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# Concerning Your Children

*By*

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*Family Life Section*  
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**Deacidified**

## The Parent Education Movement\*

By REV. EDGAR SCHMIEDELER, O. S. B., Ph. D.

**T**HERE can be no question that the responsibility of training the child and providing him with a suitable environment in which to grow up, belongs to the parents and should be assumed by them. And, indeed, there is no problem more worthy of the parents' time and effort than that of helping to develop the child's personality so that he may be a happy and efficient adult, as well as caring intelligently for his physical life, so essential to his general well-being. But it goes without saying that if parents are to meet this obligation adequately and successfully they must take the task seriously, and give the subject of child training the thought and consideration which it merits. The role of parent educator in its fulfillment involves more than loving the child and being interested in his welfare.

Born with a certain inherited equipment, what the child becomes within the limits imposed by inheritance is dependent not only upon the love and affection, but also upon the intelligence and understanding of these adults whose responsibility it is to guide him. Understanding children, however, and the causes of behavior problems which they represent, is not a matter of intuitive understanding or of the anxious desire of parents to meet their full responsibilities. It comes as a result of much study of the physical, mental, and social needs of many children, as well as the careful determination of the needs of the individual child.

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Knowledge is required for this just as it is required for any other important task.

Today, apparently, far more educational effort is centered in the school than in the home. In spite of some occasional eulogies of the home, the family is little recognized as the chief educational agency, at least by the unreflecting majority. This becomes evident when, for example, one contrasts the amount and precision of the literature relating to the teaching of school with the paucity of the material that treats the home as an educational organization. Then again, the Catholic press gives generous mention to our schools. Annual "Education Weeks" are held. The pulpit is used to further the interest of Catholic school education. But to what extent do these and other agencies call attention to, and promote, the more fundamental work of the primary educational institution, the home? No one can find fault with the splendid efforts in behalf of the school system, but the lack of interest in, and the complacent taking for granted of, that which is admittedly more fundamental can only be deplored.

It is of the essence of the parent education movement to help equip parents with necessary knowledge and understanding. There is increasing scientific knowledge concerning child behavior and methods of guidance. While it is only within recent years that conduct behavior has been scientifically studied, much has already been learned that can prove of the greatest advantage to parents in their tasks of child guidance. But real progress does not depend on the accumulation of scientific facts. It depends upon the dissemination of these facts as well. The scientists cannot take the place of the parents, but they can teach them many useful things and enable them to do intelligently not a little of what they now do in accordance with blind instinct or the advice of those who are no wiser than themselves. The parent education movement seeks to give parents the benefit of the scientists' findings.

Prevailing criticism of the family's use of its opportunity with regard to child guidance expresses itself in a program of reform with the purpose either of eliminating much of the family's opportunity to mould the child, or of demanding that the family be made more efficient by bringing its methods into harmony with present-day scientific principles. The latter method, and not the former, is, of course, the one to be approved of and strongly advocated.

There is no doubt that the parent education movement is a greater need today than it was in times past. When parenthood was less difficult than it is today there was little need for more formal education, or for specific instruction and guidance from extra-domestic sources as a preparation for family life. Domestic life was reasonably successful without it. Through informal contacts within the confines of the little home world the children gradually learned the lessons of life that prepared them for the task of founding their own home and rearing a family.

But social conditions have changed radically during the past few decades. One of the unfortunate results is that the more informal educative process of the homes of the past has largely broken down. The shared activities of work and play have more and more departed from the domestic hearth and the whole question of child training has become more difficult. Family life has become more involved and complex. The untrained parental instinct can no longer be relied upon to provide parents adequately with the necessary knowledge for their tasks. We now have an enormously complex individual coming into contact with a constantly changing environment. Hence, even for those fortunate adults who have had a childhood in a well-balanced, intelligent home under the guidance of far-seeing parents, it is very difficult to carry over this training to their children. The rapid change in social conditions, in housing, in the mechanics of living, in

customs, in recreations, which has taken place generally in the past twenty years makes a demand upon parents for a philosophy and for methods based on the present day. The child of twenty years ago lived in a vastly different world, with different stimuli, different desires, and different behavior.

Whether we like it or not, custom and tradition will no longer suffice for the efficient functioning of the home in the enriched culture of our many-faceted civilization today. In fact, if the home is permitted to continue only in traditional ways on a mere spontaneous and impulsive basis, while other institutions have the advantage of science, and are protected by special educational effort, it will inevitably slip behind in the march of progress. It will fail to function efficiently, or to satisfy the home-makers themselves. And the results will speedily be reflected in the whole civilization of the time.

