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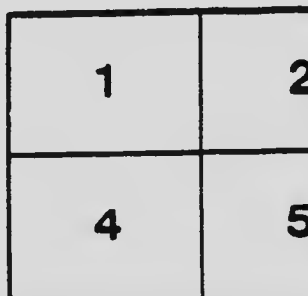
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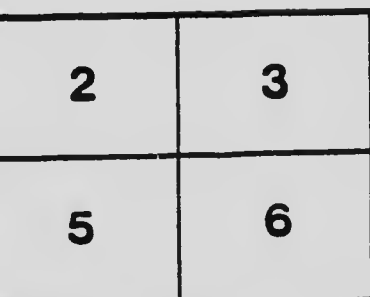
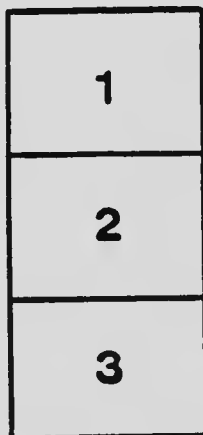
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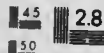
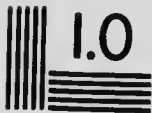
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The Church and The Boy



SERMON

BY

REV. J. K. UNSWORTH,

First Congregational Church,
Hamilton.

JANUARY 11, 1903.



“Is it well with the child?”

2 Kings iv. 26.

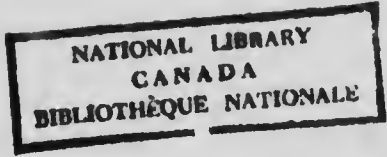


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THE CHURCH AND THE BOY

Sermon by Rev. J. K. Unsworth

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, HAMILTON

JANUARY 11, 1903

"Is it well with the child?"--2 Kings iv. 26.

IS it well with the child?" The child was a boy. "Is it well with my boy?" That was the question that the woman of Shunem kept asking herself that long anxious forenoon, as she bent over her pain-stricken son, and it is the question every mother asks as she sees her baby lad growing into boyhood and manhood. It was the question that Elisha, the man of God and spokesman of the Church of that time, sent out from his sympathetic heart, and it is a question that the modern Church may well ask in grave concern about the boys of her congregations, the boys of the city, of our nation, yea, of the world—Is it well with the boys? I would raise that question this morning. The question is already raised; the boy himself is very much in evidence. The hosts of boys at the home tables, in the schools and on the streets make a clamorous appeal to the Christian heart, Is it, is it well with us boys?

I desire to speak of the boy during adolescence, the years from twelve to seventeen. For these are the fateful years which make destiny. What manner of man he will be depends upon what manner of boy he is during this momentous period.

The period of adolescence is the time of change. "By fifteen the brain stops growing, the large arteries increase one-third, the temperature rises one degree, the reproductive organs have fr actioned, the voice deepens and the stature grows by leaps and bounds." These are the physical signs that the boy is passing from childhood to manhood. Within the nature of

this dependent child is being formed an independent man. A new world is dawning on him, fresh forces are rising mightily in him, unknown sensations are beating in his unaccustomed soul, and to adjust himself to the change is the mighty problem before the boy. The old bottles of childhood will not hold the new wine of manhood; he must find new wineskins. Just behind him lies the level plain of childhood, a uniform time of dependence, imitation and orderly progression. Before him, up yonder somewhere, is the plateau of manhood, Eldorado of his dreamings. The ascent from plain to plateau is broken, storm-beaten, and the climbing is perilous.

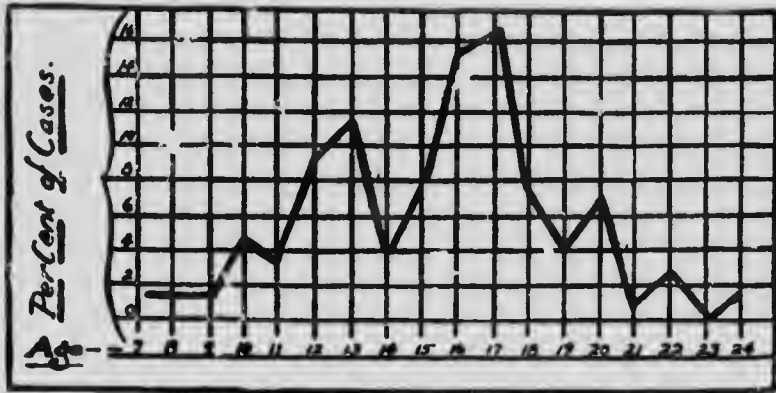
These changes, physical and psychical, make this a trying time for all concerned. The boy is irregular, uncertain, erratic. It is a trying time for the parents. The mother can scarcely believe that this creature, so reserved, changeable, so boisterous or bashful, is her nice little lad of two years since. He who clung to her apron-strings is withdrawing himself into an enigmatic reserve. The father is surprised at the docile child who has lately become assertive, and even at times defiant. He has outgrown both coat and conduct, and his childish niceness has departed with his knickerbockers. It is also a trying time for the boy. The fact is, the boy does not understand himself. He is neither child nor man. It is the volcanic period of life, and his child-nature is being heaved and hurled by eruptions. Mighty forces of nascent manhood are tugging like wild horses at the inexperienced hands of his immature will. He has a big contract on hand.

