THE
HIGH-SCHOOL AGE

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Girls in their Early Teens are Often Taller than Boys the Same Age or Even Older. Both these Children are Fourteen Years Old.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Probably most people appreciate that a human being in his progress from birth to maturity passes through certain ages or epochs, each characterized by peculiar tendencies and activities. If one should ask a man whose business it is to study human nature for practical reasons which of these epochs is of the greatest importance, he would undoubtedly say the period of the teens. He would probably declare that during this period the individual is being molded into final form in body and mind, and that whatever impressions can be made upon him at this time will be likely to be permanent. People are beginning to take this view; for during the last few years much has been said by observers and investigators respecting the chief characteristics of this period. All have noted the appearance of new interests and activities, and the development of extreme sensitiveness to various influences which have been practically unnoticed up until this time. The views of the practical man of affairs and the scientific student of mental development have been in accord with the views of the poets, who never tire of describing the freshness and enthusiasm and abounding vigor, as well as the excesses and the strains and stresses of this age.

In planning the series on *Childhood and Youth*, it was provided that much attention should be given to a practical discussion of the epoch covered substantially by the high-school period. The present volume is devoted wholly to an exposition of the characteristics and needs of the high-school age. Professor King has presented in simple, straightforward language most of the more important re-
CHAPTER VII

THE BIRTH OF A NEW SELF

The great problem of the youth is that of finding himself in the world of work, social enjoyment and duty that surrounds him. This is not altogether a problem of adjustment. It is quite as much a problem of building up a new personality in which shall be fused all that is vital in the world about him with that which is unique or original in himself, for in every human being something new, something individual, is brought into the world. And progress is possible in so far as each youth does not merely conform to life as he finds it, but makes it over to some extent in terms of himself.

The normal adolescent feels keenly the impulse to be himself, to question all traditions and all assumptions, to think things out for himself, whether it be in literature or in art, in religion, in morals, or in social duties. And his impulse is good, even though he may find, in the end, that his conclusions are not so very different from those of others before him. It is through this impulse to think for himself that
sociations, grow away from their parents and their home surroundings! When times of difficulty and struggle come to such as these, we find them turning to some friend outside the family for advice, with the thought that such a one will "understand" better than can the father or the mother.

Mistaken as this whole attitude is, it can so easily develop as the boy or girl journeys from childhood into maturity!

Authors referred to in the text:

(1) Addams, Jane, *Twenty Years at Hull House.*
(2) Bourne, R. S., *Youth and Life.
(3) Slattery, Margaret, *The Girl in Her Teens.*

For further reading and study, consult the references given at the end of Chapter VII.
he finds himself and proves his right to be a man among men.

Very characteristic mental attitudes are apt to attend the process of finding one's self in the larger world of social relationships, attitudes not always appreciated by teachers and parents. He feels at first a vague unrest in his groping for a larger life. The adolescent is traditionally a dreamer. He longs for that which he can not express even to himself. He feels somehow that he is face to face with a great thought which, thus far, no man has ever grasped; he feels he is about to solve the riddle of existence, which hitherto has baffled even the world's greatest minds. The poets who have begun to write in their youth give frequent expression to this haunting sense of being on the verge of a great discovery. No words could more aptly express this feeling than those verses of Tennyson, beginning:

"Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me."

This little poem is a typical exclamation of adolescence, not merely in its suggestion of some great thought which grips the soul, which the youth longs to put forth into words, and which yet seems to baffle all his power of expression, but also in the sense of something mysteriously beautiful and
significant in the play of children on the beach and in the passage of the ships to their haven under the hill.

Longfellow, in such poems as the *Prelude* and *My Lost Youth*, strikes a similar vein, that of being overwhelmed with meanings which he longs to express but which defy his capacity to put into words.

This keen sense of unfathomed, haunting mystery which the youth feels and which he imagines he, of all people who have lived, has somehow chanced to discover is in part the expansion of his being toward the charm and mystery of the opposite sex. Perhaps it is the first manifestation of sex love, not of course understood as such, but indicating nevertheless the enlargement of interests and ideals which must be at the basis of all healthful development of his relations with woman.

