



BRINGING UP THE BOY

CARL AVERY WERNER



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I [FROM BABY TO BOY](#)
- II [THE SIMPLICITY OF DISCIPLINE](#)
- III [AS THE TWIG IS BENT](#)
- IV [A TALK AT CHRISTMAS TIME](#)
- V [THE DYNASTY OF THE DIME NOVEL](#)
- VI [THE SIN OF SEX SECRECY](#)
- VII [THE WEED AND THE WINECUP](#)
- VIII [OUT INTO THE WORLD](#)

I FROM BABY TO BOY

Your son, madam, while passing a vacant house, paused, poised his arm and deliberately sent a small stone crashing through one of the windows. Then, turning on his heel, he ran nimbly up the street and disappeared around the corner.

You know it occurred, because some one living next to the house saw him do it and told the owner, and the owner came to you for reparation and you charged the boy with it and he admitted it to be true.

You are heartbroken because you find yourself confronted with what appears to be irrefutable evidence that your son is a bad boy.

You ask him why he did it. He doesn't know. You suggest that it might have^[4] been an accident. Being a truthful boy, he replies tearfully that it was not. You enquire if he had any grievance against the man who owns the house. He answers that he hadn't even heard of the owner and didn't know who he was. Then—you ask again—why did he do it? You get the same answer:

“I don't know.”

It certainly looks dubious for your boy, madam, doesn't it? If at the tender age of ten years a lad will deliberately “chuck” a stone through a neighbouring window, with no reason or provocation for it whatsoever, what may he not be capable of at twenty? The thought is appalling, isn't it?

Happily, however, I think it can be demonstrated to your complete satisfaction that your son is not bad—so far as this particular offence is concerned, anyway—and that this stone-throwing business is a perfectly natural thing for a perfectly normal boy to do.

To start with, let us suppose that I have placed on your back fence, side by side, a brick and a bottle. I then hand you a little target-rifle and invite you to try your skill at shooting. Now, which will you aim at—the brick or the bottle?

The bottle, of course. You answer more quickly than I can write it.

And why the bottle?

Just think that over a moment, please. Why the bottle?

Meanwhile, let us go back to the boy and the window.

The desire to see a physical result from any personal effort is deep-seated in every human being. Where is the author who does not take secret and real pleasure in scanning the achievements of his pen in the public print? Where is the architect who would forego the pleasure of seeing the finished structure, the lines and masses of which he has dreamed over and designed? The desire to see the result follow the endeavour, the effect follow the cause, is strong within us all.

It may seem a far cry from art and letters to the boy and the broken window, but the psychologic principle involved is one and the same. The boy, sauntering along the

street or the roadway, has been amusing himself by throwing stones. He has sent one against the side of a barn with no effect other than the sound of a hollow thud as it struck the boards. He has heaved one at a telegraph pole, and the pole didn't even quiver. Then he spies the vacant house.

It is obviously deserted and abandoned. A pane already shattered in one of the windows starts the idea. It is far enough back from the street to make the throw a test of skill. If he misses there's no harm done. If he hits there'll be a noise, a crash, a shower of flying glass and—Enough! Up goes the arm, away goes the stone with fateful accuracy and the deed is done. It was the act of a sudden impulse. Before the conscience within him could assert itself the missile had struck; and that innate human ambition to produce a visible result was gratified.

The deed is done, and the boy doesn't know why he did it. But returning to the hypothesis of the brick and the bottle, perhaps you, madam, can explain why you would prefer to shoot at the bottle.

In these talks I want to tell mothers something of what I know about boys; not all about them, but just a few of the more vital things that every mother of a boy ought to know and every father ought to be reminded of. I say "reminded" advisedly, for the fathers must have known some time, though it would seem that most of them have forgotten now. What I say I know about boys, I know. What I may suggest or advise is another matter. It can stand only as a belief, an opinion, and my sole excuse for presuming to offer it is that I love the boy; I live close to him and I believe in him.

I do not believe that the intuitiveness generally accredited to motherhood is in the least degree overestimated or exaggerated. But mere intuitiveness, even in its highest form of development, can hardly be expected to bridge the natural gap of temperamental sex difference between mother and son.

Unfortunately, the father, not eager to invade what he believes to be the mother's sphere, usually is content to leave the management of the boy in the mother's hands, while the mother, not recognising the deficiency of her position, labours on patiently, lovingly, untiringly, but in many cases blindly, and often with poor success. If mothers only understood this it would be better. If they could be brought to realize the handicap under which they are striving they could fortify themselves against it. They could deepen the interest of the father or, failing that, they could at the least draw upon his experience and knowledge of real boyhood with good effect. But there are no sex distinctions to the average mother. The boys and the girls are just "the children" and the difference of sex is lost in the great catholicity of maternal love.

At the very beginning parents must concede the existence of an inherent temperamental difference between the boy and the girl. This, for the mother, is not so easy of adjustment as it may appear. The boy is her baby, just her baby, from swaddling-clothes to long trousers.

The fact is, of course, that the assertion of the sex temperament starts almost with the beginning of life. For the first four or five years it is, to be sure, almost a

negligible quantity, but after that the boy needs to be treated as a boy, and not as a sexless baby.

Put a pair of new red shoes on a little girl's feet and send her out among a group of misses shod in black. Then watch her plume herself and pose at the front gate and mince up and down the avenue, as proud as a peacock.

Now, rig up the six-year-old boy in some new and untried kink of fashion and turn him loose on the highway—and observe what follows. Note how sheepishly he looks down the street to where his playfellows are gathered, and see how he edges toward them, faltering and keeping as close to the fence as he can. Observe how, just as he is trying to slip into their midst unostentatiously, one of them cries in a shrill voice:

“Look who's here!” and another remarks:

“Oh, what a shine!” and still another exclaims:

“Pipe the kelly!” meaning, observe the hat.

Then perhaps there is the very rude boy who asks whether the “rags” have been “rassled,” said enquiry being gently emphasised by a push from behind. In which case the young glass of fashion, having a gloomy premonition of what may happen to him at home if he returns bearing the marks of combat, backs discreetly off the firing-line, and retreats to his own dooryard with as small loss of dignity as the exigency of the occasion will permit. And he is pretty sure to stick there the remainder of the afternoon, while occasionally other boys, in regulation woollens or corduroys, peep at him curiously through the palings, making him feel like one of those unpronounceable animals that they keep in cages and lecture about at the zoo.

Do you think this characteristic of the boy really signifies that he is “notional”? Do you put it down merely as “finicality”? Then you do him a great injustice. In the true analysis it is quite the opposite. It is but one feature of a unique democracy, a splendid democracy that you will find holding sway wherever boys gather. Oh, this democracy of boyhood is a wonderful thing! To me it is the régime beautiful. There is something so inspiring about it! For here, in this quaint domain of dare-and-do, you see every sturdy little chap, regardless of clothes, creed or family position, standing on his own merits and judged by his own deeds.

Why some mothers persist in Little-Lord-Fauntleroy-ing their boys within an inch of their lives is to me a profound mystery. Can any mother enlighten me on the long-curls cruelty? Is it selfish vanity? Could any mother, for the mere gratification of an egoistic desire, be so unfeeling as to send her helpless boy out into the scene of humiliation and actual physical torture of which the boy with the long curls becomes the pitiable centre as soon as he turns the corner?

I do not like to think so. Rather would I believe, as in the case of the broken window, that the mother's error is chargeable to her never having been a boy. She has a faulty conception of what it means to be yanked about by those boy-hated ringlets of gold, to be harassed and taunted by the inornate but happier hoi polloi.

I recall one afternoon when I took a youngster of three around to the barber's to have him shorn. I returned with the boy in one hand and the curls in the other. He was magnificently cologned and wanted everybody to "smell it."

The mother was waiting with an empty shoe-box in her lap. She was sitting by the window, in the soft half-light of the early evening, and she caressed the golden bronze ringlets before putting them away. And something glistened in her eye and it fell into the box and was packed away with the curls. I shouldn't wonder if it were there yet, for somehow I can't help thinking that a tear like that must crystallise into a tiny pearl and glisten on forever.

But when this mother looked up at the boy, she was smiling, almost proudly; and she patted the shiny, round head, and kissed it, cologne and all, and quoted a verse about having "lost a baby and gained a man," declaring that he really looked much better than she had expected.

And the boy was put to bed and slept coolly and comfortably, and he's had a clean scalp and a clear conscience ever since, I guess.

But here I am, taking up the reader's precious time talking about clothes and curls—neither of which mere man is supposed to know anything about—when all I meant to do was to emphasise the fact that long before a half-dozen of his birthdays have been celebrated, the boy must be taken up as an abstract proposition.