It was, in fact, a realization on the part of some parents of the need for help that gave rise to the parent education movement. They began to see that the traditional methods of rearing children were not proving adequate for the complicated economic and social conditions prevailing today, and that special care and study are needed on the part of parents properly to understand and rear children. In consequence, parents began to study the procedure which they were using with their children, and to reach out to professional groups for assistance. They turned to educators, religious workers, and scientists from many branches of knowledge for information in regard to problems of child development. In response the findings of science in the field of child guidance were brought to the attention of parents. This was done, for example, through mothers' clubs and through a special literature on child care and training which has sprung up recently, setting forth the findings of clinics, children's foundations, child research departments of universities, and the like. Placed within reach of



parents, these studies have proved very helpful to them in their tasks of child rearing. Most good, however, is accomplished where there is expert guidance of some kind in addition, for instance, through study clubs competently led.

Scientific methods of housekeeping have given much more leisure time which can be devoted to cultural interests and to fuller training of children than was heretofore the case. While there is so much in modern life that tends to turn the individual away from home, parent education should go far in reversing the situation and in creating a very real and worthwhile interest in family life by faithfully and intelligently upholding the home as the primary educational institution. The notion of parent education is very much in keeping with the Catholic concept of the family and its fundamental functions. It answers a very real need today.

## Religious Education in the Family\*

By REV. EDGAR SCHMIEDELER, O. S. B., Ph. D.

**A**MERICAN Catholics are justly proud of their school system. It stands a monument to their zeal and devotion to a great cause, the religious education of their children. Few today would deny its need. Few would question the fact that, by and large, its accomplishments have been truly noteworthy.

Yet, assuming for the moment that all Catholic children enjoy the advantages of a parochial school education or that those not so privileged are at least receiving formal instruction through such subsidiary agencies as Sunday schools, weekday religion classes, or religious vacation schools, would the problem of the religious education of our children then be solved? From from it, indeed, unless at the same time Catholic parents were doing their full duty towards the religious training of their little ones. No matter how necessary the school may be in our modern complex civilization, the fundamental fact remains that the family is the primary educational institution. The school is but an extension of the home.

Pius XI in his Encyclical on Education places much emphasis upon this basic fact. Speaking, for instance, of the environment necessary for education, he writes: "The first natural and necessary element in this environment is the family, and this precisely because so ordained by the Creator Himself. Accordingly that education, as a rule, will be more effective and lasting which is re-

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ceived in a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family." With these and other words His Holiness again points to the traditional Catholic view, that the family is the school of schools and that its position must remain preëminent in any Christian scheme of education. Nor is it without great significance that he constantly refers in this connection to religious and moral education, that even when he includes physical and civic education, he adds, "principally in so far as it touches upon religion and morality."

This is all, of course, in striking contrast to the attitude of those who, because of alleged breakdown of the home, or for other reasons, would shift the sacred duties of the family to other shoulders. His Holiness admits a "lamentable decline in family education," but the remedy he points to consists in the more effective fulfillment of parental obligations within the home rather than in the shirking of duties and the shifting of responsibilities to others.

Reasons for the preëminent position of the home in any scheme of Christian education are not far to seek. There is first of all the acknowledged importance of the early years of childhood, the years of tender faith. Though apparently of little significance at the time, the early impressions of a child exert an altogether disproportionate influence on the whole course of his later life. Fortunate the little one in whose mind the truths of religion are mingled with his earliest recollections.

Then, too, there are the affective values of the home. Religious instruction in the family is associated with the sacred sentiments of the child's love for his father and mother. Religious truth taught in this wise will have a greater appeal and will exert a more lasting effect than when coming from any preceptor outside of the home. Nor is it a long step from an appreciation of parental love to a realization of the love of God, a realization on

the part of the child that "there is Someone Who gives all people greater love than anyone else can give."

But how can parents best carry out their God-given tasks towards their little ones? How can fathers and mothers, the child's first and foremost educators, make the most of their splendid opportunities with regard to their children? Space will permit at least a few suggestions here.

First of all it is of the utmost importance that they keep in mind the child's level of intelligence. Their appeal to him must be through the "things of a child" and through the faculties that are most highly developed in him. Their efforts, too, must be confined to teaching him the more elementary truths of religion, the fundamentals that he is capable of grasping to some extent. Their aim must not be, therefore, to develop a theological prodigy, a species of infant Aquinas. To go beyond the limits of a child's capacities is but to create unnecessary difficulties, to set up insurmountable barriers. The Church does not even expect a complete knowledge of Christian doctrine on the part of the child when he comes to make his first confession and Communion. Much less should it be expected of him several years earlier. Still, with a little patient effort on the part of the parents, the little one can be brought to an appreciation of some of the most sublime truths of religion.

Since it is only after we know God that we can love and serve Him, the first step should be to bring to the child's mind the notion of a Supreme Being. Here particularly will it be necessary to work through the child's senses. These faculties are more highly developed during the first years than are the mental ones. Hence the tiny boy or girl is better equipped to appreciate things that he can see or feel than he is to grasp purely theoretical matters or abstract ideas. Some abstraction, however, is necessary.

