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ADOLESCENTS IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

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Oh, my Soul" or "The Earth is the Lord's" are among the suitable ones.

Why waste our time on cheap imitations when these grand gems which stud every page of religious experience may be had for the asking and the taking. By following a plan in music as we would in literature, everything that is good and true and beautiful in music and in poetry may be brought sacredly close to the child. In these he may revel not always with conscious appreciation but with what a building into his future knowledge and appreciation of the great thought of the ages, to which he is heir and inheritor.

ADOLESCENTS IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

MEETING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF YOUTH

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1. *The Need for Intelligent, Sympathetic Leadership.*

This trying period in the life of the child is not only the opportunity for forming and leading out into life-long habits all the favorable tendencies and capacities, it is also the time when, through unsympathetic or bungling treatment the newly awakened life may be thrust back upon itself, become stunted and dwarfed and misshapen. At no time does the child crave so strongly the right kind of guidance, at no time will he rebel so vigorously against the right kind. The leader who can lead, not drag, must know how to appeal to the best that is in the child, respect his new found independence and at the same time help him to discover its limitations.

In order that this sympathetic understanding may be most complete, and that the child may find in his hero the qualities that most appeal to himself, there is great need that the boys of this age should be taught by men and the girls by women. Quite significant are the reasons given by a large number of boys for their choice of a leader in their clubs: "the best athlete," "knows how to play all sorts of games," "largest and strongest," "excels in everything we do," "best fighter," "does not say things behind our back," "not a bully." One of the greatest needs in many of our churches and

schools, is revival among the men of some sense of their duty and privilege with reference to the boys of their church and community. It is safe to say that until this happens, not very much progress will be made toward solving the problem of how to get and keep the boys.

Another reason for selecting men as teachers of boys and women for girls is found in the need for dealing with the problems of the sexual life that become so acute at this period of life. It is little short of criminal for us to allow our boys and girls to grow and enter upon life, ignorant of some of the most vital facts that they will have to reckon with; and while it is very true that the real place for this instruction is in the home, and that it is upon the parents that the first responsibility rests, it is still true that comparatively few parents recognize or discharge their responsibility in this matter, thereby forcing the Sunday-school teacher either to supplement their deficiency or allow the need to go unmet.

Whether man or woman, the teacher of the adolescent must know and love the pupil, must understand his awkwardness and tactfully ignore it, must appreciate his so-called "freshness" and not be irritated by it, must know how to lead this growing nature outward and upward into the manhood or womanhood toward which it is headed.

2. *Instruction suited to Nourish and Realize the Ideals of the Youth.*

The latter part of this period especially, is one of glowing idealism: the motive power for a splendid life development is close at hand. But, without proper food and training this fine idealism may fade away or degenerate into the mere building of air-castles, day-dreaming that never comes true, leaving the dreamer a sentimental weakling. The pupil needs sound and enduring material of which to construct his ideal. Most of such material will come to him in story form and the story should be true. This does not mean that it must be historical, it does mean that it should be true to life, illustrating the facts and forces of life as they are or may be. Moreover, this material should be selected with a view to meeting the problems of life that are real and vital to the pupil, the problems that he has to meet day after day and in the solution of which he is genuinely interested. A large part of the instruction should consist rather in the discussion of such practical problems as are suggested by the study, rather than the recitation of facts acquired. In such discussions the pupil is led to pass judgment for himself upon the acts of the character studied and to make his own applications and deduce for himself the principles involved.

3. *Self-expressive Activities as training in habits of Service.*

This is particularly the habit-forming period of life, and the habits now formed, whether for good or evil, will be the most enduring through life. But habits are formed only by doing things, through active service. One of the great problems of this period is the discovery of things for boys and girls to do in which they may give expression to the ideals within them. This is the supplement to that other need for concrete material out of which to form ideals, just mentioned.

On the one hand, we must help the youth to translate their fine and lofty idealism into the terms of common life, teach them that the essence of Christianity lies in the faithful and joyous performance of

“the daily round, the common task”;

and, on the other hand, we must find means for the utilization of this abundant life and vigor in the service of the church, thus giving to the youth a genuine share in its life. Such service must be genuine; it must not be some trivial thing clearly devised just for the sake of giving the youngster something to do and artificially dignified with the name of service. He will quickly penetrate and despise such subterfuges. It must be something that the boy or girl can do, it must be a real contribution to the common work of the church, and it must be appreciated and recognized at its true value, neither over-estimated nor under-estimated. The use of children in choirs is an excellent example.

