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## **Character Making in the Brick Church Institute**

**REV. WILLIAM R. TAYLOR, D. D.**

**Pastor Brick Presbyterian Church, Rochester, N. Y.**

To experts in boys' work, there are not likely to be any important features in any boys' club with which they are not already familiar. The clubs differ considerably, but as is always the case in such matters, after a few years of effort and experience, a few strongly differentiated types develop, to which all the organizations of the class severally conform more or less closely, so that, given the type, you know quite well the nature of the individual club.

And yet, though all the clubs repeat the features of their respective types, they are, after all, quite individualized. A brief description therefore, of our Institute Clubs may not be without interest and value, especially to those not yet thoroughly initiated in this branch of work.

Our work, which is now in its ninth year, is carried on in the building next to the church, a rather fine old mansion which the congregation bought in 1898, largely for self protection.

The accommodations, for such a work as ours has developed into, are very limited. On one side of the main hall is a spacious parlor, opening into a smaller room, which is used as an office. On the other side are two rooms, in which the boys play games. In the extension in the rear, are a dining room and a kitchen. In the basement, which has a good cement floor, there is one long room, used for battle ball; a smaller room for gymnastic exercises, a wash room and a coat room.

In the attic is a room, the whole size of the main house, used for the carpentry classes.

At first we had two clubs, one for boys under thirteen, and the other for boys of that age and over. Each club had the use of the rooms two nights a week. Later the division was ignored, except as to the dues, which were ten cents a month for the older boys, five cents a month for the younger. The rooms are now open to all the boys four nights a week.

We have worked on a combination of the mass and the group plans, seeking to extend the benefits of the two clubs to as many

boys as possible, but breaking them up into groups according to their tastes and abilities.

The boys enter through the rear basement door, passing the assistant superintendent, who issues the new membership cards and *vises* the old ones.

Their hats and coats are checked, an older boy being in charge. Then after washing and tidying up, the freedom of the house is theirs. Once in, they divide into groups. Some play battle ball, some tumble on the mattresses, some use the punching bags, some indulge in boxing and wrestling. All this rougher play is supervised by two paid students from the University.

In the rooms on the main floor where lighter and quieter games are played, pool on small tables being the favorite, the supervising service is by volunteer helpers.

The dining room serves as a reading room, the table being well supplied with daily papers and illustrated periodicals. There is a small library of three hundred volumes, from which books may be drawn, a newstand at which back numbers of magazines are sold at one cent each, and a Penny Provident Fund in which the boys have deposited a total of over \$1,000.

In the kitchen each evening a class in basketry meets, and it is so popular that the boys sit on the tables and on the floor. There is always a waiting list.

The attic houses the class in carpentry, which is also very popular.

In these classes the boys are not charged for their instruction. They are so interested in their work that the problem of discipline scarcely exists.

The product of the classes is always one of the most conspicuous features of the annual exhibit of the Institute.

Monthly entertainments are given, the stereopticon and the phonograph being much used. Occasionally a lecture is given by a physician or a dentist.

On Saturday nights, usually, refreshments in one kind are given as the boys pass out,—apples, oranges, cookies, candy, etc.

The enrollment last year was 694, of which 438 were in Club A (boys under 13), and 256 in Club B, (the older boys.) The average nightly attendance was 95. The aggregate was 13,052.

The only statistics which we have thus far attempted to gather from the boys are those relating to their religious connections. Of the 694 boys, only 47 were from the Brick Church congregation or Sunday school; 84 belonged to other Presbyterian churches in the city; 136 came from Baptist, Methodist and German churches, while 310 were Roman Catholics, 25 were Jews and 92 were classified as "Miscellaneous."

These figures bring out what is probably the most striking and significant feature of our work, seeing that it is a work carried on by a single Christian church,—namely, the fact that it is not directly, but only indirectly, what many people would call religious.

One can see at a glance that if we were to attempt to carry on any active religious propaganda here, or to run all the boys into our Sunday school, the parents and pastors of the large majority would speedily withdraw those who had not previously withdrawn themselves.