Undoubtedly most can be expected by directing the child's at-

tention to the beauties of nature around him and by constantly referring to the Creator from Whose hand they come. Many opportunities will naturally present themselves for this—a beautiful sunset, the first flowers of spring, the return of the feathered songsters. As these wonderful works of God are repeatedly pointed out, the child will come more and more to see the hand of the Creator in all things. He will grasp with ever-increasing clarity the fact that "God made all things."

A child can have a fair realization of the existence of God by the age of three or even earlier. After this fundamental religious truth has once fully come into his consciousness, it will be but a short step to the appreciation of God's power and goodness, to a grasp of man's dependence upon Him and his responsibility towards Him. The foundation will then have been laid for the whole structure of religion—for intelligent prayer and for the religious motivation of all actions, for the entire group of Christian doctrines. The child's religious knowledge should grow rapidly thereafter and his spiritual life be enriched.

The modern schoolman has come to make much use of visual education. The parent educator does well to imitate him in this in his efforts to make the religious education of his children most effective. Visual education is particularly helpful in the training of the pre-school child. Herein we see one of the values of holy pictures, statues, crucifixes, small shrines or altars in the home. By means of these the child can get a more vivid idea and a more lasting impression of our Lord, His saints, and holy things than he can through any purely abstract teaching. Then, too, there are today a number of excellent illustrated books helpful in teaching religion to very young children. These should also be utilized. Certainly they deserve more of an honored place in the Catholic home than do picture books that deal with birds, animals, railroads, etc.

In like manner should religious stories find precedence in a Catholic home over fairy tales and other stories of field and farm or of our friends in fur and feather. The child, we know, never tires of stories, not even if they are repeated time and again. They take hold of his imagination and consequently serve as an excellent medium for making religious doctrine and practice both appealing and intelligible to him. There is no question of the value of such stories in the religious training of the child during his years of tender faith, the period of awe and wonder when his trusting heart is readily disposed to the reception of faith. And there is such an endless variety of them for the parent to choose from—the story of the Christ Child, of the Blessed Virgin His Mother, of St. Joseph His foster-father, of the entire Holy Family, of the first visitors, the shepherds and magi, etc.

Or again, there is the natural tendency of the little one to imitate his elders. This fact also will be capitalized by the parent who is conscious of his responsibility before God for the spiritual welfare of his offspring. It is the child's tendency to imitate that gives the home such a powerful influence in the training process. Not only does the example of the parents and grown-ups within the family circle, but also the whole religious atmosphere within the home, react with telling effect upon the religious and moral development of the child. Such practices as grace at table, the reverent repetition of simple prayers with the child while kneeling at bedtime, all seem in some indescribable way to lead the little one to God. While the more informal instruction of the home may later be somewhat supplanted by the school, the training that takes place through example within the family circle can never be superseded. Hence Pius XI adds—after urging upon parents the use of the best methods for making their training effective, "Supposing always the influence of their own exemplary lives."



There is no denying the fact that in our modern civilization our school system is fundamental in the religious training of our children, but it is equally true that the home is still more basic. With parents first and foremost must rest the religious training of the child. That is alike their sacred duty and their inestimable privilege. And what a field this offers for missionary enterprise! What an opportunity for Catholic Action!

## The School Age Child\*

By MARY E. SPENCER, Ph. D.

THE normal child of school age is at best a very complex human being. Hence the problems at this stage of development are by no means so simple as those presented during infancy and the pre-school period. Each child comes into life a bundle of potentialities. How these various potentialities will develop depends to a large extent on environmental factors—in the child's case these are largely the personalities with whom he comes in contact. And during infancy and the pre-school years the patterns of development are well outlined. The foundation of what the child will become has already been laid. This ground structure may evidence careful planning and well defined outlines. Or it may have been built "hit or miss," with supports too weak to carry a superstructure of any lasting value. Or the masonry may be very shoddy, giving evidences of poor workmanship, as we review the foundation work on which the later personality and character building are to rest.

It is not, then, a new building that we who are considering the school age child are about to begin. The foundation has been completed in the pre-school years. What we can do depends on what has gone on before. So the first task before us is that of reviewing the existing strength and weakness. For safety demands that the mistakes of the initial construction be rectified before further building can be attempted.

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How can we determine when the lines are out of plumb? Where are the supports too weak? Are there any parts that cannot bear the load that is to be placed on them? Must part of the structure be torn down and built up anew? Is it even possible to make good any of these unintentional but careless errors? Fortunately for the children it is not too late to improve the building that has gone on during infancy and the pre-school years. In many instances the marks of repair will be there, but they will be evident only to the expert. And in any case, if repair work is necessary, it must be done.

