

Chapter 1

The Period of Pre-adolescence

It Means. The age which we designate as pre-adolescence is an age of eager desires on the part of the child, and therefore of increasing problems on the part of the parent. The term "pre-adolescence" is comparatively new, and may not be found in your dictionary. It means, of course, "before adolescence." But while such a term might imply all the period of childhood, it has in fact been restricted to the three or four years immediately preceding adolescence. An authoritative work, "The Child: His Nature and His Needs," published by the Children's Foundation, thus defines it:

"There is a well-defined period or stage of development preceding adolescence that is called the pre-adolescent or pre-puberty stage of development. The period lasts three or four years, and extends, roughly speaking, from ten to fourteen in boys, and from nine to thirteen in girls."

The term pre-adolescence, then, is used simply to mean the last stage of childhood. It is set apart for study because this age has developments and problems distinct from early childhood. It is a time in which the body and mind of the child are getting ready for the elemental changes of puberty. Life does not leap from one level to another; it ascends an incline.

Will to Do. The development of the will and of initiative is noticeable in pre-adolescence. It is the transition period from the dependence of young childhood to the independence of adolescence. The little child is continually looking to the parent for help, for ministry to his needs; the child of ten to thirteen has developed his powers so far that he is always seeking permission to do something for himself; the youth feels fully his capabilities, and initiates and carries through his own activities. The little child says, "I want;" the pre-adolescent says, "Let me;" the young adolescent says, "I'm going to - may I?" and the older adolescent says, "I do."

So now we are dealing with the age of "Let me." Without question, the ten-to-twelve-year-old has abilities that his younger brothers and sisters have not. He has mastered the elemental facts of existence, - he no longer thinks that money is the product of the bank, to be had for the asking; he knows that food grows out of the ground and must be

GROWING BOYS AND GIRLS

worked for; he is aware of many dangers, from peach-tree switches to traffic streams, and is alert to dodge them. He has met the world at school, and his social sense is growing. He wants the good things of the earth, and there is stirring in him the impulse to earn some of them for himself.

Broader Outlook. The problem of parental government is affected by all these facts. The time was, in the infancy of the child, when his chief instinct was to keep close to his mother and his father. A hint of danger, the sound of warning, was sufficient to make him scurry to their protecting arms, as chickens to a mother hen's wings. The word of his parents was law, because in that word he understood, both by instinct and by experience, there was safety. But now he has a broader outlook and a more venturesome spirit. He has tested his powers and has learned to have some confidence in their use, whether of legs or of fists, whether of memory or of wits. Consequently he wants more liberty of action. He is not yet ready to forsake entirely the shelter of the home guards, but he wants a longer rope for his tethering.

Look Ahead. When the child has reached this period, it is time for the parent to look well to his preparation for the experience just ahead. The parent must see to it that the child is occupied but not overtaxed with both physical and mental exercise. He is in school, and there is no reason, ordinarily, why he should not continue his school work, though there is, at least in America, a very grave question whether the amount of study, or rather of schoolroom occupation, is not too great for the average child.

Physical Work. He should have physical work which will keep in trim his muscles, and make steady his nerves, as well as satisfy his mind. The chores and light duties of the typical country or small-town home are good discipline to the boy and girl, and the reasonable occupation of their out-of-school time in these duties is very essential. The child left to idleness, or to no more strenuous occupation than reading, will surely fill mind and hands with evil. At the same time it must be noted that the greatest benefit from this occupation is obtained only when the child's interest and desire are enlisted in the work. There must be sufficient companionship of the parent with the child in his tasks to make them seem attractive, and there must be inculcated through story and precept, as well as by example, ideas of the nobility and benefit of work. Some tangible reward for his efforts must always be given the child.

GROWING BOYS AND GIRLS

Recreation. Nor can the need of recreation be ignored. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." The play spirit of early childhood remains with the child, beginning to be featured now by the games and plays of older boys or girls. Reasonable allowance of these plays and sports must be given, and it is best if father and mother will mingle in them with their children to as full an extent as possible. Dad and his boy must be acquainted on the ball ground and on the hike, as well as in the garden and the house. Mother must be as interested in the play house and in the picnic as in the kitchen sink. Romping games are as good now for the boy and girl as they ever have been. Climbing fences and trees, tramping the woods and roads, swimming, camping, and many other athletic activities should have their place in the pre-adolescent life.

Health. The physical life of the child must receive very great care. Nowadays in nearly all schools, either public or private, there is health inspection of the children, and from your child's health chart, and, if necessary, through special information from the teacher or inspector, you may learn in what respects his physical condition and habits need to be bettered. Nourishing food, attendance to body needs, and medical or surgical attention when necessary, are essential for the laying of a right foundation for your child's successful adolescent life.

The parent must plan to give the child in sufficient time adequate instruction in regard to the sex development and sex functions at puberty. If the proper attitude in this matter has been held by the parent during his child's earlier years, it will be natural for him to follow it up with the necessary instruction at this period. If he has neglected the earlier instruction, his task may be more difficult, but it is not less imperative. Neglect to give this instruction in time has in many cases resulted in morbidity and consequent perversion and mental instability.

Moral Training. The moral training in this period is of great importance. If the child has been rightly taught, he will come to this period with habits of truthfulness, obedience, reverence, and purity; but now in this anteroom of adolescence he, is facing such tremendous forces that he must be especially fortified. Truthfulness can be assured only by maintenance of full confidence between parent and child, and this confidence must be maintained by companionableness on the part of the parent. Indeed, the child who is kept close to a good father and a good mother can scarcely go wrong. The reading will largely influence the ideals and the habits of the child at this age, and it is a part of the

GROWING BOYS AND GIRLS

parent's care not merely to follow the child's taste, but to help him select his books for reading, and to read them with him.

Government. The problem of government is inextricably bound up with all the questions of the child's contacts, occupations, interests, and powers. He cannot be kept so closely at home as when a little child; but just how much range shall he be allowed? He has a wider circle of acquaintance than formerly, and cannot be expected to think of no one but home people; but shall he have liberty for overnight and more extended visits? He has become a lover of sports and expeditions; how shall this passion relate to home duties? He is incited by his own wants and by the examples of his fellows to try out some enterprise or money-making scheme; shall he in this receive parental license, reproof, or cooperation? Covering all these phases are the questions of in what manner he shall be directed, whether blind obedience is to be exacted, or whether he is to be given some view of the machinery of reason behind the commands.

To all these questions and problems in the physical, mental, social, religious, and governmental life, our future studies will be addressed.