At the age of five, then, let us say, the boy reaches the stage of recognisable and indisputable masculinity. This is the logical time for the properly constituted father to take the helm of the son's destiny. If he does not do so, through lack of interest, lack of time or lack of the faculty for it, the mother must needs go on with the struggle. Her five years of training the baby will not come amiss in training the boy. But she must now reckon with boyhood as a distinct classification of childhood. She must remember that from now on, every year, every month, every day, widens the gap of sex divergence. She will do well to look at the bearded men who pass her door and consider that every attribute of masculinity exists, embryonically, in her round-faced baby boy.

From now on, if she hopes to appeal to the best that is in him, she must not only study the boy, but she must study the world from the boy's viewpoint. The nearer the mother can get to the boy's inner emotions, the more effectively can she direct the trend of his mental, moral and physical development. Herein lies the secret of getting and keeping a grip on the boy.

II

THE SIMPLICITY OF DISCIPLINE

We are living in an epoch of extremists. This morning the suffering dyspeptic is told that he will find a complete cure in a two weeks' fast; this afternoon he is advised that by eating every two hours he will be forever free from his ills. On the one hand is a sect preaching that prayer will bring us peace, power and plenty, and on the other is a schism pleading that supplication, in itself, availeth nothing. Here we have a group of modern disciplinists teaching that corporal punishment is a fading relic of barbaric brutality; there we find a sturdy school of old-timers telling us that if we spare the rod we shall spoil the child.

[18]

With these extremists who specialise in the stomach or in the soul I have no quarrel; but coming down to the subject of disciplining the boy I do want to point out to fathers and mothers seriously and earnestly that there is a happy medium, a middle course—a neutral and natural way.

The moral suasion idea is a fine thing in theory and it would be a moderately fine thing actually if parents were all moral suasionists, and if parents and children had nothing else in the world to do but practise it. By this I mean that if all or most parents were naturally equipped to rule by moral suasion, and, secondly, if twenty-four hours of the day could be devoted exclusively to discipline, it would be undoubtedly a commendable method of child-government. Unfortunately, such is not the case, and in dealing with the question collectively we have to take conditions, parents and children as we find them.

Nearly every parent possesses the faculty of governing to some extent—greater or less; and all children are capable of responding to it—but in varying degrees. There is, therefore, no hard and fast rule that can be laid down for the guidance of all parents, to be applied successfully to all children. However, by reducing the subject of this article first to boys, and second to the average boy, I think we can get the discussion down to a practicable basis. The little girl is here absolutely eliminated from consideration. I have studied her assiduously and at close range for a number of years and have succeeded in establishing this much only; first, that she is almost too sweetly complex for paternal comprehension, and second, that she is not amenable to the rules by which we discipline the boy.

My boy, then, is the average boy, old enough to walk and talk and understand what is said to him, moderately sensitive, moderately affectionate, moderately impulsive, moderately perverse, of ordinarily good health, and possessed of the usual amount of animal spirits.

Obedience is the foundation stone of the entire structure of discipline. There is a good deal in discipline besides obedience, but without obedience there is no discipline. It is not the alpha and omega, but is a good deal more than the alpha.

Discipline is harmony. Harmony cannot be maintained without perfect obedience, because obedience is a joint affair, a partnership arrangement between you and the boy. All other essentials of discipline are *ex parte*. In all other essentials you are subjective and the boy is objective. You think and he acts, you direct and he executes, you furnish the plan of living and he lives it. But it is the *partnership* in obedience that makes this possible. Given perfect obedience, the rest is easy, because the boy's daily routine is simply a vivification of the principles shaped by your own matured mind.

Let me repeat, then, that discipline is simply harmony and harmony cannot be attained without perfect obedience. Note the adjective, *perfect*, for this is the obstacle over which we are so prone to stumble. Obedience must be absolute, complete and infallible.

How can we attain it? How can we take the child-boy and so mould him that he will respond to a command instantly and unfailingly? Within him there is a natural, healthy instinct opposed to it. Within him is the natural human tendency to think and act independently, to learn by experiment, to venture unassisted and unrestrained into the unknown.

Punishment other than corporal will not always do it, because at the time when this condition must be established the boy's baby mentality is not capable of compassing the long distances between cause and effect. At the early age at which it is necessary to establish perfect obedience, the moral penalties are too slow in action, too complex and too much dependent upon local condition to be effective. There are exceptions, of course. For example: You have a box of sweets and you tell the boy he may take one. He takes two. As a penalty for his disobedience you make him return both pieces to the box and you cast the package into the fire. There you have incorporeal punishment that is instant, direct and effective; but this incident is made to order and of rare occurrence in fact. Suppose that the boy swallows the two pieces instantly, or suppose the more usual occurrence that you have forbidden him to partake of the sweets at all and he has surreptitiously eaten one. What then? Casting the remainder into the fire will not impress him at the time because his appetite has been satisfied, the desire is dulled. You may deprive him of his allowance on the day following, but the lapse of time dims the relation of the penalty to the offence. This kind of treatment works well with some of the minor errors but not with disobedience. The tendency to disobey is too constant, too persistent and too frequent, and too early in the boy's process of development.

A mother said: "It is not necessary for me to strike my child. I compel him to sit in a chair for one hour without speaking. He fears that more than the rod." Of course, he does, poor little chap! And that mother did not realise that she was substituting a barbaric torture for mild punishment. I reverse her reasoning: It is not necessary for me to so torture my boy. Nor shall I deprive him of his play, of the outside air, of his supper, of anything that makes for his health and happiness, nor of any good thing that it is in my power to give him.

Disobedience calls for a punishment that is short, direct and impressive. A sharp tap on the palm of a boy's hand, or on the calf of his leg—or two or five or ten—is the only kind of penance I know of that fills the requirements. It is the one short and sure road to an immediate result. Naturalists tell us that the sense of touch is the first experienced by a newborn child. It is the first and quickest wire from the outer world to the brain. Then come hearing and smelling and seeing and long after these come the moral perceptions, the power of deduction and the distinction of right and wrong. My experience has been that this first sense continues to be the live wire until well on toward the maturity of the child—if the child is a boy. There are many men, who can undergo the severest mental torture with calm resolution and fortitude, but who tremble at the sight of a dental chair. Not long ago I was chatting with a friend, who is a dentist, when a burly policeman rushed in, plumped himself into the operating-chair and asked the dentist to ease his aching tooth. The dentist looked at the tooth and reached for his forceps. "The only way to fix that is to extract it," he said. The officer of the law sprang from the chair like a jack-in-the-box and made for the door, remarking apologetically as he went out that he couldn't spare the time. "That man," said the dentist, when he had gone, "has a medal for bravery, and three times has been commended for saving lives at the risk of his own."

It is not that the boy fears pain, but that he fears the certainty of it, he dreads the deliberate, the inevitable punishment, accompanied by no moral stimulus with which to combat it. I have known my boy to take a severe beating from another boy in a struggle for the possession of an apple—and all without shedding a tear. The spat on the hand that I inflicted was a mere flea-bite to that beating, but because of it I could leave an apple within reach of his hand indefinitely and, though he might want it ever so much, he would not touch it if I had forbidden him.

So much for the psychology of corporal punishment. Now for the practice of it.

While I may have been guilty of many literary offences, a list of "Don'ts" has not, up to this time, been among them. But as the word obedience necessarily captions an imposing array of "Don'ts" for the boy, I think his parents may be better equipped to enforce them by considering some very important ones applying to themselves. At any rate, having spoken freely in favour of the use of the rod, it is vitally important to qualify my advocacy of it in accordance with my experience and belief. Every one of the qualifications or conditions that I am about to enumerate is essential to this system of discipline, so much so that if they were not to be considered as part of it, all that I have written would go for naught and I would ask to withdraw it completely.

Corporal punishment is resorted to for one kind of offence only—disobedience. Absolutely for no other.

Corporal punishment consists of a few sharp taps on the palm or calf with a thin wood ruler.

The boy is never punished in the presence of a third person, even a brother or sister.

Punishment is never administered with the slightest sign of anger or under excitement. *Any parent incapable of so administering corporal punishment should not employ it.*

Punishment must partake of the nature of a simple ceremony rather than of a torture; it must be regarded as a duty, not as a personal retaliation.

Punishment is always prefaced with a simple, brief, but explicit explanation, like this: "My boy, listen: I love you and I do not like to hurt you. But, every boy *must* be made to obey his father and mother, and this seems to be the only way to make you do it. So remember! Every time you disobey me you shall be punished. When I tell you to do a thing, you must do it, instantly; without a moment's delay. If you hesitate, if you wait to be told a second time, you will be punished. When I speak, you must act. Just as sure as you are standing here before me, this punishment will follow every time you do not do as you are told."

Say no more than that. Drive home the inseparability of the cause and the consequence; let the idea of instant, infallible obedience be telegraphed to his brain simultaneously with the sting of the ruler.