When children enter school, one of the first impressions educators receive concerning these youngsters leaving home for the first time is that a large number of them are not in proper physical condition to pursue their school work. Obstetricians tell us that more than 90 per cent of all children are born normal. School statistics indicate that at school entrance from 50 to 90 per cent of all children are found to have physical defects of one kind or another. If the defects are those of eyes or ears, school work may be seriously impeded from the start. And this often happens, as seen from the report of the U. S. Office of Education which tells us that one-fourth of all children, at the end of the first year, fail to be promoted. Perhaps it is in the physical condition of the child that the foundation structure is weakest. Good health during school life calls for good health at the start.

All too early after school days have commenced the so-called "children's diseases" become rife. Many a mother who prides herself on the excellent health of her offspring during the pre-school period finds that, once the school doors have been opened to them, they carry home in quick succession measles, mumps, whooping-cough, diphtheria, or whatever communicable disease happens to be the "rage" in the first grade at the moment. Are

the schools to blame here? Not entirely. It has long been an accepted principle of public health that the chance of the child for life and health depends as much upon immunization to infectious diseases as upon all other influences favorable to health. No matter how excellent the home care of the child's health may be, if a mass infection of diphtherial bacilli of sufficient virulence attacks the unsuspecting child, not "all the king's horses nor all the king's men" can prevent an attack of the dreaded disease unless the child is carrying in his blood stream the anti-bodies which will neutralize the effects of the toxin. But the toxoid treatment can do this, and it is the parent's responsibility to assure the child this protection. The child today may likewise be spared the ravages and devastating after-effects of scarlet fever, whooping cough, and smallpox by the use of the scientific measures for their prevention. Have we neglected to build up this protection during the pre-school years? If so, it is now our first responsibility.

But it may be with reference to the mental or emotional aspects of the child's development that omissions occur. And these, too, must be filled in by re-education, if need be, in order to insure a wholesome personality. Where are the problems in this field liable to occur? Taking Tilson's study as a basis, negativism or contrariness is often found as a school age inheritance from the pre-school period. And this tendency to say, "I won't" is more often found among girls than boys. But more boys of beginning school age display such faults as temper tantrums, and being restless and destructive. Girls on the other hand are more inclined to conduct of the clinging vine variety, with undue emotional dependence on grown-ups. Girls, too, in strict accord with the Victorian tradition of the delicate sex, are slightly more inclined to be wanting in appetite and to be capricious about food. Boys

frequently show speech defects such a stammering or stuttering, indicating, perhaps, that even from the outset, women are better equipped to have the first word as well as the last. All these personality traits evidenced in the early school years call for an understanding of their origin so that the cause may be removed. They also indicate the need of re-education through the substitution of new and more acceptable ways of behaving for the habits that must be discarded. Does the child of school age manifest any behavior traits or personality characteristics, of the types mentioned, that may have been carried over from the earlier period of development when they might have been excusable? Then these, too, must be repaired.

However, the school period is not one of repair work entirely. Although its dependence on the pre-school period cannot be over-emphasized, the school period, in its own right, deserves consideration. The school age period is one essentially of growth and development. Growth at this age is not only physical but also mental, moral, and social. The framework of the life building is erected, and the structure is closed in. A good deal of inside work is done although the finishing touches are not completed until late in the adolescent years. In all this process of building, the home now has a co-worker in the school. Yet the ultimate responsibility as to what the outcome in every aspect will be depends upon the home. Space will allow mention of but two of its important responsibilities here—the physical well-being and the mental health of the child.

With school days as a new phase of the child's life, parents may find in themselves a tendency to place the educational aspects of the child's progress first. Where this tendency is found it is well to remember that the child may have another opportunity for the acquisition of knowledge but the demands of development

cannot wait. Whether the child learns to read at the age of five, six or seven is immaterial in the long run. Some children go to school at a later age and soon surpass their peers in educational achievements. But if an adenoid growth is not remedied the possible resulting deafness may be irremediable. An attack of scarlet fever may leave a damaged heart or impaired kidneys. A six-year molar lost because of faulty diet or careless health habits is irreplaceable in the natural species. Early rickets may leave a child with a life-long deformity. A shy, shut-in personality that is the result of injudicious handling in the home or at school may lead to adolescent dementia and the hospital for the mentally ill. Failure to learn how to get along with other people may cost the child in future years his job and success in life, since both are more dependent on proper adjustments to other people than on knowledge. The cultivation of defense reactions as a means of evading the responsibilities of school life may lead to forsaking reality entirely when the problems and conflicts of maturity seem too difficult to face.

A careful consideration of these and other effects of neglect of the physical and mental factors in child development will give ample proof that in outcomes of true happiness, efficiency and successful living, training the child of school age for physical and mental well-being is second only to training him in religion. Neither can be neglected. The schools because of their traditional interest in the academic, are all too prone to emphasize the intellectual at the expense of the emotional, the mental and the physical. This means only one thing—the home must do its share and more if the child is to receive an all-around education and development. Let us recount, then, some of the ways in which the home can meet its responsibilities toward the child of school age:

Give him yearly a thorough physical examination, and correct his physical defects.