We have, therefore, made no attempt to introduce religious instruction or worship of any kind, or to bring any pressure on the boys to enter our Sunday school.

There may be those who would be disposed to ask, Is this the sort of work which a Christian church should do? Would it not be better to have a smaller club—to have only one tenth of those 700 boys—and bring them under direct and positive religious influence? Is it worth while to do so much and spend so much on a work in which the religious element is so small?

In certain rural districts of New Jersey, they have a saying which savors somewhat of the cunning speech of Drumtochty, "It beats nothin' all to pieces." So far as the great majority of those 694 boys are concerned, the choice is simply between what we do and nothing at all. We have our Sunday school, church, Christian Endeavor and other agencies, for the religious training of our own boys. The clubs are not intended for them. They are for the street boy, the neglected boy, the boy who has little or nothing to interest or elevate him at home. Do you realize what that attendance of 13,000 boys last year means? It means 26,000 hours of boy-time, redeemed from the streets, the cheap theaters, the unhappy homes. It means 26,000 hours of boy-time, spent amid elevating surroundings, in contact with Christian young men

and women, of a sort they might never otherwise meet, of whose existence they might never know.

These boys will, most of them, make men of the laboring class. any of the helpers are of the employing class. Is it a good thing or a bad thing, in view of present conditions and future contingencies, for them to be brought into these relations? Will these Catholic and Jewish boys, when they grow up, make more or less inflammable material for the fires of religious distrust and antagonism to kindle, because they have been friends with these kind men and women of another faith?

Our boys are allowed considerable latitude in their behavior, especially with regard to the boy's privilege of making a noise when he wants to. But none of them are allowed to be lawless or indecent. A graded scheme of suspension and expulsion is in force; but although there were 36 suspensions last year, there were no expulsions. Some of the roughest and toughest have become some of the best, because having come into a square stand-up and knock-down fight with the powers that be, and having been worsted, they have submitted. These boys have surely received a lesson in obedience to law and submission to rightful authority which ought to make them better citizens.

The moral effect of the manual training classes is most noticeable, the boys settling down to their tasks like little men, and asking no better fun. The earning power of the boys, and the thrift impulse, are very evidently stimulated by the Penny Provident Fund.

One of the very best evidences of moral advance is the little damage done to the building. Of course things are not always what they seem. For instance our boys when given bananas, used to convert the skins into missiles which they employed with an effect quite deadly to the dignity of those adult persons who were so unfortunate as to be within range. They have ceased that indulgence entirely; but that is because the bananas are now peeled before they are handed out. They at first seemed to find exquisite pleasure in over-turning the garbage can. They have stopped that too, but that is because the garbage can is now locked up.

But to be serious, the rooms on the first floor used by the boys are also used by our ladies' societies and men's club and for

many of the smaller social gatherings. They must therefore, be kept in nice condition. And they are. I have not seen a pencil mark, or a scratch, or a cut or any other defacement on the walls or woodwork, which looks as if it had been done intentionally. I am afraid that if my two sons had had 692 friends coming to my house during 1906 with sufficient frequency to total 13,000 visits, they would have done a great deal more harm than our Institute boys did to the Institute building.

Those of our workers who have served for several years testify that they see a great change for the better in the boys who stick to the clubs. Some of them now are among our very best helpers with the new boys. Already several of them, who found their way from the clubs into our Sunday school have joined our church and have taken their places among our church-workers. Still more are doing excellently in their business positions and are apparently on their way to a future of which no one would have dreamed when they first joined the clubs. We cannot of course, claim for the clubs the whole credit, or any particular part of it; but that we had some part in it would seem hardly open to question.

Like all such work, it is difficult and often discouraging. It is the small minority only in whom we can see any clearly defined moral results. It is the exceptional boy in which these results are sufficiently pronounced to cause anything like a glow of real satisfaction and pride in the hearts of those who have been at work for and with him. But in answer to the question, Is it worth while? I think we would all say without an instant's hesitation, "It beats nothin' all to pieces."