Have no fear that this form of chastisement will break your boy's spirit or will weaken the bond of love between him and yourself. Both will be strengthened by it. For one punishment inflicted, there are hundreds of kind words and deeds to prove your affection.

No child should be punished corporally other than as I have described.

To strike him in the face, to strike him at all with the hand or fist is brutal, and brutality is not only sinful but ineffective. Corporal punishment inflicted impulsively is dangerous because it lacks the earmarks of good intent.

Above all, remember this: That the kind of corporal punishment which I employ is effective, first because it is the only kind the child knows, and in no other way does he feel the weight of a corrective hand; and second, because *it never fails to follow the deed.*

To waver is unfair to the child. Yesterday he was punished. To-day he commits the same infraction and is not punished. Here is inconsistency and the boy is confused. If it were not deserved to-day, he reasons, it was undeserved yesterday; therefore, he is aggrieved. Every time you miss the atonement you lose a link, and the chain of your discipline is broken.

This is the chief error of parent disciplinarians. We fail to grasp the all-important truth that the unfailing application of corporal punishment is the very thing that can render punishment of any kind unnecessary. Many a boy is punished a hundred times where but a few would have sufficed had the penalty been exacted consistently and unfailingly. The right kind of discipline neither spoils the child nor spoils the rod. It spares both. It is like good dentistry. Every moment of hurt saves years of suffering in later life. And good painless discipline is as rare as good painless dentistry.

Further than this I have but little to say about discipline, for, once you have achieved infallible obedience, you are bound to achieve perfect discipline. The two words are synonyms in effect. No mother can hope for the best results if she seeks to train her boy as she would arrange her hair—to please her vanity—or as she would plan a shopping tour—to suit her convenience. Self must be submerged and the child's future kept uppermost. For discipline is a mother's duty^[32] to her boy. If she falters in it the boy will suffer. And every penalty that the unwatched boy escapes through a parent's frailty, he will have to pay, many fold, in the future years.

III

AS THE TWIG IS BENT

You hear the sound of sobbing in the distance, and as it draws nearer and grows more distinct you recognise the voice. A moment later the door flies open and there stands your boy, crying as though his heart would break. Little rivulets of tears are trickling down his dust-covered cheeks, and on the side of his face is the mark of a cruel blow.

Between sobs he tells you that the boy across the street did it. Why? He doesn't know why; he wasn't doing anything at all, "jes' playin' around."

You wipe the tears away and kiss the hurt, and as you note the quivering lip and the angry bruise, a wave of indignation swells within you. Glancing out through the window you see the boy across the street, cavorting triumphantly on the curb. How much bigger and coarser and rougher than your boy he appears—isn't it always so? Your little chap has come to you partly for sympathy, but mainly for retaliation. He shows you his wound and points to the boy who did it. He has been hurt, he has been grievously wronged, and he has come to you whom he has learned to look upon as his one never-failing protector and friend. You spring to your feet, fired with an overwhelming desire to rush into the street and avenge the wrong that has been done your child.

Madam, one moment! Don't do it. The retaliation you contemplate may be justice so far as the tormentor across the street is concerned, but it is a rank injustice to your own boy. I want to tell you on the authority of an ex-boy that if you would serve your son best, you will not interfere.

None but a mother knows the trials and heartaches of the fighting period in a boy's life; and none but a father realises what an important part that period plays in the shaping of the boy's career. The period runs approximately from the ages of five to ten. Prior to that the child is too young to indulge in it, and subsequently he is too old to tell about it. In the interim these affairs of the street are of daily occurrence and are to the mother a source of annoyance as mysterious as they are harrowing.

The right way to deal with this problem may not be the easiest way but it is the simplest, and it is the best for the boy. It is to let him alone. It is to teach him from the very beginning that outside of his own dooryard he must protect himself with his own hands. Have a distinct understanding that if he gets himself into a fight, he must get himself out of it. Tell him that by helping him you would only make more trouble for him because he would get to be known as a coward, and all the boys would annoy him more than before.

I went further than this with my boy. I told him that I did not approve of fighting, but that if he were forced into it, I would expect him to hit out hard and fast and defend himself blow for blow. I provided him with a punching-bag and a set of

boxing-gloves and I showed him how to use them. He was just five when I established this rule and in one year it proved itself.

At six we started him off to school, and a few days later he came home one afternoon with a discoloured eye.

But there was no tear in it. He threw his books in a corner and ran, whistling, out to play. At dinner that evening my curiosity got the better of me, but I assumed indifference.

“Where did you get the eye, old chap?” I asked casually.

He looked up sheepishly, smiled and pushed his cup toward me.

“Some more milk, if you please, father,” he said. The fighting problem had been solved forever.

The mother who coddles her boy shows him a double unkindness. She not only increases his boyhood miseries, through making him the particular target of other boys, but she retards the development of his self-reliance and his manliness.

I give the *affaire d'honneur* an important place in this chapter because it is one of the things about boys that mothers often misunderstand and quite generally undervalue.

Of course, the cardinal precept which should form the foundation of the character structure is—Truth. Combine in him manliness and truthfulness, and the other essential traits of good character will spring from these two like shoots from the trunk of a healthy tree. Truth-telling should be made a matter of habit with the boy. Have you not among your acquaintances men, women and children who are habitual prevaricators, people who make misstatements continuously, absolutely without purpose and without malice? Lying has become a habit with them. By the same token truth-telling can be and should be so instilled in the boy as to become automatic. He should never be punished for a falsehood as you might punish him for disobedience. The problem of disobedience, which I discussed in a foregoing chapter, is a matter of psychology from beginning to end. Truth-telling becomes so in the end but is a matter of morals at the beginning. It can be formed into a fixed habit by treating it morally and by keeping everlastingly at it until the result is achieved. You cannot beat a boy into hating a lie, but you can shame him into it.

It is natural for a very young boy to seek to evade responsibility for an offence by disclaiming it. The first time he does this he must be made to know that, however serious the offence may be, it is as nothing compared to the lie that he seeks to cover. I did not go so far as to promise my boy immunity for infractions that he frankly confessed; but I did make it a rule unto myself that he should never suffer through confession, and I did invariably commend him, in the highest terms, when he told the truth under conditions that made it peculiarly praiseworthy. An example: I find my inkstand tipped over and a great black stain upon the carpet. I summon the boy and ask him sternly: “Who did that?” My manner is threatening. The offence is grave. He is thoroughly frightened, but after a moment he answers, falteringly, “I did.” Instantly

my attitude changes from admonitive to commendatory. I say to him: "This is an awful thing that you have done. The carpet is spoiled. The stain will always be there. Nothing can remove it. But you have told the truth and that is the finest thing that a boy can do. As bad as this is, I would rather you would do it a hundred times than tell one lie."

If, on the other hand, he falsifies, I grieve before him. I tell him that nothing that a boy can do is as bad as a falsehood: that a lie is the very meanest and lowest thing in the world. I tell him that I fully forgive him for spilling the ink, but it is almost impossible to forgive him for that lie. I leave him to meditate upon it.

I never allow an untruth to pass without bringing a blush of shame to the boy's cheek. I never let a lie show itself without holding it up as a thing to be despised. The boy first gets to fear a falsehood, then to despise it—and finally to forget it. And by forgetting I mean that it passes beyond the pale of things considerable. Truth has become a fixed habit.

Having accomplished this, you have given your boy a solid foundation upon which to rear the structure of good character.

I believe in sending the boy to the church. Regardless of the parents' attitude toward religion, I believe it is their duty to give the boy the benefit of a church environment while he is still a boy. Irrespective of sect or creed, he is sure to absorb some good in an atmosphere of divine worship. In later years he may depart from the precepts there learned, but the early teachings and associations of the church or the Sunday school will leave their influence in some degree, and whether it is much or little, it will never be for anything but good.

I give my boy the Bible to study and the Golden Rule to live by. I teach him to speak or think deprecatingly of no religious faith, and show him that all are working for the betterment of man.

From his infancy I guard him from superstition and discourage the fear of fancied dangers. I do not believe it is necessary for a boy, at any age, to fear the dark. Mine never did. Fear of the dark is born of suggestion, and he has been successfully guarded from any word that would couple darkness with danger. Throughout his entire childhood he never sensed the usual terrors of the unlighted room and the darkened passage. I would never confirm even the Santa Claus myth, though I did not dissuade him from it, because I well remember the added joy it brought to me when I was a boy. When the question was put to me I said: "I shall not tell you because the mystery of Christmas adds much to your enjoyment of it. Believe it or not, as you choose; I have nothing to say." With this pleasant exception he has never asked me a question that I have not answered truthfully and as completely as I could.