Let us give then our best consideration to the boy from twelve to seventeen: let us not add to his difficulties at this time by our impatience or ignorance. The claim of the boy upon his parents is greater now than at any other period of his life, greater even than in babyhood. In babyhood a competent nurse can be obtained for ten dollars a week, who will care for the infant as skillfully as an experienced mother. But no money can buy and no proxy can give such aid as wise and tender parents can minister to their own boy-man. And great, too, is the boy's claim upon the Sunday school. The boy of this age is the vexation of the superintendent and the trial of the teacher. Let not the Sunday school worker give him up until every resource of tact and patience has been exhausted.

Give him time, give him tether. Hold these years and you hold him for life, though will thank you before he is twenty-five.

There are two features of adolescence which call for special action on the part of the home and of the Church.

Adolescence is the *period of crisis*. During these years the psychic forces seem to come to a focus: when the crisis is religious, we call it conversion. Conversions cluster about this period, and number in these five years more than in any other fifteen. Look at this diagram:



This diagram, prepared by Dr. George A. Coe, and published in his book on "The Spiritual Life," is reproduced by D. Schauffler in the *Sunday School Times*. It shows how high is the percentage of conversions during the period of crisis. Men are converted to God at twenty-one and thirty and fifty years of age, but they are few compared to those who come to decision during this converting time.

It would seem then the duty of elder Christians to very tenderly watch these movements and to give aid at the birth-hours of the man-soul. The Episcopal churches bring their young people to confirmation at this time: the annual revival meetings of Methodism gave a religious direction to the crisis and garnered successive companies of the young; and the growing and altogether desirable practice of a Decision Day in the Sunday school will help many to come to a right decision. But whatever method be followed, parents and Church should be solicitous that their young

people should at this age, if not before, give themselves to God.

There is naturally raised just here, the relation of this period of disturbance to earlier Christian training and to a child's profession of Christian faith. As a believer in early piety, in boys of eight and ten years being true Christians and eligible for Church membership; and further, in children nurtured in the admonition of the Lord never knowing the beginnings of their loving faith in Christ, I must seriously consider the entrance of the young Christian upon this troublous time. Concerning this it may be said that the eruptive time comes both to the lad Christian as well as to the lad thoughtless. He begins to criticise himself and all things. Hitherto his religion has been based on imitation and taken on authority. He has trustfully accepted the dictum and religious forms of parent and Church, and nourished himself in their atmosphere of faith. But now rushes on the era of questioning, and authority and beliefs and ceremonies, yea, and his own soul-life are impaled on an interrogation mark. Along with this comes the natural breaking away from the proprieties of child-life, its habits of Bible reading, Sunday school and church attendance, its demure and feminine attitude towards the established order of things. This movement, weak or strong as it may be, is inevitable. It is the growing man within the boy seeking the man's footing for the man's faith.

The Christian boy will come safely through into Christian manhood if, for one thing, the habits of his religious life have been strengthened in him as a child. An intelligent acquaintance with the Bible, the practice of prayer and attachment to the Christian services, form a strong boat to carry the soul through the surf. Another aid is a warm, friendly atmosphere of older Christians. At this time we should cease to be exacting and discount any sceptical talk, and be lenient with aberrations of conduct. A benediction on the man or woman who will take time to explain and affectionately assist in the difficulties of this period, and assure the troubled one that the Saviour of his childhood is his Saviour still.

The second striking feature of adolescence is the *development of the social instinct*. Fourteen-year-old is a social animal. They run in flocks and droves, they

are found in groups, they organize themselves in teams and clubs. Now is the supremacy of the "gang" passion. The boy is keen for company, and the company of boys. He has interest no longer in playing with his little sisters, and he calls his younger brothers "kids"; but to the boys of his own age and sort he runs as quickly as globules of quicksilver to each other. The comparative ease with which the Boys' Department of our Y. M. C. A. was supplied with members until, from lack of accommodation, the Secretary is about to close the door to new members, is an illustration of the social spirit at this age. Left to himself the boy will spontaneously organize. Dr. Forbush quotes Dr. Henry D. Sheldon, who found that out of ten hundred and thirty-four boys between ten and sixteen years from whom he received responses, eight hundred and fifty-one were members of some club or other. Your boy is a "jiner."