Immunize him against infectious diseases.

Plan for him a healthful regime of living, and see that he lives up to it so that he can forget his health and devote his energies to the higher aims of life.

Teach him to face his conflicts squarely and solve them rather than evade them or deny them.

Teach him to assume responsibility and then live up to it.

Teach him how to get along with others so that he may know the value of friendship.

Help him to cultivate a wide variety of interests.

Imbue him with the ideal of unselfish service.

Give him the best possible training in his religion, and see that he uses his knowledge in his everyday life.

With this background the child of school age will be equipped for the next period of his development—and for life.

## The Gang Age\*

By REV. PAUL H. FURFEY, Ph. D.

THE adolescent boy of fifteen or sixteen is already in many ways an adult. He is beginning to show the vocational interests which normally culminate in a job. He is beginning to show interest in the other sex which normally leads to marriage. He has something of the adult's emotional adjustment, his self-reliance, his dependability. On the other hand, the boy of eight or nine is still very much of a child. These generalities, in slightly altered form, would apply to girls as well.

I have ventured to propose the term "the gang age" for this interesting interstitial period between the immaturity of the young boy and the comparative maturity of the adolescent. The name itself suggests one of the outstanding characteristics of the period; for the boy of the gang age is gregarious. He plays in groups. He looks upon himself as a member of a gang rather than as an individual.

If you ask the average nine-year-old boy whether he likes to play baseball he will answer glibly enough that he does; but if you watch him at play you will discover that he plays his baseball with a difference. He does not choose teams and play the game according to the rule book. To him baseball means a rather random throwing or batting. At most it means a form of the game in which the players rotate in the various positions. In any case, it does not mean the standard team game. Similarly, to the

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nine-year-old boy, football is not the team game but rather a kicking or rushing with the football.

A couple of years later all this is changed. The twelve-year-old boy does play the standard team games and he plays them with a vengeance. Put a group of twelve-year-olds on a baseball diamond and in a few minutes they will have chosen sides and started a game. Turn ten of them loose on a basketball court and it will not be long before a game is in progress. Something mysterious has happened to the psychology of the child which makes team games seem more interesting to him than individual competition. This is the psychology of the gang age.

The twelve-year-old's preference for team games is no mere accident. It is a disposition which is rooted very deeply in his psychology. He plays team games because group effort permeates every part of his life. This tendency to form teams or groups of some sort is so essentially a part of his psychology that the term "gang age" seems to be the most appropriate designation for the whole period.

This gang tendency has important implications from the standpoint of the recreational leader. It makes group work possible. The recreational leader may organize playgrounds for younger children but it is almost impossible to form a real club before the gang age. Examine the rules of the great national recreational organizations—the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Catholic Boys Brigade, the Columbian Squires, the Wolf Cubs, the Woodcraft Indians, and the like. In almost every case you will find that their membership is made up almost entirely of gang-age boys or girls. Certainly nine-tenths and probably a larger proportion of the membership of these national organizations consists of boys and girls between nine or ten and fourteen or fifteen.

Of course it is true that adolescents too form groups. It is true

also that adolescents enjoy the team games. Yet there is an essential difference between the teams formed in the gang age and these adolescent teams. Adolescents play the team games with enthusiasm but it is an ordered enthusiasm. They demand uniforms, umpires, spectators, leagues. The gang-age boy will play baseball all day long on a vacant lot with no thought of the future.

There are adolescent clubs but they are quite different from the gang-age clubs mentioned above. That is why boys of fourteen or fifteen drop out of the Boy Scouts of America so readily. Adolescents are bored with Scouting because it is such an excellent gang-age club and is therefore unsuited to their older interests.

There is still another characteristic which distinguishes the gang age from the periods which precede and follow it. It is the attitude toward the other sex. Upon questioning a long series of eight-year-old boys, I found that nearly all of them mentioned one or two girls as playmates. Girls of the same age are quite ready to play with boys. A few years later a great change has taken place. A twelve-year-old boy is insulted if you ask him whether he ever plays with girls. The twelve-year-old girl is quite sure that all boys are "horrid." This is another characteristic of the gang age, the antagonism between the sexes. At adolescence all is changed again. The sexes now become interested in each other once more but it is no longer the old free companionship. It is a social relationship in which the adolescents are quite conscious of each other as young men and women.

For those who, either as parents, as teachers, or as recreational leaders, have to deal with gang-age boys and girls, the writer begs leave to offer the following suggestions:

First, do not be surprised at the change which takes place in the boy of nine or ten. Before that date little Johnny may not resent being "mother's little man." He may not object too



strenuously to pretty clothes. He is easily amenable to maternal discipline. But when the gang age arrives, a new psychology comes also. The boy suddenly becomes aggressively masculine. His mouth, if not filled with strange oaths, will at least be full of strange slang. He loses the old *rapproch* with home. "What the other fellow does" now becomes of paramount importance. Parents should not be too much surprised when this change comes. They should not be too much discouraged if the boy seems less attached to home. It is all a normal stage of development.

