

(December 20th.)

## The Boy Problem.

By C. J. ATKINSON.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club, on the subject: "The Boy Problem," Mr. C. J. Atkinson said:

*Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,*—I wish at the very outset to thank you on behalf of the boys for this opportunity of advocating their interests. The Nineteenth Century was said to have been the Women's Century, and those of us who are engaged in work for the boys are trying to make the Twentieth Century the Boys' Century. At the close of the Nineteenth Century the late Henry Drummond claimed that the boy was being re-discovered. Although the first decade of the Twentieth Century has not passed, yet, those who are engaged in the work have come to the conclusion that it is not so much a question of discovering the boy as of giving him an opportunity to discover himself. Now, "The Boy Problem" has been given to me as the theme of my address this afternoon, and naturally I must take my illustrations from my work, and as you are practical men you will no doubt appreciate what has been accomplished. Some have said that it is not so much a boy problem as it is a parent problem. I might add further that it is a grandparent problem, so in reality there are three problems. The boy problem is still a very large one, and the subject needs to be carefully considered.

Now there is one thing that impressed me very greatly in boys' work, and it was that to keep boys out of mischief, giving them something to do was a prime essential. That was the first thought I had in connection with the line of work that

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Mr. C. J. Atkinson, though a layman in educational matters, is a pioneer in the "Broadview idea" of vocational or industrial play. He founded the Broadview Boys' Brigade in 1895; in 1902 it became the Broadview Boys' Institute and recently the work has been incorporated with the Toronto Y.M.C.A. The Institute was organized for work among boys between the ages of 12 and 18, and the property on Broadview Avenue consists of a large club building and 5½ acres of land, the greater portion of which is divided into 84 plots or farms and gardens, 10 by 40 feet in area and cultivated by the boys. In addition to this there are evening classes in many industrial subjects, an active athletic organization, besides many original educational features. Mr. Atkinson has been superintendent since its organization.

we have since taken up. I came to the conclusion that a good deal more judgment was used in connection with the training of girls than of boys. When you provide amusements for the girls, the toys, etc., selected were dolls, dishes and other implements that suggest their future vocation, and the result is splendid mothers. With boys, what do you provide? You fathers think your boys want something to amuse themselves with, and so you get them balls, bats, lacrosse sticks, hockey sticks, and things of that kind. Many think that that is the only thing of interest to them. What is the result? The boys are going almost sport mad. That is the reason why you business men, when you want to keep the office staff a little later on a Saturday afternoon, find how difficult a matter it is. Sports occupy almost too large a place in the life of the boy. I conceived the idea therefore that we should give the boy employment and work along the line of the work that he would take up later on in life—vocational play, industrial play. Whether that would be popular or not, nothing but experience would prove. That is what we have attempted to prove, and what we are experimenting with down there at the Broadview Boys' Institute.

Now, the city owes a great deal to a boy, and I hope the result of the talk this afternoon will lead you to the conclusion that you ought to pay the debt. A boy in a city has disadvantages as compared with the country boy. Here are trees, but he cannot climb. He sees flowers everywhere, but he cannot pick them. He sees beautiful boulevards, but he cannot play on them; and stones just the proper size for throwing, but he cannot throw them. Even the horsechestnut falls right into his mit, and he cannot throw that either. Naturally, if you are going to do your duty by the boy, you must provide some means of working off this surplus energy, because, if you do not, it will work off in other channels that lead to the necessity of children's courts and other requisites.

Therefore, the playground is a very important matter, and I hope that you will consider seriously the needs of this city along that line, because I cannot speak of the boy problem or boy interests without referring to that. Play is natural, not only to boys and girls, but to every living thing in the days of its youth. In early years or early days or early months, every animal seems to play naturally and has the play instinct. With the boys, this is uppermost.

And there are some other features that you want to remember in considering the boy. He sees the humorous side of everything, and you can be talking to him along the most

serious lines, and if you make a single slip of the tongue, a little mistake that seems of no moment, he will laugh, and you will lose the effect of your moral teaching. Humor must be uppermost with him, and it is always well to consider this in planning for boys. Our plans have been based upon the broadest natural outlines. We feel we must get the boy employed, that we must not simply provide him with sport; he needs that too; but we must give him play along the line of a future vocation. I had this in mind for years before we started in down there, and one of the reasons why I wanted a large piece of property and made this big investment referred to by the Chairman, was because we must have land enough and elbow room enough, if we are to do anything for the boy.

We started our little township the very first spring, dividing the land into some 70 or 80 little farms 10 ft. by 40 ft., and these were turned by the boys into flower and vegetable gardens, and public plots, and in that way we got them to working in the soil. Now, it was predicted that that would be a very good thing for the boys for one season, but that it would not continue, and I merely want to testify this afternoon that this work was more popular this last summer than it ever has been, and that for seven years it has been growing in popularity.

Several things have been accomplished there; among others, something that I did not even anticipate. We have found the work to be a splendid thing, not only from an educational standpoint, but from the standpoint of health. As an exercise, working the soil, whether in the spring of the year with spade, or later on with the hoe, or pulling the weeds even, the boys are out in the open, and it is a good thing for the health.

Then, there is the educational aspect, opportunities for nature study. The first season, when the flowers and vegetables would make their first appearance through the ground, the boys would come running to me to go out with them and look, as though I had never seen a radish peeping through the ground before. It was the result of their effort. A growing boy should be surrounded by growing things or he is not satisfied.

