

Moral Education of the Adolescent

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I—*Today, a Time of Crisis*

I am sure that we are all agreed in theory that the moral culture of our boys and girls is the most important issue of our country. Yet, we really give much less attention and concern to it than we give to many things of far less import. I write the *Era* in the high hope, and with a great desire, that I may help to bring the question to the foreground in the minds and hearts of its readers. I understand full well that in the space at disposal we can refer to only a few questions among the many that grow out of this great problem; and we can barely touch these few.

First, as to the import and the urgent need *now* of action on this question; I suppose every thoughtful man *sees* that the rapid multiplicity of modern inventions has produced such wonderful industrial changes as to almost completely upset our social standards of life—and this applies with full force to both community and family relations. At the same time all the old time hopes and beliefs, as old as the world, of a religious nature, have been challenged by modern scientific theories, and in the minds of great numbers of our American people, largely or wholly discredited.

The result is that we are thrown into the midst of such a rapidly changing and complex social whirlpool that we are all bewildered and many of us totally lost. The forces of greed for gold have been quick to seize upon the financial opportunities of commercializing our social pleasures. The liquor and white slave traffickers have used their gigantic powers to turn these commercialized social pleasures into such channels as will fill their coffers. This co-operation—of the moneyed interests that have commercialized our leisure pursuits, and the terrible twin sisters of the saloon and brothel—has put to such skilful use the all pervading influence of modern advertising as to lay their filthy, soul-destroying hands upon our social customs in every nook and corner of our glorious land. Our whole social life is permeated by the poisonous breath of these leprous, defiling, damning influences. Added to all this we have been flooded, yes, overwhelmed with sudden prosperity that has literally burdened us with such wealth as the world has never before known.

But at the same time, the conserving family customs and the sacred, holy influences of the home have been largely swept away by some or all of the above named changes and influences. Add to this the fact that the hallowed influence and divine authority of the Church are largely denied, and we have a picture that is gloomy enough.

But let us be glad that through it all we have had valiant souls who have girded themselves for the fight against these terrible monsters of evil and crime. These brave ones have inspired us with strength and courage by their heroic living, and their words of promise. Then too, the wholesome influences of our free, simple, rural life, and the

strengthening struggles of our pioneer fathers and mothers—I speak of the nation at large as well as of our great virile west—had rooted so deeply into our souls the habits and ideals and convictions and purposes of moral righteousness that our ruin is not easily accomplished. And there are many signs that give promise of better days. But the loss in souls is great, and we have been struck to the heart and deeply hurt.

Yet, I fully believe; yes, I feel assured that *we*, who live in this choicest section of this choice country, at least will rise up with such love and faith and strength as to win the day. And just here let me say that two great things give me abiding hope and undoubting assurance. First, I find eternal inspiration in the *inherent moral nature*, and the *persistent* disposition of the child,—the *boy* and the *girl*,—to live the *good* life. I thank God for the fresh hope and abiding promise that I get from my daily association with my own children, and our *youth* wherever I meet them in this broad land. And second, I do know that we love our homes, our family institutions. As mothers, we glory even in the self-denials and sufferings that our maternity brings us. And as fathers, we find our greatest pride in the struggles and obligations that inhere to our callings in caring for and protecting our families. "Our home stands at the end of every day's labor, and beckons us to its bosom," after the day's struggle, with the promise of holy affection and hallowed associations as the reward for our toil. Our wives and mothers thrill and glow in the truth of these immortal words of Holland's: "The woman who trains her family and rules her household well, fills and honors the highest office the world has for her; and whenever a wife or mother steps out of such a place she steps down, even though her steps lead to a throne."¹ And our husbands and fathers are the men of whom Joaquin Miller could say that we are the sires of the rarest and choicest babes born into this world since time began, because we "hate low desire and love our kind." To us the marriage relation is an altar upon which we offer our lives and strength in purity of heart to preserve and make sacred the home.