To parents of girls somewhat similar advice must be given. The gang-age girl is a tomboy. She shows very few vestiges of feminine refinement. She takes very little interest in the niceties of personal adornment. She has an unfeminine interest in getting her hands dirty and climbing trees. This again is nothing to be worried about. Parents need only be patient and their adolescent daughters will once again be well-behaved young women.

Both boys and girls need opportunity for group play. This means that home play is becoming less and less adequate. For the home cannot offer the necessary large group of playmates of the same age and sex. One good opportunity for group play is afforded by such national organizations as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Campfire Girls, and others mentioned above. The objection is sometimes made that these organizations take boys and girls out of the home. This seems to me a pointless objection. Gang-age children seek their play groups outside the home in any case. These organizations merely assure us that the groups will be organized wholesomely.

A word in closing about the religious life of the gang age. The boy of this period does not like to be called "pious." He has little patience with sentimentalized religion. He does not like pious forms of speech. The same is true in some degree in his

sister. To the casual observer it might appear that the gang-age child lacks religious depth; but this is only a superficial view. The child of this age does not object to religion; he objects to hypocrisy. Deep down within him he cherishes a loyalty to God which is a tender and beautiful thing. His religion works out in deeds. For, after all, the Masses which priests say each day all over the world are served by gang-age boys who get up in the early morning with no hope of earthly reward to do this service for their God.

## The Adolescent Boy\*

By REV. JEROME MERWICK, O. S. B.

“**T**HE normal adolescent? There isn't such a being.” It was with these words that a noted child psychologist recently began a treatise on adolescence. Perhaps there is some truth in the statement. The average adolescent is in a sense abnormal. He has certain peculiarities that set him off somewhat from the children of the other age periods. These particular traits that characterize him make him somewhat “difficult” at times and tend to lead him into ways of behavior that are not altogether “according to Hoyle.” It may well be added, however, that it is not always the adolescent's fault alone that his conduct fails at times to measure up to the standards set by society for boys of his age. Not infrequently parents or others in authority are also at fault. They fail to understand the adolescent. They fail to do him justice or to treat him with the consideration that is rightly his. Parents, for instance, commonly look forward with pleasant anticipation to the time when Harry will be fully grown up and able to take his place in the world. Yet how many of these same parents will most inconsistently withhold from him the opportunities necessary for normal growth and development. How many of them, for instance, make it impossible for him to develop a full appreciation of adult responsibility. It is always well for parents and others in authority to bear in mind that the adolescent is no longer a little child. He is in a period of rapid

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transition from childhood to manhood and it is of the utmost importance that he be given due opportunity at this time gradually to cast aside the ways of the child and to assume the responsibilities of the man.

The adolescent is usually characterized by a high degree of emotionalism. There is no valid evidence to show that adolescence introduces any new emotions, but the impulses that are already his undoubtedly take on a renewed strength and vigor. It is this emotionalism that causes not a few of his difficulties. It tends to make him over-sensitive and moody. He may note, for instance, or think that he notices, that his parents are less sympathetic towards him than towards other members of the family. He misses the love and consideration that were his in his earlier years. A spirit of antagonism readily results. Goaded on by the notion that the least whims of others around him are always given attention while his own most urgent needs and desires are disregarded, he may even be led to question whether his putative parents are in reality his natural father and mother. The growing boy who is tormented with these and other misgivings needs sympathetic attention and kind consideration. He needs to be treated with the utmost fairness. If such treatment is in reality vouchsafed him, his difficulties will soon be solved. His gloominess will tend to disappear and he will see life again with uncolored glasses.

Another emotional difficulty which not infrequently characterizes the adolescent boy is a feeling of loneliness. He very easily develops the impression that no one cares for him, that everyone misunderstands him. He feels that there is no one to whom he can go to talk matters over; no one to whom he can confide his real or imaginary worries. Unfortunately, too, this feeling of loneliness, and the sense of insecurity that goes with it, is greatly augmented in some cases by the fact that his parents, instead of

being prudently tolerant of his moods and peculiarities, tend to nag and criticize the adolescent constantly. There is no question, of course, that the growing boy can be somewhat of a nuisance about the house and not a little trying to his parents. And certainly no one knows better than he does that he is awkward and clumsy, that his hands and feet are disproportionately large and that they have a peculiar knack of getting mixed up rather unconventionally at times. But he will outgrow all of this if only given a reasonable chance. Persistent nagging and indiscriminate fault-finding on the part of the parents, however, will not help him to do so. Rather will they make matters worse. Happy the lad whose parents do not subject him to constant criticism. Fortunate the adolescent boy whose father is his frequent companion and considerate friend.

