

JUST ACROSS THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE.

A STUDY IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE.

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In the language of the modern Sunday school, the intermediate years are thirteen, fifteen and sixteen. In the language of psychology, they are the years of early adolescence. In the language of pedagogy, they are the years of entrance into the high school. In the language of home and every-day life, they are the years of the big boy and big girl.

The Continental Divide.

Life may be divided into two periods: The period before the age of twelve and the period after twelve. This division is not fanciful, nor artificial; it is based upon reality. Such tremendous physical, mental, social and spiritual changes take place just after the twelfth year that the individual, although the same in name, is very different in other respects. The age of twelve may well be called the continental divide, since it marks the turning point in the chief interests of life.

Before twelve there is the intimate home life, the outdoor freedom, the development of the senses, the beginnings of school life, lesson study and the storing of memory with facts of every kind and class. After twelve, boyhood and girlhood are gone; the innocent, happy, care-free life is over. The individual turns toward manhood and womanhood and for the time being, at least, is a stranger in a strange land." For the first few years it may well be called "topsy-turvy land."

After twelve begins the period of early adolescence, according to psychology; and adolescence means "growing into," being derived from the Latin "adolescere," meaning "to grow into." While this process of growing

into manhood and womanhood goes on, nothing is settled. Things do not go smoothly; everything seems twisted. Body, mind and spirit are undergoing a transformation and the individual has the momentous task of becoming acquainted with himself anew. Up to the age of twelve, the individual had just about discovered his best powers of body and mind, and now he is amazed to find the old dependencies uprooted and overturned by the coming of new, stronger and most strangely insistent powers. These clamor for expression and there is no accumulated experience to guide in giving them expression.

Three Periods of Life—Absorption, Adjustment and Achievement.

Life may be represented by a line divided into three parts. The first is the period of absorption; the second that of adjustment; the third, that of achievement. Childhood is the period of absorption; youth the period of adjustment; adulthood the period of achievement.

During the period of absorption, the child's mind is flooded with information about the world around him. The five hungry senses are the channels through which this information pours in. By the age of six or seven, he is pretty well acquainted in the world. In no other period of life does he gain quite so much information, and certainly never again does he gain it in such large variety. This might be termed the period of "filling-up the brain-cells."

During the period of adjustment, the individual learns chiefly by study. He takes up the things he has previously learned by name and now investigates their nature. He learns to distinguish between the safe and the harmful, the pleasurable and the unpleasant, and how to adjust himself to each. The power to do this is accompanied by an interesting development in the growth of the brain. At this stage of life the brain begins linking up its vast number of cells by new fibres, association-fibres—what has been learned during the filling-up process is now worked over, associated and adjusted.

During the period of achievement, which is adulthood, the individual puts into use his powers of both body and mind and his knowledge of the world about him. He begins to achieve his career.

The Intermediate years fall within the period of adjustment. These years mark the beginning of the adjustment process and because it is the period of beginnings, it is most difficult. There is more to be learned. The breaking-in stage is always trying. Initiation is very pleasant to look back upon, but while the proceedings *are on* the neophyte gets but little pleasure out of them.

So the Intermediate years are the middle ground. Immediately preceding the Intermediate are the Junior years—nine, ten, eleven, twelve. These are the years of early childhood. They are full of fun and frolic, of ever-increasing bodily energy; mentally, they are the years of verbal memory at its height. Immediately following the Intermediate are the Senior years—seventeen to twenty. These are the years of mental and physical vigor, the full flower of young manhood and womanhood.

A Fourfold Adjustment.

The Intermediate pupil has to make a fourfold adjustment of his new powers.

First, there must be a physical adjustment. It seems impossible for the big boy and girl to get fixed during this time, for the body, like a sky-scraper, is running up its frame work at a tremendous rate, to be filled in later. Arrangements that satisfy this month are out of date next month. Even the voice becomes unreliable.

The growing body naturally develops new powers which clamor for expression. The Intermediate pupil finds himself suddenly possessed with adult powers without experience in controlling them. Adjustment is difficult. It is a period of nervous and muscular education for the adolescent.

Second, there must be a mental adjustment. Mentally, the adolescent is upset. New ideals present themselves

and dissatisfaction results. These boys and girls begin to wonder at themselves. They long to be what they now dream of being, but cannot yet. Doubt creeps in and they are subject to spells of moodiness. There is a tendency to become shy and retiring, and they want to be left alone. As nature puts a shell about the embryonic egg, shielding it, so there is the shell of reserve about the growing boy and girl. It should be respected and not ruthlessly broken through. It is needful that they should brood and dream just before emerging into manhood and womanhood.