We have emphasized the gradual character of the transformations of youth and yet there are nodal points or crises when the aspect of things seems to change pretty definitely. Not that there is necessarily any sudden break in the course of development. It is rather that hidden forces, as we have said, gradually come to the surface and make themselves evident and, because we have not noted them before, we are often inclined to think that something new has been interposed. These crises, or turning points, are rather analogous to the experience of a traveler
who arrives at a turn in his road that brings to him
a new vista or who, surmounting a range of hills
or a mountain, sees for the first time a winding river
and a fertile valley beyond.

Such a crisis in the life of a group of boys and
girls in their middle teens is thus penetratingly de-
scribed by Mrs. Deland. "Elizabeth's long braids had been al-
ways attractive to the masculine eye; they had sug-
gested jokes about pigtails, and much of that pec-
culiar humor so pleasing to the young male; but
the summer she 'put up her hair,' the puppies, so to
speak, got their eyes open. When the boys saw
those soft plaits, no longer hanging within easy
reach of a rude and teasing hand, but folded around
her head behind her little ears; when they saw the
small curls breaking over and through the brown
braids of spun silk, clustering in the nape of her
neck; when David and Blair saw these things, . . .
something below the artless brutality of the boys'
sense of humor was touched. They took abruptly
their first perilous step out of boyhood. Of course
they did not know it. . . . The significant
moment came one afternoon when they all went out
to the tollhouse for ice-cream. . . . As they
sat eating their cream together, Blair suddenly saw
the sunshine sparkle in Elizabeth's hair, and his
spoon paused midway to his lips. 'Oh, say, isn't
Elizabeth's hair nice?' he said. David turned and
looked at it, 'I've seen lots of girls with hair like
that,' he said; but he sighed and scratched his left ankle with his right foot. Blair, smiling to himself, put out a hesitating finger and touched a shimmering curl; upon which Elizabeth ducked and laughed, and dancing over to the old tin pan of a piano pounded out 'Shoo fly' with one finger. Blair, watching the lovely color in her cheek, said in honest delight, 'When your face gets red like that you are awfully good looking, Elizabeth.'

"'Good looking'; that was a new idea to the four friends. Nannie gaped; Elizabeth giggled; David 'got red' on his own account and muttered under his breath. But into Blair's face had come, suddenly, a new expression; his eyes smiled vaguely; he came sidling over to Elizabeth and stood beside her, sighing deeply: 'Elizabeth, you are an awful nice girl.' Elizabeth shrieked with laughter, 'Listen to Blair, he's spoozy!'

"Instantly Blair was angry; 'spooniness' vanished in a flash; he did not speak for fully five minutes." They presently started home, "but," says Mrs. Deland, with keen insight into the nature of youth, "childhood for all of them ended that afternoon." (1)

As Bourne says: "Youth expresses itself by falling in love. Whether it be art, a girl, socialism, religion, the sentiment is the same; the youth is swept away by a flood of love. He has learned to value, and how superlative and magnificent are his values!"
The little child hardly seems to love; indeed his indifference to grown people, even to his own parents, is often amazing. He has the simple affection of a young animal, but how different his cool regard from the passionate flame of youth! Love is youth's virtue, and it is wide as well as deep. There is no tragic antithesis between a youth's devotion to a cause and his love for a girl. They are not mutually exclusive, as romanticists often love to think, but beautifully compatible. They tend to fuse and they stimulate and enoble each other. The first love of youth for anything is pure and ethereal and disinterested. It is only when thwarted that love turns sensual, only when mocked that enthusiasm becomes fanatical and mercenary. Worldly opinion seems to care much more for personal love than for the love of ideals. It gives suffrage and approval to the love of a youth for a girl, but it mocks and discredits the enthusiast. It just grudgingly permits the artist to live, but it piles almost insurmountable obstacles in the path of the young radical. The course of true love may never run smooth, but what of the course of true idealism?" (2)

This passage, though from a prose poet rather than a scientist, is full of deep insight into the psychology of youth, and it is worth studying. The sex impulse is the hidden spring, the underlying motive of much, if not all, of the interesting and worth-while de-
development of this period, and a happy transition to adult life depends almost altogether on how this impulse is utilized. As Jane Addams well says: "The early manifestations of this impulse are for the most part vague and formless, and are absolutely without definition to the youth himself. Some months and years elapse before the individual mate is selected and determined upon, and during the time when the differentiation is not complete—and it often is not—there is a great deal of groping and waste. This period of groping is complicated by the fact that the youth's power for appreciating is far ahead of his ability for expression. 'The inner traffic fairly obstructs the outer current,' and it is nothing short of cruelty to overstimulate his senses as does the modern city." (3)

