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## The Problem of the Older Boys

Perhaps, of all the instincts, the most important is imitation. As Professor Baldwin says, "the man who is fit for social life must be born to learn. The great method of all his learning is imitation."

Imagine a child incapable of imitation. Could it ever learn to speak? A deaf boy remains dumb, not because his organs of speech are defective, but because he hears nothing to imitate. When his teacher excites his capacity to imitate by placing the boy's hand on his throat, the boy begins to make sounds like speech and continues to improve till he can make himself understood. The blind cannot paint, though the muscles of the hand may be ever so sensitive. In the *Jungle Book*, Kipling pictures the effects of imitation in Mowgli. In speed, in endurance, in animal wisdom, he far excels other boys, but how different in other respects.

The imitative instinct first appears in the last half of the first year and continues to grow in strength, though differing in its object, until the youth is passing into a man. Through it we learn to talk, to write, to dress, the greater moralities, as well as the minor or manners. "During childhood life is largely determined by heredity and imitation." We inherit our environment of customs, ideas, sentiments, as well as our dispositions or biases. This environment we make our own by imitation. A boy becomes a criminal largely through association with actual or possible criminals.

When we speak of a boy's environment, we mean more than the stones and sticks that surround him. These are of trifling importance. The environment that he imitates is personal—the persons whom he knows in the flesh, in biography, in fiction. By turns he is his father, his teacher, David slaying Goliath, Robinson Crusoe.

What can the Sunday School do in this regard? It cannot control the boy's life; for it brings him into a good environment for but one hour in one hundred and sixty-eight. If the home and the public school be hostile, it can do little. It forms such a small part of his environment. Still the teacher who meets his class outside of school and who makes much of his time in

school, may do something. He can present in story as well as in person examples, not only worthy of the child's imitation, but capable of attracting his interest.

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### THE PROBLEM OF THE OLDER BOYS

The problem of the older boys is always with us, and as the extreme importance of the period of adolescence is becoming better understood, is more and more eagerly discussed. The two brief papers that follow, and which were sent at the request of the editor, give, each from its own standpoint, valuable and practical suggestions on this living question:

#### HOW TO MAKE THE LARGER BOYS FEEL AT HOME IN THE SABBATH SCHOOL

By Rev. E. A. Mackenzie, B.A., B.D.

One does not teach a class of larger boys very long without discovering that the work has difficulties peculiar to itself.

There is however no magic secret of success. The result will always be in proportion to the time and pains expended. If you know of a class of young men that is steadily dwindling, you may, as a rule, safely conclude that the teacher, through some reason or other, is not giving enough time and thought and planning to the work. On the other hand, if the class be large and growing and enthusiastic, it is simply because the teacher thinks it worth while to work for results. Just as the farmer who works with stony and difficult soil must rise early and work late and toil earnestly through all the day if he wants to get a fair crop, so the teacher of the larger boys must be willing to spend and be spent.

This is the first and chiefest thing to remember. With a class of younger children the truth of this statement may not be so apparent. They will likely come every Sabbath, just because they are sent; but the larger boys, who have the ordering of their own ways pretty much in their own hands, are held and helped only by the teacher who is willing to give of his best.

It must also be remembered that young manhood is a period of intellectual awakening. The small boy who sat in the class and