I often hear parents say to our lads and maidens of high school age, "If I had only had your opportunities, what wouldn't I have done," etc. We forget that temptations have multiplied many times faster than opportunities. I would rather say, "Would we have stood erect and kept our feet in the way of life had we had such temptations as they have?" I believe most of us would have done so, and I believe most of our boys and girls will do so. I urge that we rededicate ourselves to the task of glorifying parenthood—being grand men and noble women in our homes and daily lives before our children. By so doing we may help our children to the conviction that obedience is the crowning virtue of childhood and youth—an enlightened and spontaneous obedience that makes *partners* and *comrades* of children and parents. By thus exalting the office of parenthood and imbuing the young with the spirit of filial obedience alone may the home be made a veritable temple for the moral culture of the boy and the girl.

II—*The Call to Fight*

¹ J. G. Holland, *Plain Talks*, p. 120.

But since the church and home have lost something of their former authority and influence, the state, through its public schools, is obliged to undertake much of this work of preserving the nation by keeping its people clean and upright.

Buisson says, "The nation having become sovereign of her destinies must take care of her future and rest secure of the morrow."

And as teachers we surely agree with Sissons when he declares:

"A believer in education must needs deny the power of luck and must pin his faith to the proposition that character develops, like all other growing things, in accordance with inviolable laws; and that if we could know these laws, and act always in accordance with them, we should be able—not to make what we please out of any child,—but to make of every child the best that he is capable of becoming."²

Parents as well as teachers are involved in this great problem of moral training. One of our greatest authorities on education puts it thus:

"This is considered the most vital and the most difficult of all the many vast problems before the American people. It is not for educators alone, but for the nation to solve. It is the problem in which all the deep questions touching the perpetuity of our race and people culminate, and one in which a great awakening seems by every sign to impend."³

"The work to which we are called is thus one of conserving the highest of our racial and national resources and to convert arid moral wastes into fields teeming with harvest. This task cannot wait. The call is like that with which the New Testament opens—its tocsin words are now and here. The realization of long delayed hopes, the averting of long felt dangers must be accomplished at once. To do this we must call home our hopes for a far future, our desires for a distant good, and cash all their specious promises into immediate and present effectiveness. This makes great epochs, and the formula for little ones and mean ones is: Great plans for the future, and precious hopes for all the goods that are remote, and nothing here and now. Has any race ever had so urgent and imperative a call to do a present duty."⁴

If we do not answer this call we will have failed the coming generations, and proven ourselves unworthy of our inheritance.

III—*Preadolescence*

As I view the matter there are three essential things in our training of the *little* child. They are, first, to keep him well and vigorous in body; second, to provide him with *models* to

² Sissons, *Essentials of Character*, p. 1.

³ G. Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems*, p. 200.

⁴ G. Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems*, p. 339.

imitate—I think I would add here that the critic and fault-finder should be kept far from him; and the third is to keep him *happy*. This last I consider so important and so much neglected that I can hardly refrain from again quoting Commissioner Sissons:

"Hopefulness is cheerfulness with forward look and outstretched hand. * * * * The capital crime of early training is the killing of happiness; nothing can atone for that loss. * * * * The joy that illuminates the days and hours of childhood also lays the best foundation for strength and wisdom and health to serve maturity and old age."⁵

Prof. George Herbert Palmer has given such a graphic comparison of the charming little fellow of the early imitative period, and the boy of the trying period following when he comes into a life of his own, as his individuality begins to assert itself, that we cannot do better than to give place to his words:

"We accordingly reverence the child and delight to watch him. How charming he is, graceful in movement, swift of speech, picturesque in action! Envidable little being! The more so because he is able to retain his perfection for so brief a time.

"But we all know the unhappy period from seven to fourteen, when he who formerly was all grace and spontaneity discovers that he has too many arms and legs. How disagreeable the boy then becomes. Before, we liked to see him playing about the room. Now we ask why he is allowed to remain. For he is a ceaseless disturber; constantly noisy and constantly aware of making a noise, his excuses are as bad as his indiscretions. He cannot speak without making some awkward blunder. He is forever asking questions without knowing what to do with the answers. A confused and confusing creature. We say he has grown backward. Where before he was all that is estimable, he has become all that we do not wish him to be.