Third, there is a social adjustment. The adolescent is a strange mixture of shyness and boldness. He is a paradox from any standpoint, but from none more than from the social. Because of self-consciousness, this pupil is inclined to be shy, retiring and even morose; yet warring with this tendency is the desire to be a part of the family councils and to be recognized and appreciated in social circles. If not noticed, there is likely to be boisterousness and explosive speech, with opinions that are as high sounding as they are lacking in experience.

Club and team work is now attractive since these organizations put those of like nature together, ridding the social life of much of its embarrassment and at the same time offering an opportunity for the expression of the newly developed and developing powers that are surging within. The activities of a boys' or girls' club, when properly supervised, are a great safety valve for the relief of pent-up energy, and, at the same time, a powerful agency in directing this energy towards worthy ends. In Sunday school, we call such a club an Organized Class.

Fourth, there is a spiritual adjustment. The social awakening marks the development of the *alter* as opposed to the *ego*—which is but another way of saying that the big boy and girl begin to dream of a life of service for others. It is the time for the life to become God-centered. If not converted, there will likely come a period of con-

viction for sin. All possible means should be exerted to win this pupil to Christ now, for if this convenient season is allowed to pass unimproved, the years following are likely to be filled with trouble and danger. If already a Christian, the call of God will most likely come to consecrate life and talents, and this call means a searching of the soul. It is a critical time, a time of crisis whether the pupil be converted or not. The home, the Sunday school and all church agencies should bend their efforts toward winning and developing the pupil. The boy Jesus, we are told, "increased in wisdom" (mental growth), and "in stature" (physical growth), and in "favor with God" (spiritual growth), and "with men" (social growth). Jesus, the model youth, had this fourfold development. Every normal big boy and girl since has had the same fourfold development—either in right or in wrong directions.

The opportunity of the Sunday school teacher and Intermediate worker today is to understand the growing powers of these pupils, and to help nurture and guide them in their development toward righteousness. The crying need of the Intermediate department in our Sunday Schools is for those who will learn to work with the laws of life so as to help and not hinder the highest development of growing boys and girls. The aim of the home, the day school, and the Sunday school should be the same—the development and training of body, mind and soul of each one of the adolescent pupils, for the highest Christian service.

Travelers who have visited Niagara Falls will remember three features of the tour: the beauty and charm of the falls, the whirlpool and the rapids, and the peaceful on-going of the river to the open. The Intermediate years might be likened to the second stage—the upheaval of the whirlpool and the rapids.

In order to reach the summit of one of the greatest of the Alps, the climb upward must be made in three stages:

the gentle upward slope which brings one to the edge of the plateau; the dangerous journey across the plateau, all rough and seamed with deep gorges and dangerous passes, but which leads out to a safe landing; and then, the noble peaks beyond. Our Intermediate pupil may be said to have climbed the gentle slope of the foothills; and to have begun the hazardous journey across the uneven surface of the plateau; he will need a faithful and sympathetic guide.

Summary: The Intermediate years are the years of early adolescence and lie just across the continental divide in the life of the individual. These years are the years of adjustment and are preceded by the period of absorption and followed by the period of achievement. This adjustment must be fourfold, physical, mental, social and spiritual, and the pupil needs a sympathetic and faithful guide and helper while the adjustment is being made, because adult powers are being thrust upon him and he has no adult experience in handling these powers.

Having in mind this brief glimpse of the fourfold nature of the Intermediate pupil, it may be profitable to consider a little more in detail the physical side of the pupil and to note some results of this physical development.

Physical Development and Some Evident Results.

The rapid growth of the body causes the individual to become awkward. Few people grow taller than they are at the close of the Intermediate years. As a rule, children grow rapidly from two to three years old up to seven or eight; here they reach a stationary stage, or plateau, where they rest until about the thirteenth or fourteenth year; then they have another period of growth and get their final height. This rapid upward growth tends to throw the body out of proportion generally. The limbs are too long for the size of the trunk, and the hands and feet are too big for the size of the slender limbs. Hence, the awkwardness of the adolescent. Conscious of it, he becomes self-conscious and ill at ease.

The rapid growth of the body results in increasing appetite and need for sleep. Growth of body is an added burden upon the adolescent. The adult has to work and repair bodily waste; the adolescent has to work, repair bodily waste and, in addition, grow. Hence, the adolescent is always hungry and sleepy. Growth means appetite; appetite means hearty meals; hearty meals mean need for sleep. Hence, the adolescent needs more food and sleep than the adult. The extra task of building up the body is responsible for the need.

No wonder men, when tired and run down physically, love to think of the good times they used to have when boys, eating anything and sleeping any time and any where. The pies that mother made! It was doubtless not so much the brand of pies as the ravenous appetite of a growing boy that made them so good that their memory still lingers. A boy was asked, "What are the three graces?" He replied, "Breakfast, dinner and supper."