4. *The Utilization of the Growing Social Instinct through Group Activities.*

This is the time when the gang or clique begins to appear, when team work begins to be a possibility. Shall the gang be our enemy or our ally; a power for evil or a power for good? It may be either, if not one it will probably be the other.

Here is perhaps the one point at which the Sunday-school teacher has decidedly the advantage over the average public-school teacher. The smaller sized group and the prevalence of the principle of natural selection in the making up of these groups, make it more easily possible for gang and class to be identical and for the teacher to capture or be the leader.

Some kind of class organization, simple, informal and effective though unobtrusive, and various forms of group activities in sports and games, in Christian service, and in class exercises, will be of value here. Some classes have done good work in introducing co-

operative forms of note-book work, each member contributing his item to the class book. Group meetings outside the class hour, for debates, sings, "hikes," outings, summercamps, etc., etc., are suggestions along this line.

Another aspect of the growing social instinct has reference to the relations between the sexes. Toward the later part of early adolescence some care should be taken to provide opportunities for the meeting of the sexes under proper surroundings and conditions, that the introduction to this phase of their social life shall be sane, healthful, normal, free from the sickly sentimentality and foolishness that characterizes too many of our young people's meetings. The churches, and especially those churches that minister to communities where the home and social life is barren, whether in city or rural district, have a great responsibility in this matter. It is time for us to realize that a young people's party may be just as appropriate in the church parlors as a prayer-meeting and, in its time and place, no less sacred.

5. *The Culture of the Æsthetic Instinct.*

Toward that latter part of this period also, the æsthetic nature shows a marked awakening. A new appreciation of the beautiful, in art, in music, and in literature, begins to show itself. It is the time for the establishment of correct standards and tastes in these matters, and be it remembered that a keen appreciation of the true and the beautiful is not far from a like appreciation of the good. Far more emphasis should be laid upon such matters as the selection of music pictorial illustration, the architecture and furnishing of the Sunday-school room, than is commonly seen. There is no real reason why we should be content to cultivate the taste of our youth on trashy music, much of which is veritable religious "rag-time." We ought to set a much higher standard of excellence for the illustrations in our lesson helps, or the wall-pictures used in our schools to illustrate the lessons. It is poor economy that saves a few dollars on the year's supplies or the furnishings of the rooms, at the cost of degraded tastes in the next generation. The average public school puts us all to shame in this matter. The condition of many Sunday-school rooms should be a matter of deep concern. We have gone too long on the apparent principle that the auditorium where the elders listen to sermons must have our first care and attention and then, if there is any money left, we may fix up the Sunday-school rooms a little. If there is to be any difference, the rule should be reversed. The taste of the elders is probably well-established by this time, or else hopeless; the taste of the youth is in the making.

The growing appreciation of the beautiful in literature indicates this as the time for introducing the finest passages of religious literature, in poetry or prose, from the Bible or elsewhere. The adolescent pupil also likes the terse and classic expression of moral precepts which he finds in proverbial quotations and the like, and these also help him to give expression to the ideals that he is beginning to cherish.

6. *The Improvement of the Spiritual Opportunity.*

The dictum of psychology and child study that adolescence is the time of opportunity for religious awakening and life choices, simply bears out the experience of practical workers, in church, in Sunday-school and in the evangelistic field. The majority of all conversions are effected between the ages of 12 and 21 with the preference for about 16. The Sunday-school teacher should be aware of this and should be alert to improve the opportunity. Care should be taken not to force the matter unduly, not to pluck the fruit before it is ripe. The effort should be to preoccupy the mind of the child with the facts and impulses that will help him to make the right choice when the time for choice comes to him. And the teacher should stand by, a ready, sympathetic, tactful friend; respectful of the youth's own individuality, and moral freedom, but saying by every act and word: "call on me if I can help you to solve your problem and reach the right decision." To such a teacher will come the opportunity, oftentimes at a moment when he thinks not, to unlock the door of the kingdom, though the youth must walk for himself, erect in the proud distinction of one who chooses of his own free-will to be a child of God.