It would seem, then, to be absolutely essential to normal development that the sex impulse, as a definite and conscious factor in the life of the youth, should emerge in some wholesome way from this background of general idealism and vague longing. The interests which may thus develop will be the driving impulses and motives for all the rest of his life. In the season of youth itself this dispersion of the sex impulse furnishes a ballast that will keep the boy and the girl steady on many tumultuous waters. To quote from Miss Addams again: "If the values [associated with sex] are dispensed over the world, the young person suddenly seems to
have discovered a beauty and a significance in many things—he responds to poetry, he becomes a lover of nature, he is filled with religious devotion or with philanthropic zeal. Experience, with young people, easily illustrates the possibility and value of diffusion.” (3)

What a powerful appeal to youth is made by Tennyson’s *Maud*! Although sex love is the dominant motive, it is effectively interwoven with many other life-interests and finally it is transformed into high ethical purposes. Such passion easily runs over into the esthetic appreciation of nature:

“There has fallen a splendid tear  
From the passion-flower at the gate,  
She is coming, my dove, my dear;  
She is coming, my life, my fate;  
The red rose cries, ‘She is near, she is near’;  
And the white rose weeps, ‘She is late’;  
The larkspur listens, ‘I hear, I hear’;  
And the lily whispers, ‘I wait.’”

Every boy and girl whose mind has not been too early opened to the meaning of those manifold suggestions of a sex nature which pervade and render unhealthful the average social environment, will at first develop in this general way, especially in the direction of the esthetic appreciation of nature and of a passion for lofty ideals. But modern society, or
rather modern commercialism, has, with an almost sardonic insight into the psychology of youth, set a multitude of traps to thwart the normal method of development. The moving-picture shows, even the censored ones, are teeming with suggestions of sex impulse; so also the vaudeville and the popular songs, the dances, the stories, the pictures, whether of genuine art or on flaming bill-boards, all combine to give definite form and content to the sex susceptibility which should at first have been diffused throughout the personality, giving it character and driving power.

The great need of adolescent education, whether in the school or in the home, is just this, of tiding the youth through these critical years, presenting to him abundant opportunities for satisfying his expanding sense of selfhood in wholesome athletics, in oratory, in debate, in art, in literature, in appreciation of natural beauty, in scientific experiment and in various forms of simple social service. "It is neither a short nor an easy undertaking to substitute the love of beauty for mere desire, to place the mind above the senses; but is not this the sum of the immemorial obligation which rests upon the adults of each generation if they would nurture and restrain the youth, and has not the whole history of civilization been but one long effort to substitute psychic impulsion for the driving force of blind appetite?" (3)
We should not, then, conceive these new interests in a narrow sense. The central fact of sexual maturity is, it is true, at the first, the dominant and all-compelling one. For a time it holds the attention of the youth, in one way or another, in its more limited physical aspects. But if his surroundings are normal and hygienic; if his physical development is unretarded and his opportunities for self-expression in a good social environment are what they should be, these basic and, in themselves, animal instincts, broaden out into a host of allied interests. This broadening of the sex impulse has been spoken of as a process of irradiation, or of expansion. The whole tendency of the better phases of modern civilized society is to afford manifold opportunities for a diverse expression of the new life. As the basis of these secondary manifestations it becomes the key, the hidden motive to every conceivable enrichment in the life of later youth and of all the succeeding years of maturity. New appreciations of nature, of poetry, of history and of biography rapidly unfold.

To many a boy, some field of modern science opens up a veritable fairy-land of wonder and opportunity. Others crave adventure and forget all else in its mad quest. The pulse of the explorer and of the buccaneer begins to throb in their veins. Friendship assumes a new meaning. The mind of the youth begins to open up to the characteristics
of strength and of weakness in his more mature associates. He becomes a hero-worshiper; an ardent admirer of the man who can do things; who can lead his fellow men or direct their energies to the working out of some purpose. He is as yet not always able to distinguish worthy from unworthy purposes. His outlook, at first, lacks perspective or a due sense of proportion. He is often quite as ready to admire and imitate the base and selfish manifestation of power as the more enlightened, socialized types. But he is not lacking in appreciation of the deeper ethical and social relations and duties of men.