A new spirit of self-assertion and independence also commonly shows itself in the adolescent boy. Only too frequently the reaction of the parents to this new development is one of rigidity and ever-increasing strictness. Such a policy is ordinarily not for the best. Many of the parental "don'ts" that are so common to this period might well be omitted with not a little profit to all concerned. As suggested before, if the boy is to grow up, he must be given a chance to do so. Endless restrictions on the part of parents will make the home anything but an inviting place to a growing boy. They will even create in him a spirit of antagonism and of open hostility or rebellion. This is all not to say, of course, that the adolescent should be cut loose entirely from all parental authority. It does not mean that he should be allowed "to live his own life free from all hampering restrictions." The adolescent needs some restrictions. He needs discipline, a steadying hand. He does not, however, need the same amount or kind of restrictions that were his in his earlier years. It may not be easy for parents to find the happy medium between

the two extremes of rigidity and laxity, but every effort should be put forth to do so. It is also well to observe that the restrictions that are imposed should be appropriate and necessary and such as will enable the boy to see in them an instrument for the promotion of his own higher interests.

Again, there is the further emergence of the sex instinct at this period of the boy's life. This implies new difficulties to be encountered, new battles to be won. Manual labor, physical exercise, and good health will help the adolescent in his efforts to keep the mastery over this powerful impulse. But the Catholic parent will particularly encourage the adolescent boy to have resort to prayer and the sacraments as the best means of keeping the spiritual in the ascendancy over the physical. Some further instruction regarding the instinct in question may be necessary on the part of the parents at this time. This will present little difficulty if they have already done their duty towards their child in his earlier years. It will give them the opportunity, however, to increase in him his sense of respect for life and for the sacredness of fatherhood and motherhood. It will also serve to increase the bond of affection and the feeling of confidence between parent and child. Such instruction, properly given, will naturally create an attitude of chivalry on the part of the adolescent boy that will go far towards keeping him above reproach in his habits and thought-life.

The adolescent is naturally a hero-worshipper. He is very easily influenced by ideals. The parent is invariably the embodiment of the little one's ideals. But in early adolescence the boy tends more and more to look to individuals outside the home. Not infrequently he picks upon some well-known public character and makes it the height of his ambition to emulate him. Needless to add, it is of the utmost importance that his new found hero be really deserving of emulation. Today, too, the adolescent



boy gets many of his ideals from the printed page and from the cinema. This naturally suggests the need for parental supervision of the literature that the boy is to read and of the movies that he is to see since here, again, there are tremendous possibilities for evil as well as for good.

Such are at least a few of the considerations that parents may well keep in mind in their efforts to guide their growing lads safely across the restless sea of adolescence on towards the serene port of an upright and useful manhood. The relationship between the two calls not only for mutual love but also for a generous supply of respect and kindly considerations. It calls, furthermore, for mutual effort to understand each other and for a sincere and appreciative respect for each other's personality, interests, problems, and pleasures. Fortunately, none of these things are beyond attainment. And they are worthy of every effort. They will serve to lead both parent and child upward and onward towards a life "rich and overflowing."

## The Adolescent Girl\*

By ANNA E. KING

WHERE in American fiction can we find an adolescent girl as real as "Finch," De la Roche's adolescent boy in the novel, *Finch's Fortune*? You may be shocked, as I was, in rereading our childhood favorite, *Little Women*, to discover that the delightful March sisters were not stuffed with blood and bones and tissues. Did Louisa Alcott ever permit them to question deeply their relationship with any other human being? Did they ever stir us with vexing questions about the meaning of life for them alone? Did they not rather ride along on a series of happenings, homely and natural enough to pass for any girl's real life? If you do not believe me, take *Little Women* off the shelf and reread it for yourself.

Tarkington, reputed wizard at interpreting youth, usually simplifies and caricatures his adolescent heroines. Modern psychological novelists empty out upon the page the contents of a young girl's mind, but they, too, fail to satisfy because the authors seem to be treading quaking marsh as much as their characters. The realities of adolescence may be more frequently encountered in books of psychology than in fiction. However, the best way to meet them is in daily contact with some adolescent girl. Every parent of a teen-age girl has a laboratory of his own.

All of which will not deter from reading, those who are up on their toes and genuinely determined to be the kind of parents

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adolescent girls need. On this account we will dare to suggest, not prescriptions for handling adolescent girls, but some vital principles for parents to follow. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that the important things for parents to do include: observation, the exercise of self-control, active co-operation in the really important matters (important to the girl), and a willingness to let go at the proper times.

Parents sometimes take for granted, with false optimism, that they know pretty much what goes on in their daughter's head merely because they have always lived with her. Sylvia, Dorothy Canfield's heroine in the famous, *Bent Twig*, said with surprise, after she had left her home: "All the time I was growing up, I was blind, I didn't see anything. I don't feel remorseful. I suppose that is the way children have to be. But I didn't *see* my mother. There were so many minor differences between us, tastes and interests."