I live close to my boy, and by so doing I find his level and see his narrowed horizon as he sees it. When he was only six we lived together in the woods, slept under the same blanket, fished and sailed and took our daily swim together. Beginning at that early age we have sat by the campfire at night and talked of the stars and the moon

and the strange noises of the wood. Nowhere can you get as close to your boy as you can out under the sky with only Nature about you. It would be asplendid thing if every father could devote a few weeks each year to “roughing it” with his boy. Besides the opportunities it offers for community of thought, it brings out a phase of the boy’s character that under other conditions might never come to the surface. I recall one evening, as the boy and I were lolling on the bank of a river, how he astonished me by exclaiming: “See! What a beautiful sunset!” He had seen the sun go down many times over the housetops of the town, but it needed the solitude of that particular place and time to give him an appreciation of its beauties. Unexpectedly there was disclosed to me an æsthetic side of his nature that I had never known.

These are opportunities that open peculiarly to the father, and he should take advantage of them.

I believe that every boy should be encouraged to acquire a college education and that he should be made to pay for it. We hear a good deal of talk nowadays about the lack of real advantage that the college man has over the other fellow. Thousands of college men fail in their struggles with the work-a-day world, and often you find a degree man working in a subordinate capacity to a man of his own age who missed a college education. It is a fact, too, that the honour men of our colleges rarely distinguish themselves in their chosen professions. But none of these things prove anything, because the personal equation has to be reckoned in. I believe that the young man who takes his college course and takes it seriously is better fitted for the work of life than he would otherwise have been. The unschooled man who succeeds would have succeeded with more ease and to a higher standard had he been schooled. The college man who fails would have failed more miserably had he been untrained. I believe that failure of an educated man is in spite of his education, and not because of it.

If you want to make sure that your boy is going to use his college education to the best advantage, let him pay his way. The failures that our institutions of learning turn out are not the men who work their way through; they are the sons of the affluent, the little brothers of the rich. The boy who drives the hay-rake or works behind the counter of his father’s store in vacation time is rarely found among the derelicts. Let the boy share the cost with you, and you need have no fear that either the time or money spent for education will go for naught.

From the first time that he trots over to the candy store with his penny, the boy should be trained to know the intrinsic value of money. Encourage him in moderate frugality, not because the accumulation of money is a desideratum, but because profligacy is bad for the morals.

Whether it is the mother or the father who takes especial charge of the boy, or both, they should aim steadfastly to have his complete confidence always. He should be made to feel that they are not only dearer to him, but nearer to him than any one else in the world.

If a condition of implicit confidence can be established between you and the boy, you can depend upon him to be receptive of the good which you seek to charge him with.

Then, with truth as his anchor, no storm of the outer world can sweep him beyond the influence of home. The bulwark of the good character that you have builded will stand throughout his lifetime.

IV

A TALK AT CHRISTMAS TIME

On a Christmas Eve some thirty-odd years ago a very small boy, guarded on either side by sisters older than himself, knelt at the low sill of his bedroom window and looked wonderingly out into the night. Above was the sky, studded with twinkling stars. Below was a soft, silent blanket of white—the unsullied snow of a northern winter. Everything was very still.

The boy looked first at the sky. Being of the baby age when the children of the wise are put to bed with the sun, the night sky was more mystic than the snow. There were so many of those stars, and they appeared to be twinkling at him with cheerful friendliness. One attracted him particularly. It did not twinkle and was not so merry as the others, but it was larger and shone with a bright, steady glow. It seemed to be reaching down toward the boy as though it would speak to him.

He recalled the story that had been told him only the day before, the story of the first Christmas and of three wise men who had been guided to the manger wherein lay the infant Christ; and the thought came to him that this, perhaps, was the star that led them. The suggestion of the manger brought the boy's eyes downward to the snow-topped stable opposite his window; and from the stable he turned to the white-roofed houses with their chimneys still smoking from the evening fires. He wondered if Santa Claus would have to wait till all the fires were out before he could make his rounds.

How white everything was and how still! A sense of delicious mystery crept over him. He heard the sound of distant sleigh-bells. They drew nearer and jingled more tunefully. One of his guardians caught his hand in hers and held up a warning finger. They listened.

“Quick! Maybe it's Santa Claus!” whispered the guardians in unison; and the three scampered to their beds and disappeared beneath the blankets. Five minutes later the little boy was fast asleep.

The little boy was myself, and the incident is the first Christmas that I can recall. I recount it because it seems to illustrate the natural coalescence of the mythical idea with the historical idea of the great world holiday.

Too often, I think, the real significance of our holidays is lost in the merriment of celebrating them. Every child is entitled to a thorough explanation and a lasting impression of the incident which Christmas commemorates. In shaping the Christmas idea in the boy's mind we should begin at the beginning. If the story of the Star of Bethlehem is told in the right way and at the right time, it may be depended upon to survive the myths and the merry-making with which the atmosphere is charged during the festal period.

And this need not militate against the development of the Santa Claus side of the celebration, for the one amplifies the other. Unselfish giving is the keynote to both,

and the child-mind easily comprehends the application of the modern custom to the ancient story.

In the bringing up of my boy I have been a stickler for truth. Absolute confidence between father and son, mother and child, has been my plea and my practice, always. Yet, while not going out of my way to encourage the Santa Claus myth, I have most cheerfully tolerated it. It is the one mystery of childhood that I do not explain, and my reason for excepting it from the calendar of candour is that the end justifies the means.

I would not rob the boy of a fiction that has not one harmful possibility, and that brings so much gladness into the home, and into his heart. I would not deny him a kind of pleasure that added so much to the joy of my own childhood. But, and paramount to every other consideration, the great unassailable justification of the Santa Claus myth is the remarkable lesson it teaches.

With reasonable reservations for the unusual I may say that never, after the Santa Claus age, does a man or a woman either practise or experience that remarkable unselfishness of the parents who conceal their bounteousness behind a fiction. After childhood we continue to give and take. We give to our brothers and sisters, to our parents and to all whom we love. It is our pleasure to add to their happiness; but it is also our pleasure to feel that they know it is we who have so contributed to their enjoyment.

Not so in Santa Claus land. There, and there only, is found the absolute submergence of self, the sincerely impersonal benefaction. As a child, coming down to the dazzling Christmas tree, I said: "How good is Santa Claus!" But in after years when I began to realise that every one of those trees of joy had come from my good father, who had tramped out into the woods to cut them and had hauled them over the hills for miles, sometimes through a blinding blizzard,—then I said: "How great is a parent's love!"

When the boy arrives at the age of serious reasoning, say six or seven, and asks me point-blank if there is really a Santa Claus, I meet the question fairly. I simply decline to answer and give him my reason for so doing. I explain to him that half the fun of the holiday lies in the mystery surrounding St. Nicholas. I tell him, good-humouredly but positively, that he must solve the Santa Claus problem himself.

By taking this position I keep square with the boy, and at the same time he is not disillusionised, for he is as willing to cling to the romance as I am to have him—and more so.

The custom, particularly prevalent in the large cities, of conducting the boy through the toy department of the stores when the big holiday stocks are on display, is to be deplored. The lavish exhibitions paraded before his eyes cannot fail to dull his appreciation of the home Christmas.

In arranging my boy's Christmas I strive for simplicity. It was Nerissa, I think, in the "Merchant of Venice," who said: "They are as sick who surfeit with too much, as they that starve with nothing." The rich—sometimes—pity the poor at Christmas.

This is well, for pity looses a purse-string occasionally, and Heaven knows there are enough tight ones! But the fact is, that the children of the moderately poor often get more real joy to a square inch of a Christmas morning than many a little brother of the rich. There can be no great pleasure in receiving when there has been no genuine longing. Only the child who has known want can fully relish realisation.

A few modest gifts, judiciously selected, are more permanently satisfying than a lavish display, indiscriminately gathered. I always try to supply my boy with one thing that he most desires, or with a fair compromise between it and what I can afford to buy. If I can meet his anticipations fully in this one gift I do so; but it must be something of a substantial and permanent nature. After which, if my purse permits, I amplify this with a few things of lesser cost and more trivial in character.

And here let me record a protest against that modern unnecessary, the perfected toy. By the perfected toy I mean the toy that is not a plaything, but an ingenious contrivance so perfected mechanically that it leaves nothing for the child to do. I protest against the toy that leaves absolutely nothing to either the fancy or the ingenuity of the boy. The imaginative faculty of a child is constantly reaching out for something upon which it may feed and develop. This propensity is stifled by the perfected toy. The railroad outfit that goes into complete operation at the turn of a lever; the doll that walks and talks and has an elaborate trousseau; the soldier equipments that fit a boy out in military style from head to toe—these and all like them are praiseworthy examples of the commercial instinct of the toymakers; but they do not meet the requirements of the child.

And if the juvenile mind were capable of self-analysis it would reject them. I learned this first from a little girl of three years. She had been deluged with presents that Christmas morning; but before an hour had passed she had looked them all over, and we found her curled up in an armchair, playing with a clothes-pin and an empty baking-powder can! Hers was the happiness found only in the land of Make-Believe.