A vague crude idealism is a part of the life of all early adolescence, an idealism that is often early nipped in the bud or suffers in its development a pitiful miscarriage. But there is an idealism there to start with and often it carries the youth over many untoward circumstances and renders him oblivious to many of the sordid influences that play upon him and strive to check his gropings after the larger life which he feels is unfolding before him. Healthful, vigorous outdoor exercises, constructive work of all sorts, opportunities for social service, religious exercises make powerful appeals to him and afford so many fruitful avenues for the expression of this new life that first comes to his consciousness in the impulses associated with sexual maturity.

Every youth is, then, an incipient reformer, a
missionary, impatient with what seem to him the
pettiness and the obtuseness of the adult world about him. It is
true that many aspects of this adult world are petty and bound down by useless compromise with ideals. The adult world needs the vitalizing energy of each new generation of youths to open its eyes or even to sweep it, if need be, off its feet and knock from under it the props of tradition and of complacency. And yet the world of mature men and women is not quite so blind and halting as the youth often imagines, and as he will discover for himself when he finds his own place within it.

The advice of Wendell Phillips that the young man should identify himself with some great but unpopular cause finds a ready response in the vague longings of the adolescent who is fortunate enough to be living in a community or in a country where some burning social question is agitating the social conscience.

How common it is for boys and girls in their teens to feel that they have been born to fill some great place in life! Take any group of high-school pupils of past sixteen, and what aspirations, nay, even settled convictions as to the high part they are to play in the world may we, who gain their confidence, discover hidden in their inmost hearts. This one aspires to be a poet, that one a novelist, another
a statesman, still another a great musician or an orator. We do not, indeed, mention this to discredit such a spirit of high resolve. Nothing in human life is finer, in a way, than this. The spirit of great men is essentially the spirit of youth with its never-ending enthusiasms, its untiring energy, its daring, its vision. It is not strange that so many of the world's great soldiers, reformers, prophets, poets, musicians, statesmen have been young men and women.

When we read the biographies of such people we find them strangely like the boys and girls whom we see every day in our high schools, and on our streets and farms. The world's renowned seem to have been able to carry to a fuller realization than most of us succeed in doing, the impulses which throb in the breast of almost every live, adolescent boy or girl. These high-school years are years of promise. The pity of it is that later years are not inclined to view the promises of youth with sufficient indulgence. Too few of these fine anticipations of greatness ever get worked out. Not that these children should all normally grow up to be gifted men and women. The plea is rather that they should carry over into their maturity some of the enthusiasm and vision of youth. Even the humblest work that they may take up has a need of being transfused and enriched with the fiery zeal of adolescence.
This is the time when boys and girls are hungry for stirring biography. How many a time does one of our pupils feel, as he reads the story of a great thought or sees that thought worked out into a great deed, "That is just the thing I was trying to say, to do." He finds his own best aspiring self pictured in the life of the statesman, of the reformer, of the missionary, and this glimpse, helping him to know himself better, is an important factor in his own development.

Many a time, of course, the larger vision of life does not have opportunity to develop in normal surroundings. The fine impulse "to be something in the world" may easily run into semi-if not actual criminality. Many investigators have called our attention to the large percentage of crime that comes from the hands of the youth. Fortunately, much of it is not the expression of a really vicious nature, but of the misguided impulse to find adventure, to see life, to do something big and startling. It is not necessary here to enter into the long and pitiful story of adolescent faults and crimes. The preceding sentences give one the point of view from which to understand much of it. Through the list of references given below the reader may find ample illustration of that to which we refer.

Authors referred to in the text:

(1) Deland, Margaret, *The Iron Woman.*
BIRTH OF A NEW SELF

(2) Bourne, R. S., Youth and Life.
(3) Addams, Jane, The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets.

References for further reading and study:
Starbuck, E. D., Spontaneous Awakenings, Chapter XVI of The Psychology of Religion.