

# THE BOY AND SOCIETY

Continued from page 1.

honest boys. They dared each other to make the hole larger. One of the worst whippings I ever enjoyed previous to the age of ten years, was for removing a few bricks to make the hole large enough to let me crawl in in search of certain copper cents and slate pencils that tradition said had been dropped through cracks in the floor by scholars of by-gone generations. In the days before they lathed and plastered this building, boys had bored through the brick walls with jack knives, doing the work behind the desk with one hand while studying the geography lesson with the other. Under the wear and tear of the student body that school building deteriorated rapidly. In twenty-five years it was replaced by another. During the quarter century it stood it was a disgrace to the district that paid for it, to the workmen who built it, to the trustees who let it decay and the boys who whittled it down. I note in passing that the desks on the girls' side were not much whittled, but they were elaborately penciled.

The outhouse of this school and of nearly every other school in nearby rural districts, were a standing disgrace to the people. That ours might not remain a standing disgrace, a party of boys at a noon recess, by means of rails and other mechanical aids, tipped it over, thus rendering it in a measure innocuous. Though then under the age of ten years I had the honor of assisting at this co-operative razing, as well as a share in the wholesale whipping that followed. Our school board decided that inasmuch as the student body had thus destroyed public property they might be fittingly punished by going without an outhouse. So the structure lay prone in its dishonor for the space of about six months, before public opinion was aroused to re-erecting it.

In bleak weather the internal heat of the school building decreased directly as the square of the distance from the box stove in the center of the room. When very cold, children were permitted to keep pans of coals beneath their desks or to go to the stove for thawing out. Quite the same conditions obtained in the building in which I first taught.

This neglect of school accommodations had the effect, as I now very clearly call to mind, of breeding contempt in the minds of the children for the school authorities. It bred rebellion against the powers that were, and those powers in return suppressed the rebellion by force. Corporal punishment was in vogue in those days in that country.

It was also considered good business in those days to hire the lowest priced teacher. Teachers and would-be teachers would make application for a school, naming their price. Usually the lowest bidder

received the award. Our district once hired as low as \$16 per month, the teacher paying her board out of that amount. It is needless to say that the pedagogical trash picked up under such a peanut policy of finance, was provocative of insubordination in the school. No self respecting boy is going to show respect for a teacher in whose thin mantle of fitness he can plainly see large loopholes. In very self defense he must be a rebel. Two teachers in the list of my childhood years I remember with thankfulness and high esteem. They were earnest, honest, reasonably well educated people. Under them study, to which I was not naturally averse, was a delight and the desire for insubordination was wholly laid.

It is very helpful in studying the problem of how to handle boys, to remember with memory undimmed, how one felt and reasoned when he was a boy. The average man is quite unable, I think, to put himself in the boy's place. The thoughts and interests since boyhood have crowded wholly out of the world, the boy he once was. So that in dealing with a boy he is dealing only with his own twisted mental version of a boy, a kind of stunted man. As a matter of fact the average boy is more honest than the average man. He is living more nearly up to his ideal. The great trouble with the delinquent boy is that his ideal is out of plumb. And for this, the father—possibly also the grandfather—is chiefly responsible. Many a time in dealing with a young human torment in school, I have longed to lay the penalty upon his parental ancestor.

The attitude of a boy then, toward society—particularly toward that form of society in which he first moves as a conscious individual—namely the school—depends as I have indicated, chiefly on two factors, the society that sends him and the society that receives him, that is, the home and the school. If either or both are abnormal, his attitude will be oblique.

The school is what we make it. The home is what we find it. Therefore for purposes of immediate reform, the school is the more hopeful segment of society. We can have a helpful, wholesome, uplifting public school even though many of the homes from which the scholars come are of low quality. The American people in general bear taxation for school purposes more cheerfully than for any other. Many a man will pay a teacher to do for his boy what he would have neither grace nor grit to do himself. As a rule he wants his boy to be a better man than his father is. Therefore the position of a teacher is a most responsible one and the calling high. No one who is not a friend of children with enthusiasm for their welfare should ever attempt to fill a teacher's chair. Many a boy has been saved from bad parents by a good teacher. To be on good terms with one's scholars without lowering one's official dignity may be a problem. But it will not be if the teacher is thoroughly on fire with the desire to help him forward toward a moral and intellectual ideal. To such a teacher dignity and good fellowship go naturally hand in hand and, this spirit, no one is so quick to recognize and respect as is the normal, unsophisticated boy. Given a body of good teachers and a well equipped school plant, and the question of a boy's attitude toward school society, is pretty nearly solved.

Provided: That his father is a man fit to be the father of this boy; and that his mother has average mother sense.

This is to say that such a school will command the loyalty and respect of all boys who are not in some considerable degree delinquent. To find the source of delinquency in a boy one need rarely to look beyond the gate of his father's door.



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yard. How many fathers keep in good touch with their boys from little boyhood up? How many, naturally and of choice chum with them through the years of adolescence? Through the period of "storm and stress" as the Germans call it, that is between the ages of fourteen and twenty? We think we know our baby. We flatter ourselves that we see the exact course of reasoning going on in his little head. Have we taught him all he knows and does he not think about it as we do? Not wholly. In thinking we measure everything by our experiences thus far in life. Early experiences shape all after thinking. Your early experience were not those of your baby. Therefore his way of looking at things, even while under your sole care and keeping, is not exactly like yours. He is a little independent being with an individuality that must be respected the same as your individuality. You don't own him. You only have the duty of making a good man of him. As he goes out of the home to the school he is being taught more and more by others, so that by the age of fourteen your boy is in no sense as much a product of others' teaching as yours. At about this time you wake up to find a semi-stranger in your house—you do unless you have chummed with your boy from childhood up. Very rarely will a boy get away from a father who is filled with the idea that his most important life business is raising that boy. Boys do not usually walk deliberately away from close personal friends.