Instead of giving my boy a soldier outfit, I would give him a pocket-knife—assuming that he is old enough to wield one. Having a new knife, he is ambitious to use it, and he fashions a sword out of a stick of pine. The sword suggests playing soldier, and he proceeds to make a peaked hat out of a newspaper; a skate-strap answers for a belt, and he makes a pair of epaulets from a scrap of tin-foil. In this way the boy is duly benefited: in creating these things his ingenuity is drawn upon, and, in supplying things that he cannot make, his imagination is exercised.

One can hardly begin too early to teach the child the pleasure of giving. A few pennies taken by him from his own little bank, and an excursion to a neighbouring store, will initiate the idea. A mere trinket for each member of the household will serve the purpose and put him on the right track. But we must go further than the family circle with the Christmas idea. We must show the boy that while charity begins at home, it does not end there.

One day shortly before Christmas, I took the boy to the closet where his discarded toys were kept, and I said:

“There are millions of children in the world, and there are not always toys enough to go around. If you will tell me which of these things you do not play with any more, I will see that they are distributed on Christmas Day among little boys and girls who otherwise would get nothing.”

He looked the things over carefully, and said finally that there was nothing that he would like to give away. I did not urge the matter; but the next day I invited him to take a ride with me on the street-car. Alighting at City Hall Park, we walked down the Bowery. Arriving at Pell Street, I found Chuck Connors sunning himself on the corner.

“Chuck,” I said, “I have a dollar in my pocket that isn’t busy, and I want you to take me to some one who needs it more than you or me.”

So off we trudged, Chuck and I, and the boy between. A few blocks farther down we turned toward the river. It was familiar ground to Chuck and me—but the boy’s eyes were opened to a new world. He saw the misery of the slums. He passed a boy of his own age, barefooted—in December—staggering under a load of scrap-wood that would have troubled a man to bear. He saw a little girl, half clad, shivering behind an ash-can, trying to hide herself from her drunken father, who leered at the waif from a hallway across the street. Pushing on into the very heart of that pitiable section, through poverty, want and wretchedness, the boy went with us through a miserable tenement, wherein the spectre of Starvation stalked through the sordid halls and snarled at my dollar bill.

On the car, homeward bound, the boy tugged at my elbow.

“Father,” he said, “besides what’s in the closet, they’s a lot of other things I don’t play with any more.”

Ever since then we have had an annual house-cleaning about a week before Christmas, and the Salvation Army wagon carries away a goodly load. Indeed, the event has come to be regarded as quite a festal occasion.

As the years go on and the boy begins to leave playland behind, I would not hurry him into the realism of the grown-up’s Yuletide. Let the charm of mystery, of certainty, of anticipation, linger as long as it will.

Perhaps last year you thought it was a bit incongruous when you found yourself slipping a safety razor into a gaily-hued sock, size ten, dangling in the chimney-corner. And perhaps you have decided that he is too big for that sort of thing now, and that you will let it go by default this Christmas. Maybe you are about to tell him so.

My friend, defer it.

Stick right on in the old way as long as you can get the boy to stick with you; for, once you have severed the ties of the Christmas of his childhood, you will have cut the tinsel thread that links your son to the only fairyland he will ever know.

V

THE DYNASTY OF THE DIME NOVEL

My neighbour ran in at the basement door as was his wont. Coming lightly up the stairs he entered the library, and not finding me there, but hearing a voice beyond, he walked across the room and looked in at the open doorway of my den, where he stood for a moment, unobserved.

This is what he saw:

The boy, then scarcely nine, stretched out comfortably on a sofa, reading aloud; I reclining in an easy-chair with my slippered feet in another, and listening intently; a bright light shining over the boy's shoulder and flooding the room.

My neighbour paused long enough to hear these words fall from the reader's lips in boyish monotone:

"The crack of a Winchester sounded on the night air and the engineer fell dead!"

Then he interrupted.

"Well, in the name of reason," he said, "what are you folks reading?"

The boy and I looked up. I took the book from the youngster's hand and passed it up to the intruder.

"The life and adventures of Jesse James," I said.

My neighbour took the book gingerly, read the title and glanced at the cover, upon which were pictured in vivid colours three desperate-looking gentlemen in black masks, holding up a train.

"And you are reading this—together?" he asked.

"Yes," said I; "taking turns at it, he a chapter and I a chapter."

My neighbour shrugged his shoulders and returned the volume, dusting his fingers.

"Don't you think he would get to this sort of stuff soon enough—without you helping him?"

"He arrived there to-day," I said; "and I'm there with him."

There you have it—the great difference of viewpoint: my neighbour looking at it from where he stands and I looking at it from the standpoint of my boy. My neighbour convinced that I was starting my beloved son on the highroad to a criminal career; I calm and confident, and cocksure that I am doing what is best for the boy. And I guess if we were to take the vote of Parenthood on the issue, my side would go down to overwhelming defeat.

Now, my father says that up to the time he departed from the parental roof there were only two books in the home that he was permitted to read—the Bible and Foxe's "Martyrs." From his tenth to his seventeenth year he was actually starving, he said, for the want of stories of adventure. Once, when he was fourteen, a departing visitor left a copy of "Scottish Chiefs." This he seized upon and was devouring it in the attic when discovery by his stern pater cut him off in the middle of a most exciting

battle. The book was confiscated and he was soundly chastised. “And do you know,” adds my father ruefully, “it was three years before I learned how that fight came out!”

Perhaps that’s why he gave me a freer hand in my selections when I was a kid. He did, anyway. All that he required was that it must be free from any suggestion of the obscene and of sacrilege. Like most boys I began my independent reading with “Grimm’s Fairy Tales,” “Robinson Crusoe,” “Swiss Family Robinson,” “Arabian Nights” and books of the sort that boys usually receive as gifts. From these I jumped to the nickel and dime variety. There were one or two good juvenile magazines coming into the home, but they were not sufficient. I waded through all the “Smart Aleck” books, including “Peck’s Bad Boy.” I took the thrills with the ten-cent detective heroes of the Old Sleuth and Nick Carter type, and revelled in the more or less historical exploits of David Crockett, Kit Carson, Daniel Boone and Buffalo Bill.

At fourteen I had run the gamut of cheap literature. I do not mean that I read every “penny-dreadful” in existence, for the list is endless—there is a new one every day. But I had “got my skin full” and the stuff began to pall. After reading a good number of these books, even a boy feels their want of the convincing quality. He feels, too, their sameness and their unrealness.

Then I approached the modern style and the truer type of boy books, stories of the Alger, Oliver Optic and G. A. Henty kind; and then the better type of adventure stories, such as “Treasure Island” and “King Solomon’s Mines.” Then I drifted into Wilkie Collins’ creations, reading only the more exciting ones—“The Moonstone” and “The Dead Alive.” After that came Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Reade; and before I was sixteen I had got into Scott, Thackeray and Dickens. And here I anchored. Since then, of course, I have voyaged far and wide in all directions, but Dickens is my snug harbour, and will be to the end. No boy could revel—shall I say wallow?—in trashy literature more than I did; but search as I will, I cannot see where it left a trace of an influence on my conduct or my character. I do not think it was owing to any want of physical courage; because I know that I did my share of fighting and took as many beatings with a dry eye as the others; a little more of both, in fact, than it would become me to boast about. But I never robbed a bank or had any desire to; I never craved the career of a detective keenly enough to try my hand at it, and while at one time I did yearn for a chance to battle single-handed with a band of Sioux warriors, the desire never led me into more dangerous quarters than a seat at the Wild West Show. Was I different from other boys? My mother says certainly I was, and very much better. God bless her! My father says I was about like the rest. My teacher—he is a prominent member of the New York bar now, and I put the question to him squarely just the other day—tells me frankly that I was the worst boy in school. The three estimates, averaged, would make me an average boy, and I think my experience as to the effect of reading material was about the usual experience of boys in general.

They pass through the age of blood-and-thunder literature just as they have mumps, measles and marbles, and are none the better and but little the worse for having gone through it. As water finds its level, so the temperament eventually finds its affinity in reading matter.

“There is no book so bad,” said the elder Pliny, “but that some good might be got out of it.”

I know that some boys who read cheap literature go to the bad. But I have never seen it established that the reading was responsible for the waywardness. I do not deny that, granting the existence of a tendency toward a life of crime, certain types of stories might encourage the tendency. But the influence of this stuff is so slight that the avoidance of it would not prevent the downward step.

Many a boy, fascinated by the glamour of the circus, has run away with one. Still, this does not make the circus reprehensible nor would I, because of that circumstance, deny my boy the pleasure of attending it. On the contrary, I go with him to the circus and sit beside him. We munch peanuts joyously, but I warn him to beware of the red lemonade and tell him why it is sometimes unwholesome. He sees the show from start to finish—under my direction. And when he has seen it I reveal to him the reverse side of the picture—I give him a peep behind the scenes. I tell him of the hardships and privations of a showman’s life, the long night rides, the harsh discipline, the perils and dangers of it.