Nor did Sylvia's parents *see* her. "She was growing up to be herself, not her mother or her father, little as any one in her world suspected. . . . She was alive to all the impressions reflected insistently upon her, but she transmuted them into products which would immensely have surprised her parents, they being under the usual parental delusion that they knew every corner of her heart. Her budding aversions, convictions, ambitions, were not in the least the aversions, the convictions, and ambitions so loudly voiced about her. . . . Her father would have been aghast if he could have felt the slightest reflection from the heat of her detestation of his favorite Emersonian motto, which aroused in Sylvia the rebellious exasperation felt by her age for over-emphatic moralizings."

It is a fairly common happening for daughters, like Sylvia, to become ashamed at times of the nicest parents, simply because they do not reflect the popular mode of thinking, verbalizing, and

competing with their fellow men. Parents who adhere to the principle of being good observers can tolerate that seeming rejection on the part of a daughter as a part of the struggle to grow up and be herself. The self-control exercised here is, of course, closely bound up with the exercise of a sense of humor.

Parents who are good observers watch all the phenomena of adolescent behavior with endless interest to see what their daughter is dramatizing for them from day to day. The giggly, flip-pant manner, the bored air of condescension, the occasional direct defiance of parental edicts, the exaggerated emotional reactions to the most minor frustrations, the display of lack of consideration for others, spells of moodiness and apathy, all may be taken as reactions to the experience of growing up and often as reactions to the way parents treat them.

The questions which tease the minds of objective and understanding fathers and mothers are: "Who is this mysterious, contradictory, frequently annoying human being? What does she want out of life? Does she know, and is she bothered about it? What does she think of me as a parent? What kind of a person would she like me to be?"

As many mistakes can be made in taking growth for granted as in refusing to see that it has taken place. Sound observations, honestly made, often reveal the need for family self-control. A thirteen-year-old girl, a member of a brilliant, exciting family group, clings with grave tenacity to playing with her dolls. Her sisters had given up dolls long before that age. The family were chagrined. Could she be retarded? A mental test reassured them. What to do? How to make her more outgoing? Should they shame her from too much pretending? I am happy to say that the family council decided just to accept her present conduct as an expression of her continued need, and to wait patiently for the day when she might voluntarily put the dolls aside, to remark:

"I'm tired of these old dolls. I'm going over to talk with Alice." This family were wise enough to acknowledge that growth cannot be forced, that they can only co-operate in helping her to go out to meet her world and the people in it.

What are the matters really important to the adolescent girl, with which all fathers and mothers must co-operate or fail her when she needs them most? Some, at least, can be mentioned. Each girl needs an emotional center of gravity, first of all, in the assurance of the continued love and interested attention of her parents. Then she needs: an opportunity to distinguish between other people's ideals and her own; to acknowledge the existence of reasonable authority; to appreciate the need for consideration of those under whose roof she lives and whose support she accepts; to experience satisfying relationships with her own and the opposite sex; to achieve a sense of her self-responsible identity; to live in a spiritual and universal as well as a personal and vocational world; to prepare herself in turn to become an adequate parent.

Co-operation in vital affairs implies quick recognition of the presence of the vital in seemingly trivial concerns. A daughter remarks with a swing of her head that she is through with Bill, who ignored her at the dance last night. A mother, with quick perception to get the implications, may find herself discussing the really important matter of what constitutes comradeship with men.

The problem of diminishing relationships with those who have meant a great deal, is one which many youngsters try to work out alone, often with considerable pain and disillusionment. They face the same situation as Robert Frost's "Oven Bird," for

"The question that he frames in all but words,  
Is what to make of a diminished thing."

The sweetheart whom the girl is outgrowing troubles her with a sense of loyalties forgotten. She may question the permanence of any love if her dearest friend meets someone more interesting and begins to neglect her. Unselfconscious parents who can accept without question or probing any sort of behavior at such a time, provide the comradely setting for thinking through and talking out the problem.

Fellowship in religious experience provides a bond for parents and children which is of special significance in the period of heightened emotions called adolescence. A "Holy Hour" spent together in church, attendance at a retreat, open family discussions of the lives of the saints and the best philosophical books—these and other experiences touch the mainsprings of reality. Of fathers and mothers who know how to share their own spirituality, youngsters can never say: "You can never talk to them about the things that really matter."

Perhaps the hardest job in co-operation is the willingness to let go at the proper times, and the ability to know when not to let go. It would be fatal if the developing girl were to enjoy her dependence upon her parents too much to make an effort to escape. "Letting go" may mean something so small as letting her stay up an hour later at night, or something so big as permitting her to choose a job far away from home and not to the parents' liking. The sweetness of feeling a daughter's dependence is not easily relinquished. The one reward that parents can expect is the delight of recognizing the individuality of the person who is their daughter, and of helping her to grow out of their own lives into her own.



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