Keeping your boy in right relation to society, therefore is first, keeping yourself in right relation, and then, keeping a good grip on the boy.

After all this has been said there is yet in actual practice a residue to be counted with. Unfit people do raise children, always have done so, and probably—until the world grows perfectly logical or perfectly righteous—always will. What shall we do with the irreducible minimum that even good inspiring schools will not inspire?

An evil force has come into this problem or at least has tremendously grown since my boyhood school days. In those days no one with whom I came in contact had ever seen a cigarette. They were hardly known in America. A recent canvass of the Minneapolis schools disclosed the fact that a very large per cent of the school children from the fifth grade up used tobacco mostly in the form of cigarettes. The habit was infectious. Boys in groups would sneak off to vacant sheds or brush lots to smoke together. Without doubt Minneapolis is but a sample of all the large cities in this regard. When I remember that not a boy under 20 in our country school used tobacco; that about the same conditions obtained in our village high school, and that but few of the men in my university class had acquired this habit, I can vividly see with what speed we have degenerated in our attitude toward this pestilent habit.

I think I have full warrant for saying that trying to teach a cigarette smoking boy either morals or books is simply pouring water into sand; and that smoking schoolboys can rarely be depended on to work vigorously or honestly in studies or in other helpful school activities. In our own Gresham school has its scholars who carry pipes in their pockets and who can hardly wait the dismissal of school before scratching a match and smoking

up. The use of tobacco by men of any age is deplorable enough. Its use by children of school age is not only physically debilitating; it is morally stultifying. The habit is almost always begun in disobedience. Its continuance is a repeated offense against the smoker's better judgment. As constant dropping wears away stone, so this daily offense against one's better judgment, this continuous needless self indulgence dulls one's sense of right and wrong, makes self denial for society's sake more rare and difficult; and balks the very end we seek in all our strenuous work for the moral and intellectual uplift of the community. There is no greater obstruction to wholesome popular education and to the maintenance of normal social relations among young people today, than the tobacco habit. We should have in our state a law prohibiting the sale and use of cigarettes within the state's borders. A campaign for the purpose of making the use of tobacco unpopular should be carried on continually and vigorously by every lover of good morals and good order.

Another specific act that is the manifest duty of every parent is the teaching of children the rudiments of sex hygiene. The facts about themselves that children and youth should know ought not to be taught to them by other children of polluted minds. If a father has chummed with his boy and has been awake to his duty toward the boy he has told him these vital facts of life at an early age—earlier than he would wish to but for the fact that the nasty minded schoolboy has no respect for tender years. Some parents are awake on this point and have done their duty. But probably the majority have neglected it. For this reason we must assume the work they have shirked. There seems to be no better way than to have some physician of commonsense and good heart give the school boys counsel on this matter and so put their minds in normal frame. Such a course as this will undoubtedly banish in large measure the practices of secret vices that are alarmingly prevalent in some communities, particularly in country schools. There is an organization in this state, splendidly prepared to aid us in this matter. There should be no delay in availing ourselves of this good help.

There is danger that the school will educate the child away from the home. In these days of uniform graded courses for the schools of a whole state, children early learn to feel the strong compulsion of school duties, quite out of proportion to that of home duties. At a very early age they begin bringing their books home to study lessons that cannot be learned in school hours. Father and mother gradually come to count John and Mary out of the working force at home. Father does the barn chores alone and mother does up the supper dishes unaided, because John must wrestle with his algebra and Mary work here arithmetic. The children become children of the school and not of the home. Father and mother are waiting on them, taking off all loads except what the schools impose upon them. And so it comes about that the whole family unconsciously get the idea that the school is the Whole Works. Under these circumstances father finds it quite impossible to chum with John and mother with Mary, without quitting the farm and taking the school course again.

Our State Superintendent of Schools, Mr. L. R. Alderman, who

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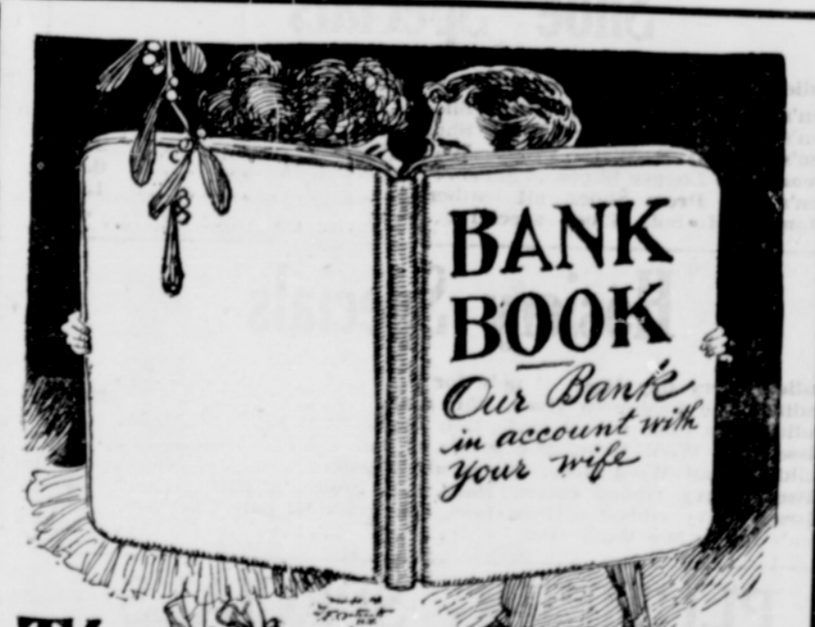
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