. Therefore, all true community work should include in its programme such practical steps towards the elimination of causes of evil as may be in harmony with its other objects and not merely involve the alleviation of results of evil.

The community programme recognizes that the social, economic and religious problems of the day are intricately involved in the boy problem, and that any attempt to lay siege to the citadel of boyhood in a statesmanlike way must take cognizance of these factors. To give ideals and spiritual impetus to individual boys is good; to help direct and spiritualize the social forces in addition is better. Any community promoting community work is under obligation to conduct a programme of activities which is comprehensive enough to provide for the physical, educational, social and spiritual needs of the boy. It is likewise under obligation to discover the causes of misery and wrong as they affect the boy, and help call into existence such forces as will hasten their elimination. The causes are many and cannot be considered here. One characteristic is common to them all. Much if not most of the evil and suffering involved is preventable.

If you put your hand to the boy and girl problem in a constructive, comprehensive manner, you at once touch the centre from which radiate the threads that are woven and interwoven into the very woof and warp of the social fabric; for the adolescent boy is not an isolated individual, but an inseparable part of the family and society. You cannot in any large way help or harm one without helping or harming the other. Infancy, childhood, parenthood, have all contributed to the physical, intellectual and spiritual life. To disregard

these factors is a serious error, for they are the foundation upon which character is built.

Without relaxing our efforts in dealing directly with the adolescent boy we soon discover that we have become vitally concerned and interested in his parents and his home, his school and church, his play and recreation, his mental and physical endowment, and the preparation he is now receiving for the critical stages that are ahead of him. We want, if possible, to improve our chances of helping him actively when he is at the susceptible period of life. We wish to touch the stream of life more nearly at its source.

Community work, in other words, is teaching us to look upon the life of the community as a whole. It asks us to become intelligent concerning the conditions surrounding child life and the laws governing its development. We are obliged to become students of the social problems of our own time.

After all is said and done, the home, church, school and municipality are the agencies which eventually must meet the needs of the boy life of given communities, if they are to be met in a constructive and comprehensive way.

(Next article will deal with the above agencies).

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