This is exactly my attitude toward the boy’s early reading. I do not throw wide open the doors of the paper-cover library and push him into it. But if he shows a desire to explore it, I go with him. Wherever I can save him time and eyestrain by a friendly suggestion, I am there to make it. When I find him reading “Cut-Throat Charley, the Terror of the Spanish Main,” I do not pooh-pooh the book or make sport of the boy. I do tell him that the best pirate story ever written is Stevenson’s “Treasure Island” and tell him that if he wants a shipwreck story that will make his hair stand up he ought to read Poe’s “Arthur Gordon Pym” or Reade’s “Foul Play.” Once he has read either of these, you may depend upon it that “Cut-Throat Charley” will never ring true.

When he takes up Mr. Nicholas Carter I suggest “The Mystery of the Rue Morgue,” “Les Misérables” and “Sherlock Holmes,” and other detective stories of the better class.

My boy had been learning from other boys something of the exploits of Jesse James and asked me if I would get the book. I agreed to it, readily. Somewhat to my surprise I found that since my time the list of James books had been increased to thirty-six. Thirty-five of these were “pot-boilers”; “Jesse James’ Nemesis,” “Jesse James’ Revenge,” “Jesse James’ Long Chance,” “Jesse James’ Mistake,” and so on. I passed these over, of course, and invested fifteen cents in “The James Boys, Jesse and Frank,” which was the book I had read when I was a youngster. It was a plain record of the men’s exploits, compiled from newspaper clippings of that period. I explained to the boy that the others were largely imaginative—unreal. We read the book

together. Then we read the story of Cole Younger and his brothers and later that of the criminal career of Harry Tracy, the infamous outlaw of the Northwest. Together we enjoyed the romance, such as there was, of their exploits; together we discussed the animal courage and moral cowardice of their careers; and together we followed them to the punishment which they so richly deserved.

Had my boy evinced a desire to read the remaining thirty-five James books, I would not have restrained him, farther than to suggest a change. It so happened that when he had finished the three books mentioned he had had enough of these distinguished gentlemen and their ilk, and began casting about in other directions.

So my message on the reading subject is, don't think that the boy's craving for the nickel library is an indication of depravity, or that indulgence in it will start him on the road to perdition. The appetite for these books is a normal one. It develops at a time when his appreciation of romance is in full bloom but while big words, subtle phrasing and genuine ingenuity are not yet within his comprehension. It demands quick action and quick results, stripped of the artistic setting and higher polish which are demanded by the refinement of matured intellect.

Do not regard this kind of reading as a menace to the boy's morals, but as a stepping-stone to something better and more beneficial. Do not, either by rule or ridicule, drive the boy from his home to seek it, but stay with him and guide him through it. Keep him well supplied with good books and good magazines that approach, as nearly as you can judge, the requirement of his fancy. Watch him, but do not worry him. Have the better things at hand and accessible and point the way to them. Rest assured that in due time Cut-Throat Charley will have lost his charm, and a hero more worthy of emulation will stand in his shoes.

VI

THE SIN OF SEX SECRECY

Let us suppose that our country has become involved in a war. At the edge of your town a battle rages. You can hear the roar of cannon and clash of steel as columns of men fall in their blood, cut down by the flashing sabres and flying canister. Reinforcements are hurrying to the scene. Up the street comes a regiment of soldiers with flags waving, drums beating and arms gleaming in the sunshine. Your son, your boy, standing in the doorway, laughs and cheers as they approach. The band strikes up a lively air. The boy beats time with his feet, starts, hesitates and then, with a wave of his cap, falls in line with the gay procession and marches joyously toward the scene of death and carnage.

Madam, at such a moment what would you do? Would you sit calmly at your window and see him go innocently, blindly on to the danger that you knew lay just beyond the turn of the road?

Would you not fly to his side and draw him back and hold him tight in your arms? And if he were big and strong and insistent, though still your boy, would you not at least tell him that war is not all music and drum-beats and bright uniforms? Would you not warn him of its dangers, of its horrors? If he must go and you could not hold him, would you let him go unwarned of its realities—and unarmed?

Well, there is a war in progress—in our country, in your town; a war more terrible, more revolting than any chronicled in history. The youth of America are marching toward the battleground, and the splendid column is passing your window now, to-day and every day. Perhaps you do not see the conflict yourself, for the battlefield is always just around the corner.

As sure as you have a son, just so sure will he some day turn that corner. Just so sure will he some day stand on your doorstep, and feel the lure of the passing show, and just so sure will he some time be drawn into the conflict, when he will have to fight his way through as best he can. At six he is in your arms; at sixteen he will be on the firing-line; at twenty-six the ordeal will have passed and the battle will have been lost or won. Can you then look backward into the past and feel that you had warned and fortified him?

I can. Whatever may be in store for my boy, he goes to meet it with more than my prayers—he has, also, a full knowledge of life's mysteries. He shares with me a thorough understanding of the evils that may beset him. If my affectionate admonitions can help him, he has them; if my mistakes of the past serve as danger signals along his pathway, he knows of them; if my longer experience and broader knowledge of the world's ways can save him, he shall escape the snares and pitfalls that await the heedless step of the untaught and untold young.

Before he was seven I had told him whence we come. Scraps of conversation overheard on the street between his own playfellows warned me that the time had come and made my duty clear. I saw the pity of it! My boy, whom I had taught to look trustfully to me for the truth at all times and about all things; my boy hearing distorted and vulgarised bits of knowledge that should have come to him solemnly and sacredly from the parent whom he had learned to look upon as the fountainhead!

This is what I told him:

“God made everything, as you know. He made the sea and the land, the sky and the stars and the sun and the moon. He makes the trees and the plants and the animals and the boys and the girls who grow to be men and women. But when I say God makes these things I do not mean that He makes them with tools, as you would make a playhouse, or with His hands, as you would make a snow-man. He makes all of these things by a great plan which He has laid out and by which all things, with His help, spring up and grow, over and over again, so that the world may go on just as it is for years and years. By this plan all living things come from a seed. This seed is within all grown-up plants and grown-up animals. When a new plant is needed, a seed falls from the grown-up plant and falls into the soil, where it sprouts and becomes a young plant. Every kind of animal is composed of two sexes, the male sex and the female sex. The fathers are of the male sex; the mothers of the female sex. As the seed of plants is within the flower, so the seed of animals is within the mother animal. When a new animal is needed the seed within the mother slowly grows into a young animal like the father or mother, and while it is still very small it comes out into the light and sunshine; and that is what we mean when we say it is born. Men and women are animals. They are different from all other animals in that they can talk and think and are much higher and better in every way. But the seed forms within the mother just as it does within the plants and birds and animals of all kinds. And when another child is needed the seed begins to grow and takes the form of a little child and after awhile it comes into the world to be dressed and fed and cared for; that is what we mean when we say that a babe has been born. That is how you came into the world and how I came and how all of us came. It is all a part of God’s wonderful plan to keep the world growing greater and better and more beautiful. It is not good for boys to talk about these beautiful things in a rough way, and I hope you will not do so. I tell them to you because I want you to know the truth. If there is anything you do not understand, ask me and I will explain it. Whatever you may hear, no matter whether it is good or bad, if you want to know the truth about it come to me and I will tell you.”

That was all. Science in words of two syllables. Science is truth, and truth is what your boy demands.

My boy took me at my word. He came back for further enlightenment more than once. But every time I answered him soberly, freely and truthfully. And when he knew everything he was immune to that contamination which mystery breeds. And what is more, the parent had measured up to the child’s ideal. The father was still the

fountainhead; and no boy will drink from the stagnant pool of vulgarity when the clear crystal water of truth is close at hand.

Revealing the science of propagation to the child-boy is, after all, only the first step toward unfolding the many facts of sex—facts that are made mysteries through the inexcusable selfishness—or modesty, if you prefer to call it that—of mothers and fathers. If sealing the secrets of sex is an injustice to the boy of six, it is a scarlet sin against the youth of sixteen. At six he is looking at life curiously from the family dooryard—within the mother’s call; but at sixteen or soon thereafter, he strides out into the street, marches down the highway and turns the corner. He is on the firing-line. Now comes a crisis in the boy’s life so acute, so grave that I approach the subject with trepidation. My poor pen, tempered by that delicacy demanded of printed words, seems incapable of the task before me. And I approach it also with reverence because I look upon it as an almost divine privilege to be permitted to discuss with an army of mothers a problem which I regard as the great tragedy of American youth.