Now this is normal, healthy. It is the expression of his growing sense of unity with the race. It is an upward step from the egoism of his dependent years. It is a legitimate hunger, for it is the "hunger of his unselfing." My friends, this legitimate masterful instinct brings before us the most pressing problem of youth, and, I will say, a question of the highest importance to the Christian Church. If boys are bound to associate with other boys, if their social hunger must be satisfied, the Christian Church should ponder questions such as these: Shall they find good company or bad? Shall they meet in places helpful or harmful? Shall their association be directed to higher or drift to lower ends? These interrogations suggest one of the most important issues before the Church to-day, but one before which the Church has been lamentably inactive.

The best boys' club-room is the home. Better dedicate your best parlor to a company of young ruffians, among whom your own boy is pre-eminent, than that they dedicate the street corner or some deserted shed or hay-loft to their doubtful practices. But your boy does not want the parlor; he would thank you more for attic or basement in which he and his chums may carry out their secret but usually harmless plans. At any rate, under the aegis of home influence, let the inevitable boys' club be organized. It may disorganize housekeeping somewhat, and once in a while induce

headache, but mothers will sacrifice considerable for the real good of their sons.

Every church should have a boys' club of some sort, and some should have several. The almost universal neglect of the boy is incredible. Almost every section of the congregation has been entered to, but the great army of big boys has ranged at their sweet will. The most difficult, but perhaps most important, class, have been "passed by on the other side."

Every club of boys should be framed to the keel of physical activity. Action, not contemplation, is the key-note; they must *do* something. Let boys spontaneously organize, and eighty per cent. will be devoted to physical activity. He's a restless, energetic creature, this colt of ours, and whether by military drill or gymnastic work, by manual training or play, keep him busy, hands and feet, body and brain. I submit that the ordinary Junior Endeavor Society can never include the average boy of fourteen. It is too quiet. It is also too introspective. The boy is expected to express in prayer and testimony feelings which he is not sure he has, and around which, if he were sure of them, he would at this age throw a triple steel of reserve. We cannot hold a boy by a fragment of his nature, but through the main movements, and this fourteen-year-old is mainly an engine of energy, who looks not in upon himself, but out upon an intoxicatingly lively world.

Nor is the Sunday school meeting the need. The boys' class of this age—and, alas, they are too small and too few—should not be expected to be a limp company of patient auditors, but should be directed towards Bible study and Christian living by methods suited to their active natures. The Sunday school is sadly in need of a pedagogy for the adolescent boy.

I plead that the best wisdom of the Church be given to the boy problem. I long that every boys' club, whether in home, or shed, or church, or Y. M. C. A., should be directed on lines not only Christian in spirit, but also divine in methods, divine because suited to the nature God has given them. Is there no call to look after the boy? *Is it well with the boy?* The fearful leakage from the Sunday school at the age of fifteen, the scarcity of boys in church services, the droves running the streets at late hours, the growing practice of cigarette smoking and reading of the

"detective story," the irreverence lifting itself against parent and law, the numbers trailed before the magistrate's bench (sixty-four in our own city last year), the secret clubs for useless or evil purposes, haunts of vice frequented by boys from twelve to fifteen, all these aspects of the boy question, so menacing to them and to all society; these, as well as a study of the boy-nature, cry aloud to us seniors of Christian faith and of good morals to set ourselves to their redemption.

If any man would make his life tell, let him be a leader of boys; let him gather boys of a dozen homes to meet in home or church, or boys of the street into church or club-room; let him, by energy, tact and patience infinite, relying on the hero-worship in the boy, lead them in all good things, until he has tided them over this formative, erratic period of their life into Christian young manhood. Wanted, one hundred such men in Hamilton, and none but boy-lovers need apply.

The boys of to-day are the men of to-morrow. Would we have a democracy that is pure, a Church that is militant, a home that is holy, save the boy.

NOTE—In the preparation of this sermon I have been greatly helped by the fine book of Dr. Byron Forbush, on "The Boy Problem." Other books on the general subject are: "The Child," by A. F. Chamberlain; "The Spiritual Life," George A. Coe; "Bible School Pedagogy," A. H. McKinney; "What a Boy Ought to Know," Sylvanus Stall. Most of these will shortly be placed in our Public Library.