"All that *we* do not wish him to be, but certainly much more what God wishes him to be. * * * * For if we could get rid of our sense of annoyance, we should see that he is reaching, a higher stage, coming into a heritage and obtaining a life of his own. Formerly he lived merely the life of those about him."⁶

I shall leave this period—the habit-forming time, and the age when the child's individuality asserts itself—after quoting the following from Dr. Hall:

"So, too, in our urbanized hot-house life, that tends to ripen everything before its time, we must teach nature, although the very phrase is ominous. But we must not in so doing, wean still more from, but perpetually incite to visit field, forest, hill, shore, the water, flowers, animals, the true homes of childhood in this wild undomesticated stage in which modern conditions have kidnapped and transported him. Books and reading are distasteful, for the very soul and body cry out for more active, objective life, and to know

⁵ Sissons, *Essentials of Character*, pp. 49, 50.

⁶ Geo. Herbert Palmer, *The Nature of Goodness*, pp. 236, 237.

nature and man first hand. These two staples, stories and nature, by these informal methods of the home and the environment, constitute the fundamental education."⁷

"Never again will there be such susceptibility to drill and discipline such plasticity to habituation, or such ready adjustment to new conditions. It is the age of external and mechanical training * * * this is not teaching in its true sense so much as it is drill, inculcation, regimentation. The method should be mechanical, repetitive, authoritative, and dogmatic. The automatic powers are now at their very apex and they can bear and do more than our degenerate pedagogy knows or dreams of."⁸

During this period the child should be well established in the moral habits of righteousness, and thoroughly committed to the practice of filial and community obedience.

IV—*Adolescence, the Age for Moral Culture*

We will now let Mr. Gould, the greatest living authority on moral education in England, introduce us to the adolescent boy and girl—the golden age for moral and religious culture:

"When beyond the line of puberty, a great gate unfolds its leaves, the soul will then (if ever) enter the Storm and Wrestling experience, and try its strength on doctrine, gospel, revelation, and inquiry into things universal. * * * * This then is the moment to portray a long and rich series of examples of self-control, self-direction, self-development, kindness, generosity, sincerity, veracity, modesty, fairness, justice, chivalry, beauty, honesty, honor, industry, loyal service in family relations, in friendships, in art and craft, in conquest of difficulties, in social co-operation and civic order and progress."⁹

I truly believe that this period of the teens is a wonderland of opportunity for moral training. Yet, it seems to me because of our lack of vision here, that it is too often, both at home and at school, the age of misunderstandings and consequently of offenses between the child and his parents and teachers. Am I fortunate or unfortunate in retaining rather vivid memories of the crises in my life, and in the lives of some of my comrades, during this period?

Many of our greatest educators—men and women of *vision* and *rich experience*—even while writing on purely philosophical or psychological themes, burst suddenly into poetry or religious fervor when writing of the adolescent youth or maiden. I feel sure that it will be profitable for us to quote some of these authorities as they reveal and declare their love for youth; for the words that I shall select, shall be ripe in educational wisdom and warm in inspiration.

Hall says:

⁷ G. Stanley Hall, *Youth*, p. 34.

⁸ G. S. Hall, *Youth*, p. 5.

⁹ Gould, *Moral Instruction*, p. 24.