Nature is good, Nature is provident, but above all Nature is self-preservative. Go to your naturalists, your entomologists, and they will all tell you that the law of perpetuation is first and foremost among all living things. Man is no exception. Your boy, just coming into his maturity, is in this respect like unto all other growing things that God has made. As he ripens toward manhood this instinct becomes more manifest within him. Vaguely, perhaps, he recognises its import, but in the main it is a mystery. In a general way he may reason out its purpose; but how can he know its humanised limitations? How can he know that the refining process of civilisation has demanded a check upon the exercise of Nature’s functions? And—here is the vital issue—how shall he know of the dread penalties Nature sometimes exacts when these restraints are violated? Why is it that the loving father and mother, who labour with him and watch over him and shield him through childhood, decline to raise a finger of warning against the grim spectre of^[87] disease that stalks behind the painted faces of the underworld? Must it be written, to the shame of human parenthood, that the very horror of this evil stays the warning hand? Or does the mother fall into that too common error of thinking that this evil of evils is open to every boy but her own? Then listen to this, which I quote from an eminent authority:

“Take a group of one hundred young men—those from eighteen to twenty-five years of age—and seventy-five of these will be found to be suffering either from the effects of venereal diseases or still in an acute stage of one of them.”

Mothers, let not your eyes be blinded to a condition that medical records have proven to be a fact. It may be your boy and it may be mine.

The chances of its being mine are reduced to the minimum—*because my boy will know*. The revelation, as I make it, is so simple and yet so complete, that it could be accomplished with equal ease by mother or father. When he is about sixteen I place in his hand a book that tells him all, and I say to him: “My boy, when you are alone, read this.^[1] There are truths in it which you should know.” From that hour the “great social

peril” must fight my son in the open. He knows all that science can teach—all that parents can tell.

[1]There are several good books designed for this purpose. “Confidential Chats with Boys,” and “Plain Facts on Sex Hygiene,” are two in a series on this subject by Wm. Lee Howard, M.D., and published by E. J. Clode, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York.

I am going to say now what I should have said at the outset—that the father, though he may leave every other phase of the boy’s development to the mother, should take the initiative in sex enlightenment. He should regard it as his peculiar right, his sacred privilege, to point out the devious paths through which he himself may have threaded his way from youth to man’s estate. There are no barriers between me and my boy. The oneness of affection and the sameness of sex easily compass the disparity in years. He grows older but I do not, for I am waiting for him. In fact I am going back to him—I am meeting him halfway. Our play is as boy with boy. Our talks are as man to man.

In a relationship like this there are no “sex secrets.” There is no ice to break, because the transmission of knowledge is consistent, gradual and unconscious. But when the father fails in his duty and the mother has to step into the breach, it is different, I concede. There is a certain reserve which is womanly, and perhaps not unmotherly. Still, mother’s love is a poor thing if it cannot break down that slender wall to save the boy. And mother’s love is not a poor thing, but a great power. So if mothers can only be made to see why it must be done, and when and how, I believe they will do it.

This is an appeal not to parental love only, but to parental reason. It is made not by a purist, but by one who has travelled the road by which all boys must go, and who knows its every crook and turn. It is a plea in behalf of the American boy, who asks only that he be given a torch to light his way.

VII

THE WEED AND THE WINECUP

In the past fiscal year there were smoked in the United States nearly two million cigarettes more than in any previous year of the nation's history; and the consumption of distilled spirits, exclusive of wines and beers, broke the record of the preceding year by twenty-three million gallons.

Now, there is nothing particularly remarkable about these figures except as they signify that we, as a nation, are smoking and drinking considerably more than we used to, which in turn suggests the question: To what extent are our boys responsible for the increase? I'm sure I don't know, and I can't see any way of finding out. But I do know, from daily observation, that the tobacco and strong drink habits are formed in boyhood more commonly than there is any need of. I do know that a great many young men acquire a taste for cigarettes and whiskey while yet in their teens, purely through lack of the proper parental influence and instruction.

To me this seems pitiable, especially because it is so obviously unnecessary. The parents' duty is clear. It is amenable to a hard and fast rule to which there need be no exception, from which there should be no deviation. The boy should be made to abstain from liquor and tobacco until he is twenty-one.

How can you keep him from them? Facts, logic, reason. By these means and only these, can you get the boy on the right track and be sure that he will stick. Threats, coercion, exaggerations, bribes or pleadings will accomplish nothing dependable. At this stage in his career you can tell him what to do, but you must also tell him why.

A lady once said to me: "You believe that the parent should live according to the principle he teaches the child. Then, how can you deny your son tobacco, with a lighted cigar between your lips?"

The answer to this brings us to the nib of the tobacco question. The child is put to bed at seven o'clock, although the parents may not retire until eleven. The child takes milk at breakfast and the parents may have coffee. The father may devote ten hours of the day to work, but this would not be well for the child. Many things that the man may do with impunity are not good for the growing boy.

This is exactly what I tell my boy, and he sees the logic of it: While a boy is growing he should take nothing into his system that is not nutritious and he should particularly abstain from anything that may retard the development of his bodily organs, even in the slightest degree. Every pulsation of the heart, every expansion of the lung cells, every function of the nerves must do its work unimpeded while the frame is lengthening and broadening into the proportions of a man. Once the frame is completely developed the organs merely have to renew the old tissues. But during the growing period they have not only to renew the old but to create additional flesh, blood and bone to meet the demands of the increasing bulk. There are two chemicals

in tobacco, pyridine and nicotine, that have a restraining effect upon the heart, lungs and nerves. If you give them the additional burden of carrying off these two poisonous chemicals, the building up of the tissues is sure to suffer. If you do not feel bad results from it in youth, you will certainly feel them in later years.

Said my boy to me: "I know a chap who smokes cigarettes; and he does a hundred yards in eleven seconds." "That's too bad," said I, "for just so sure as he does it in eleven seconds with the cigarette handicap, he could do it in ten and a half without it. And if this boy is running for an organised athletic department like that of a college or an established club, the training rules will forbid him the use of tobacco for a certain period before the day of the contests. Ask any athletic coach about tobacco and he will tell you to 'cut it out.' Ask any physician about it—even one who is himself a smoker—and he will tell you that no matter how strong and well a growing youth who smokes may be, he would be a good degree stronger and better if he did not use tobacco. You would like to arrive at manhood, as nearly physically perfect as you can, wouldn't you? You have not as yet acquired a taste for tobacco, have you? Well, then, do you not see that by abstaining from it you have something to gain and absolutely nothing to lose? Let tobacco alone until you are twenty-one. I might better say twenty-five, for that is the accepted age of maturity. But we will put it at twenty-one and perhaps by that time you will add a few years' more abstinence of your own volition."

Mothers, do not go beyond facts in pleading against the cigarette. Do not tell your boy that cigarettes contain opiates, because they do not. I have been through dozens of cigarette factories and have followed the process of manufacture from the raw leaf to the finished article. The better grades contain absolutely nothing but pure tobacco of the mildest kind. In the cheaper grades a little harmless glycerine is sometimes used to relieve the harsh taste of the tobacco. No harmful drugs are employed. The paper wrappers are purer and less irritating than the tobacco. Cigarette paper is the purest paper manufactured. The danger of the cigarette is, first, that its cheapness appeals to the boy who would not think of buying cigars; and second, its very mildness encourages the young man to increase his smoking until he drifts into excessiveness without knowing it. Consumed in moderation, it is the least harmful form in which tobacco is used. But cigarettes or cigars, or tobaccos in any shape whatever, are not good for the growing boy.

Mothers, this is the truth about tobacco, and this is what you should tell your boy. Do not say that cigarette smoking leads to the penitentiary or the madhouse, because it doesn't, and the boy knows better. The principal of my boy's school walks by every day with a cigar in his mouth. He is near seventy and a good citizen. Do not say tobacco creates an appetite for strong drink, because it is not true, and the boy will not believe it. Do not say that smoking wrecks the nervous system, because in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it does nothing of the sort, and the boy, who is constantly observing the man, will not be convinced. Tell him the plain truth as I have written it, and he will see the consistency of your reasoning.

Strong drink is no relative of tobacco. The only similitude between the subjects is that they are both unnecessaries, if I may coin the word, to the boy's career. I have little to say about strong drink, because, while it is a matter of vital importance to the boy, it is a problem which our mothers appear to have pretty well in hand. The great majority, I believe, proceed on the theory that alcohol is not good for anybody, is ruinous to many, and, therefore, should be kept out of the home and away from the boy. There are a minority, however, who reason differently—thuswise: That drink is not harmful except to those who make it so by excessive use; that the boy who is carefully guarded against it in the home will the easier fall a victim to it when he gets beyond the home influence and the home restraint; and, *per contra*, that the boy who is permitted to become familiar with the use of it moderately in the home, will acquire temperance at the same time and be the better fitted to combat with its attending evils when he eventually goes out into the world.

To the majority first mentioned I have but this to say: Go on; you are doing well.

But to this minority I want to say: Stop! For the love of the God who made you, stop! You are on the wrong track. And I'll tell you why.

