

The Boy Problem

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THE BOY PROBLEM VS. THE GIRL PROBLEM.

Frequently I am asked why emphasize the boy problem and say nothing about the girl problem? The question is quite in order. I think I am safe in saying, however, that many of the principles laid down by writers and speakers, and confirmed by observation and experience, are equally applicable to boys and girls. Of course they are not all applicable, nor are they applicable in the same way. On the other hand there is a sense in which the boy problem differs in degree at least from the girl problem, and is the more acute and immediate. It differs in the fact that the boy responds more intensely to impulse, is swayed by stronger passions and is less restrained by the influence of the Church and home, and to this extent his problem is the more urgent. Moreover, I am not so sure but that a solution of the boy problem will make for a solution of the girl problem inasmuch as a strong, heroic type of boyhood exerts a powerful influence upon the girl of similar age. And so we are coming more and more to believe that the holding of the boy for Christ and the Church and training him for world-wide service, is the most potential work in which the Church of the twentieth century may engage.

THE URGENCY OF THE PROBLEM.

We have said that the solution of the problem is urgent. This cannot be emphasized too strongly, and for these reasons:

1. The adolescent period, that period, say from twelve to twenty-one years of age, is the time of greatest responsiveness to moral and religious ideas.

2. It is therefore the time of most frequent conversions. Dr. G. Stanley Hall, in his "Psychology of Adolescence," gives a table showing the ages at which 4,654 boys and young men were converted, as follows:

Age.	Number.	Age.	Number.
6.....	6	18.....	442
7.....	17	19.....	381
8.....	32	20.....	329
9.....	50	21.....	245
10.....	90	22.....	139
11.....	101	23.....	136
12.....	193	24.....	68
13.....	190	25.....	59
14.....	284	26.....	33
15.....	336	27.....	27
16.....	448	28.....	18
17.....	439	—

From the tests that I have made at Institutes from time to time, the above figures showing the conversion age to be largely from 14 to 20 years have been confirmed. I am of the opinion, however, that as the laws of human growth are studied and applied, this period will gradually fall until it extends from 12 to 18 years of age.

3. It is the "savage" and "semi-criminal" age. Surely it is a paradox that a boy should manifest at the one and the same time the strongest criminal tendencies and the greatest responsiveness to religious impressions. But this is true. The two sets of forces are engaged in deadly conflict. The outcome will depend upon the nature of the influences that are brought to bear upon him at this time.

4. It is the period of will-training and character-formation, when all the forces at our command should be utilized, not to break and destroy the will, nor even to repress the enthusiasms, but to con-

trol and direct them along the lines that make for the largest life.

And so the problem of the boy is urgent.

THE BOY PROBLEM VS. THE LEADER PROBLEM.

I sometimes ask is it the boy problem after all, or is it rather the leader problem? The Young Men's Christian Association says the latter. Has it answered rightly? A principal of one of Toronto's Boys' Industrial Schools, who has had to crack some "hard nuts" in his time, declared a few weeks ago that he had never seen a "bad" boy. He certainly ought to know. He is wrong or right? It is a question of definition. If "bad" means the specific violation of criminal and moral law by a single act, then he is wrong. But if it means, as I suspect it does in the mind of the principal, a continuously and deliberately perverse attitude toward the good—if it be a condition and not simply an act—then it may be that the principal is right. Certainly most boys have in them the "potential" good, and it is up to someone, and we may call that someone a "leader," to learn the law of the



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boy and to lead out and develop the potential to the full. And so we say that the problem is the leader problem rather than the boy problem.

IF POSSIBLE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

A it be the leader problem, then upon the Church is the task of educating and training the leaders for work in this department. The first essential bit of knowledge that the leader should possess is the laws of growth through which the boy seeks to express himself. This is as necessary as it that one should know the laws of bridge-building before attempting to construct a bridge. Let me illustrate. I take a contract for the building of a bridge. The beams, planks, cement, steel, bolts, spikes, etc., are all brought to the river's edge, but I remember, alas, I do not know one "how." Never mind; that makes no matter. I put the material together some way. The job is finished. The tracks are laid. The construction train comes along, and crash, down goes the bridge, train, human life and all to destruction and death. Was it a bridge problem, or was it a contractor problem? Who was the criminal, the engine-

driver or the builder? And so I stand as a teacher or leader before a boy of fourteen to lead him up to perfect manhood. Here are the raw materials—physical life, throbbing almost to the bursting point, emotions, enthusiasm, dreams and ideals, social instinct, intellectual possibilities, moral and religious yearnings. Shall I, knowing nothing of the laws of manhood building, accept the contract and proceed to construction operations? Dare I do such a thing? Or shall I study the laws of boyhood and learn to shape these raw materials might be moulded and fashioned and grooved and chiselled and put together and built up into the symmetry and beauty of a noble character? Is not the boy problem a leader problem after all, the leader being perchance a parent or a superintendent, or a pastor or a teacher?

SOME HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT.

In closing let me ask a few questions as to how you, Sunday School teacher, are seeking to keep fourteen-year-old Joe in the school and to save him for Christ and for service.

1. Have you attempted to bring Joe's chums into the Sunday School or to find him chums among those who are already there?

2. Have you some kind of boys' organization in the school, a church into which Joe might nicely fit as a member or perchance as an officer?

3. Have you tried to organize Joe and his friends into some kind of an athletic society?

4. Have you done anything to give him the privilege of gymnasium work or of manual training?

5. What do you know about Joe's course of reading?

6. Have you made his hobby of gathering picture post cards your hobby meanwhile?

7. If Joe is not already in the Kingdom, what efforts are you making to lead him to Christ?

8. If he is already in the Church, what regular and continuous work are you doing with him in order to develop him?

9. How would it do to have Joe and the other Christian members of the class lead the rest into the Kingdom?

10. Have you thought that Joe might be especially interested in the lives of the modern missionary heroes?

11. To what extent does your personality play a part in the moulding of Joe's character and does your comradeship with him inspire confidence, trust and respect?

12. Do you know that this is the age that Joe is naturally critical of your dress, manner, general demeanor, moral conduct, etc., and that he is easily influenced thereby?

13. How many what conditions do you see about the week, and how do you propose to interest him in the school during the hot summer days?

14. Do you know Joe's dreams and ambitions, and to what extent are you controlling and directing them so as to make for the largest and best life?

15. Are you seeking to give Joe a vision of the world's needs and to train him for world-wide service?

If Joe's teacher is finding a way into his heart, these questions can be readily answered.

The work of the Sunday School is to bring to perfection and fruition the possibilities of the boy by meeting his every need and by utilizing his every motive force in ways that wisdom and prayer and human knowledge and the Holy Spirit may direct. This is its greatest work. And the work of the Sunday School is the greatest work of the Church.