"But with the teens all this begins to be changed, and many of these precepts must be gradually reversed. There is an outburst of growth that needs a large part of the total physical energy of the body. There is a new interest in adults, a passion to be treated like one's elders, to make plans for the future, a new sensitiveness to adult praise or blame. The large muscles have their innings and there is a new clumsiness of body and mind. The blood vessels expand, and blushing is increased, new sensations and feelings arise, the imagination blossoms, love of nature is born, music is felt in a new, more inward way, fatigue comes easier and sooner; and if heredity and environment enable the individual to cross this bridge successfully, there is sometimes almost a break of continuity, and a new being emerges. The drill methods of the preceding period must be slowly relaxed and new appeals made to freedom and interest. We can no longer coerce, for fear of a break, but must lead and inspire if we would avoid arrest. Individuality must have a longer tether. *Never is the power to appreciate so far ahead of the power to express, and never does understanding so outstrip ability to explain. Over accuracy is atrophy. Both mental and moral acquisitions sink at once too deep to be reproduced by examination without injury both to intellect and will.* There is nothing in the environment to which the adolescent nature does not keenly respond. With pedagogic tact we can teach about everything we know that is really worth knowing; but if we amplify and moralize, instead of giving great wholes, if we let the hammer that strikes the bell rest too long against it, and deaden the sound, and if we wait before each methodic step till the pupil has reproduced all the last, *we starve and retard the soul, which is now all insight and receptivity. Plasticity is at its maximum, utterance at its minimum. The inward traffic obstructs the outer currents. Boys especially are often dumb-bound, monophrastic, inarticulate, save in their own vigorous and inelegant way. Deep interests arise, which are almost as sacred as is the hour of visitation of the Holy Ghost to the religious teacher.*"¹⁰

While Percival Chubb thus declares himself:

"This golden age does undoubtedly offer rare and peculiar opportunities to the educator. The young nature, crossing the threshold of adult years, expands with almost sudden access of life. It is an age of new birth, of quick changes and swift maturity; *the age for the taking of vows and assuming of responsibilities*; the age of consecration and self-dedication. In the course of a few years the slim, frocked girl becomes the gowned and dignified woman; the boy's piping treble turns to a manly bass. Features take a firmer cast; the limbs a settled pose and gait. And this outward change of life, as we significantly phrase it, is marked by inward mutations no less marked. The nature vibrates with new longings and resolves, deeper admirations and hopes, strange curiosities and doubts. The tumult and trouble of the spring tide are in the brain and heart no less.

"As a rule these four years of high school life are to count for more in determining the set of the character than any other four years of life. When at one time the throng of new interests, tastes, and desires declare themselves. When, one after another, literature,

¹⁰ G. S. Hall, *Youth*, pp. 236, 237.

music and the arts—nature, solitude, religion, adventure—make appeal to the sensitive nature, it becomes a matter of chief moment whether what are often mere transience of impulse and liking, mere shy, fleeting visitants asking food and shelter, are to receive a hearty and hospitable welcome, or are to be excluded (forever as it often proves) from the home and the soul. Are they to grow to more and more under generous hospitality, or to die of inanition and neglect? The High School teacher may be a large—sometimes the largest—factor in deciding the answer to these vital questions."¹¹

Turning now to Pres. Henry C. King of Oberlin College, we are given an insight into another sphere of the nature of youth:

"The peculiar natural power of all the active instincts at adolescence certainly can never be wisely ignored. At no other time does the human being show so clearly that he is made for action. The love of excitement and adventure, the fierce combative instinct that delights in danger, in struggle, and even in destruction; the restless ambition that seeks with an insatiable longing to better its position and to climb to heights yet unscaled; the craving enjoyment which not only gives pleasure but carries with it a thrill of passion,—all these are particularly in evidence at this period; and it is surely, as Lecky says, a part of the business of education to find for them a healthy, useful or at least harmless sphere of action. In the chemistry of character they may ally themselves with the most heroic as well as with the worst elements of our Nature."¹²

I wish I could quote to you from Judd, Bagley, Parker, Thorndyke and others, but I am forced to content myself with another quotation from the great Dean of moral education in England. Mr. Gould says:

"Three problems assail the soul and, if they make their appeal simultaneously, the agitation will be profound, and deep will call unto deep. One is that of the physical relation to the race; in a word the sex-life. The second is that of the social relation, realized in manners, industry, and ambitions. The third is the relation to the world at large, and this involves the insistent and perhaps turbulent questions of God, morality, destiny. * * * Youth desires to know its threefold relation—physical, social, and universal, and in the very nature of the case, its chief need is liberty, combined with a prudent and sympathetic provision for companionships, search, adventure, experiment, discussion, reflection. Dictation is the natural enemy of such liberty, and adolescence quite naturally and quite rightly resents dictation, and wards off a fussy interference. * * *