While this process of body-building is on, the individual is lazy and physical energy is at low ebb. For this condition the pupils are not to blame; scolding and punishment, to which they are many times subjected, cannot help them over the condition. Only time can effect the cure. Did you ever hear a parent scold a big boy or girl saying, "You are the laziest thing I ever saw. You are worse than you were five years ago! You used to be my smart boy, or girl"?

That parent did not stop to think that the heart and arteries of that boy or girl increased in size enormously in five years. As a child the arteries are to the heart as 25 to 20; in this period, as 140 to 50. Thus, development in adolescence is enormous as compared with childhood. This development consumes bodily energy; the result must be laziness, drowsiness and lack of endurance for long periods.

The beneficial result of this condition is, in the long run, strength-getting. Mother Nature seems to be giving

these boys and girls a final stage of relaxation, stretching and strength-getting before thrusting them out into the heavy work of life.

This period of laziness and lessened energy affects the mental condition and activity of the adolescent. This should be understood especially by teachers, both in day school and Sunday school, for it throws light upon the problem of leakage from both.

Teachers should count on what may be called a "slump year" in the experience of this pupil. The exact year may vary; with some it will be between thirteen and fourteen; with others it may not begin until they are about fifteen. But when it does come, it matches that year or more when the pupil grows so rapidly that you can almost see him grow. While this growing spell is on, about the most the pupil can do is to grow. And, naturally, a growing boy or girl will be lazy, preferring to eat and sleep. A lazy, sleepy big boy or girl cannot study very much.

Strange to say, we notice boys and girls of this period going to some day schools with their arms piled up full of books. One of two things may result:

(a) If the pupil lacks the will power to overcome nature's demand for relaxation of body and mind, he will slump in studies and fail to make the grades. What becomes of this pupil *then* will depend upon the sympathy and understanding of teachers and parents. If they criticize and punish, lending no helping hand, the boys especially will give trouble, quit school, and, maybe, quit home, go to work for a small wage and never go back to school. Girls may take the work over and hold on until both body and mental powers are normal and then catch up.

(b) If the pupils are greatly ambitious or urged and coaxed by parents, possibly they may make their grades, but will likely suffer physically; some of them break down nervously. Like whipping a tired horse up a long hill.

the after effects are hardly justified by the benefits gained.

Suppose they do not study books very much during this slump period, and suppose they are outwardly lazy—there is an inner mental activity which compensates. This would seem to match the physical result in strength-getting.

It might be only fair to say that the lessened energy is much more outward than inward, and that it relates chiefly to the assigned tasks for which teachers and parents are responsible. Their inward activity is engaged with a task which nature, the great school master of this period, has assigned.

While the body is growing, nature assigns the mental task of working over the accumulation of material gotten during the Junior years of golden memory. This material must be sifted, readjusted and put to the acid test of worthwhileness. The process of association of ideas is on. The adolescent takes stock mentally and has a house-cleaning. When possessed with a dreamy look, let us not shock him, for he is dreaming worth-while things; when absent-minded and preoccupied, remember that he is busy somewhere with a task that is very important to him. He is absent-minded only to the immediate task and call of the teacher and parent. It may be really worth more to the future for this boy or girl to correlate a few new brain cells by dreaming over some past experience or future ambition, than to work a certain problem or run a certain errand. Alfred the Great let the old woman's cakes burn while he dreamed of a greater Britain. Watts dreamed out the principle of the steam engine while others gossiped about the kitchen fire.

The "tragic age of fourteen."

A modern writer upon criminality uses the phrase quoted, stating that the fourteenth year marks the largest number of "first offenders," and the greatest age of truancy from home and school.

It is also the "tragic age" in the Sunday school, as it marks the beginnings of trouble there; also, it stands as the highest peak of conversion, especially in schools that have not yet developed an aggressive Junior department through whose good work the conversion high peak has been brought down to twelve.

The International Sunday School Association gives out these figures: "Seventy per cent of all conversions occur under twenty years of age, and the critical age is between twelve and sixteen.

"Sixty-eight per cent of all criminals commit their first crime before they are twenty years of age.

"There are more than twenty million boys and girls of the teen age in North America.

"Half a million boys and girls of the teen age drift out of the Sunday schools of North America every year."

Superintendent Maxwell, of the New York City schools, in his annual report for 1914-1915 (pages 272-247), gives the following table based upon the record of 640,000 pupils:

<i>Grade.</i>	<i>Promoted.</i>	<i>Failed.</i>
Fifth	55.22 per cent	44.78 per cent
Sixth	49.03 per cent	50.97 per cent
Seventh	43.54 per cent	56.46 per cent
Eighth	38.70 per cent	61.30 per cent

According to this table, only 38 out of every 100 pupils were promoted from the eighth grade, showing that at about the fourteenth year more than half of the pupils strike a slump year and need special care.