If alcoholism were only a habit, like the use of tobacco, there might be a thread of practicability in your line of reasoning. But alcoholism is more than a habit—it is a disease. There are alcoholic wards in the hospitals, there are sanitariums devoted exclusively to persons afflicted with it, there are physicians who specialise in the treatment of it. Some people are immune to it; others are not. I am, it so happens, and perhaps you are—but is your boy?

Science has lately ascertained that none are born consumptives. Some may be born with a tendency for the disease, or they may be born without that tendency and subsequently acquire the disease. The same is true of alcohol.

I have no reason to believe that my boy would be particularly susceptible to tuberculosis. Nevertheless, I do not propose to expose him to it. His window is kept open while he sleeps, he is encouraged to spend much time out of doors, he is given breathing exercises daily, he is taught to take precautions against infection when near any one afflicted with the disease.

Nor have I any grounds for believing that my boy has inherited the condition that develops alcoholism. Looking back into his ancestry, I find some non-abstainers but no drunkards. I, his father, am absolutely immune to it. Neither a total abstainer nor, in my youth, even a temperatist, I have walked arm in arm with it, but found nothing to attract or allure.

But does this justify me in deliberately exposing my boy to it?

I do not know how he is equipped for it and there is no way of ascertaining. You can take your boy to the doctor and he will tell you whether or not his condition is favourable to consumption. But alcoholism is more insidious. Physicians can diagnose it but they cannot foretell or forestall it. There are some sanitariums for alcoholism, but there are no preventoriums.

“But,” I am told, “if it is in him it will come out sometime. Might it not better show itself under the watchful eye of the parents, rather than after the boy has gone out from the home?”

If it is in the boy, then every year that will put breadth to his shoulders, brawn on his arm, pride in his heart, judgment into his head and force into his character, makes him better able to cope with the disease. No, no, a thousand times no! Do not have on your soul the guilt of giving your boy his first taste of wine.

We must consider latent alcoholism as a possibility in bringing up our boys. Remember, alcoholism is not a habit only, but also a disease. It is much more prevalent than smallpox, but for alcoholism there is no vaccine; science offers no preventive serum. It is your sacred duty, then, to prevent the contact, to keep out the contagion until your son has his full growth and strength, and it is your duty to tell him the situation as I have outlined it, so that he may know the real danger of rum.

Then, if the tendency is not in him, nothing has been lost, and if it is in him, you have brought him to man’s estate well equipped to give the evil a fair fight for supremacy.

VIII

OUT INTO THE WORLD

A young man of my acquaintance, who had just finished his schooling, came to his father one morning, flushed with pride, and holding an open letter in his hand.

“Father,” he said, “I’ve got a situation, and the man says I may start to work in the morning.”

The father took the letter and read it.

“Do you know all about this man?” he asked.

“Do I know him? Why, no; I don’t know him at all. But he knows all about *me*. He looked up all my references.”

“Of course he did,” replied the father, putting the letter into his pocket; “and before you go to work for him I’m going to look up *his*.”

It was a homely, up-state father who said that, but he was a wise and a good man and I revere him. He was a father who knew the boy from the skin in. He knew that the boy’s first employer is, in the boy’s eyes, the greatest man in the world. He perceived that his son, who for twenty years had looked upon him, the father, as the man of men, was about to have set before him a new pattern, a new ideal. And out of his heart came the question:

“What is this man like?”

It is a fine thing to know that you have brought your boy through that plastic period between his cradle-hood and his majority, and to know when he comes of age that he is clean and straight and true. It must be gratifying indeed, when the last text-book is closed and laid away, to see him start into the world, a man grown, with keen aspirations and high ideals, ready and eager to grapple with the world on his own account, and capable of taking care of himself with his own hands.

If you have brought him through safely to this momentous hour, you have done much. But is your task quite ended? Does your responsibility stop here?

That up-state father whom I have just referred to thought that it did not; and I agree with him. I believe that the father and mother yet have that one last touch to give to the character they have helped to form. I believe it is their duty to see, not that the boy has a good situation, but that he starts under a good man.

Naturally, the employer, in most cases, is a man who has met with some success in his business or his profession. He sits apart from his subordinates. However much they may use their ingenuity, it is he who shapes the policy of the business and dominates the concern. Every one about him defers to him. Everything that is done is subject to his approval. He is, in fine, the head and front of the entire establishment. There are clerks and salesmen and accountants and confidential advisers in the place, some with long experience and grey hairs, but none are as great as he, and all look up to the place he occupies as a position worthy of aspiring to.

The youth enters the employ of this man fresh from school or college. Here he gets his first insight of the career he intends to follow. If the employer is a good man, a man of high principles, all is well. But if he is a man of sharp practices, the boy is in danger. Having no other standard of comparison in business life, he may fall into the error of accepting his employer as a true type of the successful man. He has come to this place in a receptive frame of mind. Here the foundation of his chosen career is to be laid. Is it not probable that he will absorb something of the morals of his superior, even though they may not agree with the higher ideals raised in the home? When the boy first strikes out he is, after all, only a fledgling. The family nest has been feathered with love and care and kindness and protecting influences. You have told him of the outside world and you have tried to give him a clear vision. But there are some things about flying alone that only experience can teach. You cannot always extend the home atmosphere beyond the home, but you can do something akin to it. You can make it your business to see that his first glimpse into the new life reveals nothing contrary to the morals of the home.

You can see to it that his first employer is the kind of man you would be satisfied to have your son emulate.

In the selection of the boy's calling it is admitted, of course, that the boy himself is, in a large measure, the best judge. The vocation that he inclines to most strongly is likely to be the one for which he is best fitted. I think, however, that this rule is made too elastic at times.

A young man of my acquaintance thought that the stage was his calling. The father, telling me of it in confidence, said that in his, the father's opinion, the boy was best suited to the law, but added that he would say nothing, believing it to be a matter for the young man to decide alone. The young man had an exceptionally good memory, a fine speaking voice and the gift of oratory in a remarkable degree. He was much of a student, prepossessing in appearance and magnetic in personality.

That was ten years ago and the young man has never risen above mediocrity—and he never will. He lacked one essential to the drama—imagination. The truth is that he should have gone into the law. He saw the mistake in course of time, and told me so, but it was too late. Time had elapsed and he could not turn back.

The boy is not always a good self-analyst. He is too prone to measure his talents perfunctorily. It does not follow that your son's calling is art because he can chalk a caricature on the wall; that he should be a poet because he can dash off a sentiment in rhyme; that he is suited to the clergy because he is of a pious turn of mind. It does not always follow that the thing he does the most easily he can do the best. This is the mistake that parents must guard against when the time comes for choosing a profession for the boy.

They have studied the boy from infancy, while he has studied himself but little, and that with an immatured mind. Is it unlikely, then, that the parents often know his latent capabilities better than he himself knows them? It goes without saying that the son

shall not be driven by parental authority into a profession that is distasteful to him; but I think in most cases the parents can aid the boy in finding the true thread of his bent. With no attempt at coercion they can help him to accurately analyse those natural leanings which, in the embryo, are many times conflicting and misleading. It appears to me that the counsel of the parents is needed at this time no less than at any other period in the boy's life.

Having seen the boy well reared and started in the career for which he is best equipped, and under the direction of a superior whose influence will be uplifting, I think the parents may rest in that peace and tranquillity of mind that comes with the consciousness of a duty well done. They may now sit quietly by and watch while the boy works.

I would caution them against expecting too much of him. Of the million-and-a-half of American boys born every year, all cannot be famous—all cannot be rich. Only a few can be President of the United States. But all can be good citizens, and that is the kind of material that the country needs. We have plenty of great men, and too many very rich men. A great man is merely a good man picked haphazard from thousands of others just as good—picked by Opportunity whenever the occasion demands. A rich man is one who has more money than he needs. Either of these, beyond a certain stage of self-progress, is a child of chance.

What you have a right to expect from your son, if you have trained him conscientiously, is success. I do not mean the success that is measured by the dollar sign, or by the size of the type in which the newspapers print his name.

The successful man, in the true sense of the word, is the law-abiding citizen who gives unto the world enough of his brain and brawn to pay the way of himself and his family through it.

I believe there is the making of such a man in every healthy boy that is born into the civilised world. I believe that every healthy boy is brought into the world a good boy. If one of these develops into a bad boy it is because he is made to; not affirmatively, but negatively—through the want of proper training. All the boy needs is to be treated as a boy. He is not a god, to be worshipped, or a girl, to be coddled, or a dog, to be driven. The boy that I know is a sturdy little human being, distinctly masculine in gender, with a desire to be doing something and a want of direction; in fine, an embryotic man.

Give him the light, tell him the truth, show him the way. Do this consistently, conscientiously, and he will measure up to the highest standard of good citizenship.

More than this I do not ask of my boy.