* This is a liberty which ought to be unchecked by premature wage earning and material cares. *Nevertheless, it is not a liberty with intelligence enough to discover its true environment*, and it is at this point that society should intervene in the provision of opportunities of learning, exercise, co-operation, industry, recreation, friendships, self-culture, and rudimentary civic functions. 'What is a noble life?' asked Alfred DeVigney, and he replied to himself: 'A thought formed in youth and realized in mature years.' How far does society help its youth of both sexes to form such thoughts? Not wishing to lapse into a mood of irony or scorn I leave the question un-answered. But till our daughters and

¹¹ Percival Chubb, *The Teaching of English*, pp. 235, 236.

¹² Henry chill King, *Rational Living*, p. 151.

sons think these thoughts, and until we furnish them with the workshop and garden for that self-discipline and self-revelation, our whole social structure must suffer confusion and decay." ¹³

"It is of the first importance to let him feel that his individuality is to be fostered and not repressed; that we wish to discover his gifts and capacities, and give them scope for exercising them; and we need not hesitate * * * to tell him of willful children * * * whose troublesome passions have become transfigured into useful activities. The education of the future will mainly concern itself, not with what the 19th century called discipline, *but with discovering what the child can be and do and inciting him to be and do that*. It is not the least of our tasks to unfold the romance of existence to the child's imagination, sometimes by the portrayal of chosen heroes, and more often by the portrayal of the risks, adventures and joyful victories of everyday household life and civic industry. *Show life; constantly enlarge the landscape of life; make life magnetic in its crowded interests; * * * .* The child is an intellectual being, and to his intellect we will appeal. He loves to construct; we will build up ideas of justice, devotion, and sympathy. He loves affirmation rather than negation; we will prove that the moral life is a perpetual *Yea* of experiment, skill, exploration, and doggedness. He loves to ask and understand; we will have daily news for him, and narrate to him constantly fresh tidings of the battle of good and evil. He loves simplicity and directness; * * * we will present the issues dramatically so as to make claim straightway to his sense of justice and his unsophisticated sympathies. The child 'wants to be a man,' in other words, he wants to tread an ever widening arena of experience; we will teach him that this arena is the universe itself, and his companions in the action are saints and captains, sisters of mercy and noble 'Mothers in Israel.' In his sports he has learned the value of a target and a goal; we will impart to him the open secret that life with a purpose is worth living. Every normal child has his passion for achievement, and the so-called 'bad boy' is often a complete arsenal of misdirected idealisms; we will let him see our own enthusiasm and beckon him to the strenuous quest. If at any moment he betrays a disposition to cunning, to trickery, to circumvention, we will assure him that an honorable career requires alertness, wit, ingenious adaptation of means to ends. * * * If he is persistent, we will not stay to call him obstinate; we will congratulate him on his possession of a quality which is proof of an inward stability." ¹⁴

A friend of mine, a teacher and a psychologist, whose judgment I esteem very highly feels that the changes attributed to the child at this period are greatly exaggerated. He contends and finds some educators of eminence as authority for his contentions, that there are no new instincts or interests or capacities born at this period, except the awakening or birth of the sex nature. I do not deny this claim. But of this I feel quite sure: that often the mental and spiritual powers do grow, even as the body and its powers do, by *leaps and bounds*. Whether new capacities and interests are born, or whether those already possessed suddenly *burst into new life and power*, I know not. But this I know, *that the passion for life—the passion to dare and do, to love and create—is now intensified and glorified within the heart of boy and girl*. They are born again. Born into the realm of manhood and womanhood. He is no longer a child. Their hopes and plans and dreams are

¹³ Gould, *Moral Instruction*, pp. 25, 26.

¹⁴ Gould, *Moral Instruction*, pp. 85, 86.

the inspirations and aspirations of the man and woman now. So I close by venturing that this is a critical period. To the high school boy and girl we parents and teachers may be either priests of life or stumbling blocks just as we have vision of their possibilities and worth, or as we are blind to these glories of youth.

(To be continued)

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