The publication of such facts as these is but an indication of the general awakening among day school teachers, and it is interesting to note the steps taken by these experts to stop the leakage.

Reducing the text-book work for the eighth grade is a popular plan in high schools. In the place of the omit-

ted text-books there are provided certain practical activities which train the hand and eye more than they tax the brain. For boys, there is the ever-attractive manual work, or shop work, where they receive training in wood-work, brass, clay, and the gymnasium; for the girls, there are sewing, cooking, care of birds and plants, decorative work and the gymnasium. For all grades there is superintended play, which is of great value in its all-round development of body and mind.

Such an arrangement takes care of the lessened mental energy in the period when bodily growth is excessive, and ministers to the needs of the growing body, besides appealing to the pupils because of its practical value. Many pupils are thus kept from dropping out of school. The well-known plan of the Junior high school was adopted to induce pupils to stay in school at least until the end of the ninth grade, and secure a certificate, when they might otherwise drop out during the eighth grade. The Junior high school comprises the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, and the Senior high school, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades. The Junior high school curriculum does not require the languages necessary for college entrance, but offers electives of a practical nature, such as bookkeeping, shorthand and typewriting, which prepare for practical business careers. The Senior high school curriculum requires the languages and other studies necessary for college entrance.

By means of this Junior high school curriculum, many pupils, who would likely break down in the eighth grade because of the languages and difficult mathematics, are able to remain in school, complete the work of the eighth and ninth grades, and receive a creditable certificate, and go out with training for business and good citizenship, to say nothing of the feeling of satisfaction because they completed with success a given course.

Into communities where the day schools are not thus aggressive, go the agents of boys' preparatory schools and girls' boarding schools and such schools grow rich

by the attendance of pupils who broke with things at school and often at home because they failed in their studies. These boarding schools are wise in providing a rather easy curriculum for the first year or two, while stressing regular hours, wholesome food, plenty of exercise of the right kind, and, above all, a cheerful atmosphere; all of these minister to the lazy pupils' needs and help them tide over the slump period. When things are again normal with them, they become capable of splendid mental work.

What is the Sunday school teacher to do with pupils afflicted with lessened energy?

First of all, it is essential that the teacher understand the physical causes of this condition. Growing out of this understanding there will be sympathy for the pupil and patience with him. If men teach the boys and women teach the girls it will be possible for the teachers to think back to their own experiences at this time of life. It is passing strange that many parents and teachers fail to think back, and as a result they lack sympathy and patience. A Sunday school teacher of this type is a failure to begin with.

Again, the teacher must put forth every effort to hold the pupil in spite of all else. To lose is to cut down the tree. These boys and girls are the only material out of which men and women can be made. To lose them is to abandon hope for fruitful Christians in the future. The teacher's best chance to hold them often lies along the line of friendship and companionship, which are most desired at this time by these boys and girls. A girl once asked in despair: "Why don't teachers understand girls?" If that feeling of understanding can be established, all will doubtless go well. Many times these boys and girls are not understood in their homes, and the teacher has the great privilege of winning their confidence and steadying them in this time of storm and stress.

The wrong way is to blame the pupils for the unsettled condition they are in, and to tease them about their ill-at-

ease manner, uncertain voice, etc., thus adding to their embarrassment. The right way is the kindly way, the helpful way, no matter in what direction it may lead. There is a "key" to each life. Find it. It pays to look long and well. The pupil really wants sympathy and yet, being a "bundle of contradictions," tries the sympathy of all who deal with him. But once up this hill of difficulty, and the road stretches away, ever smoother and better, toward the years of achievement in young manhood and womanhood.

And, again, the teacher is to do the best that can be done with the pupils while holding them. There will be some gains. They can't stand still. There is hope in better methods of teaching. Teachers are learning to present Bible truth to these pupils from the point of view of the pupil's interests, rather than from the teacher's pleasure. Teachers are thinking in terms of the pupil's life. Hence, modern lesson material is adapted to the pupil's interest and understanding; no longer do we try to force adult lessons upon Intermediate pupils. Modern teaching methods lead the pupils to exercise their investigative instincts, to discover truth, and to express it in their own lives through hand-work, story-work, collecting and arranging material; good deeds are wrought through plans of their own, centering in the class organization. The teacher ceases to become a lecturer and conducts lesson study upon the basis of the co-operative method.

May the Intermediate workers of the future and all who love these boys and girls for what they may be to the kingdom of God, lay hold of this task with renewed vigor, determined to study the problem and work at it until we succeed in holding these pupils, and while we hold them, to train them in Christly deeds; for out of big boys and girls, solely and only, can there come those heroic men and women who will be the heralds of the gospel to the ends of the earth.