Now, I did not anticipate that this work would give opportunities for business development, but I soon discovered that it did. We had a red-headed, freckled boy, not much in appearance, but who had a twinkling little eye which suggested much. I found that he was buying the half-grown

crops from the other boys. He would, for instance, pay them so much for each row of beets, onions, turnips, etc., that they would cultivate, and he was to sell them. He invested very largely, so largely in fact that he had to borrow money to carry on his operations. I insisted on his banking his money in the Institute Savings Bank and upon his keeping books so as to be able to report on the different cases, which he promised to do, and did do later on. The result was that in the evenings you would see the boys' carts, made up of baby carriage wheels and old soap boxes, lined up at the Institute gates, and this boy busy doing up his vegetables, which the other boys distributed, and on Saturday he went and made his collections, and the people were glad to buy from him because they got their vegetables so crisp and fresh. The boy found ready customers, and you can understand how people would prefer to buy from the boys rather than from the men on the wagons. At the end of the season he reported on several transactions. For instance, he bought five rows of onions at 10 cents a row, 50 cents; the boy selling the same to take care of them. Well, with what he had sold in green onions, and the value of the matured stuff, he realized \$1.50 from the five rows. At the end of the season we had a summing up, as we always do, in fact we have two or three of them during the year, and on this occasion I preached to the boys a little from this text: "You can be a fifty-cent boy and do the work, or be a \$1.50 boy and let someone else do it." I told the boys that it generally took men forty or fifty years to find that out, and that the ones who discovered that early were the \$1.50 men. That naturally aroused them a little bit, and the result was that next year several wanted to start in this business, but no one wanted to sell.

Another thing of interest to those who care to study these social questions took place. Some of the bright boys managing truck farms in this way commenced to form combinations or syndicates. The owners of several of these plots would combine. One of those in the combination would have a good business head and go and get the customers and do all the business part of the work, and the other boys would attend to all the plots in common, and the crops would be bulked and sold together, and the profits divided. The spirit of combination is in the air, and they have been breathing it in, and just imagine for a moment what that means in the life of the boys, even to those who do not engage in it! So far as practical business experience is concerned, here are boys fourteen and fifteen years of age who have to think for themselves and

to use their own judgment. Do not decide everything for the boy; let him decide for himself. When he comes for your opinion, try and draw him out and get his opinion. The chances are you will be able to agree with his opinion, and the result will be that he will have a greater esteem for your advice and more confidence than ever in himself.

When the autumn came, we started industrial classes. My idea was to start the winter season much as we had the summer. Several principles were involved. One was that we were not going to duplicate any of the work carried on in the public schools. I had come to the conclusion that we should have something whereby they might employ their hands as well as their heads, so all our classes were industrial; and we have since had the following classes in operation: Manual training, clay modelling, wood carving, printing, show card lettering, free hand and mechanical drawing, cooking—the principal classes touching the different vocations and different callings. My idea at first was that they would be purely educational. A boy could not know too much no matter what his life pursuit, and so he should have his hands educated as well as his head. This general education plan has, however, after seven years' experience, given place to the idea that our classes are vocational. Of the boys interested in agriculture we find eighteen or twenty of them on farms. I could tell you very interesting experiences as to how they persuade their parents to go on to farms, and the success they are making of this work by carrying it on in a practical business way as they did their little township plots.

You can see what that means too in a community. We have the country giving to the city great numbers of boys constitutionally fitted to make splendid success in business and in city life, but there are very few going back to the country. Now, in order to have a healthy body, there must be a complete circulation, and it is the same with the body politic. You must have not only the farm boys coming into the city, but the city boys going back into the country, and I think if something like that which we have been doing were introduced into the public school courses, it would very largely accomplish that result.

Now, among those who have gone out from us, besides those following agriculture, we find those who are carpenters, builders, pattern makers who had been working in the manual training classes, and those who have been studying drawing we find went to the lithographers and engravers, while those who had been in our printing office went to the printing trades,

and so on right through the list. I therefore have changed my mind, and am convinced that these classes were vocational. The boy was finding his bent in life. Don't you think it worth while to try and discover what a boy is fitted for, and fit him into just the groove he is best adapted to? You know how many good carpenters have made poor business men, and how many business men had better have been at the plough, and so on all through the list. Anything that can be done, therefore, should be done to find out what a boy is best fitted for, that will make him discover himself, and what his bent in life is, and then follow it. Taking up these industrial lines does not magnify the business life, which I think is sufficiently taught in clubs and schools. We must have our mechanics, and the better mechanics we have, the better for all concerned; and I endeavor to point out to the boys that even in the matter of salaries the foreman and master mechanic has the advantage of the man in the office. So we have tried to magnify that side of life as well as the agricultural side.

The city boy is inclined to make fun of the farmer and speak of him in a jocular way. Our boys, however, take considerable pride in donning cow breakfasts, and overalls, and calling themselves farmers, and we always call them farmers, and they glory in it.

This rural township suggested a municipal government as an education in citizenship. That is all-important. I think that it is one of the best features of the work. The municipal idea was started, and later developed into a commonwealth. It not only educates the boy in regard to the question of elections, because they have to elect councillors and reeve, but the boys who are elected have opportunities for obtaining business experience, and this seems immediately to give the boy a sense of responsibility. They are voters, free-holders, and they feel that if the men they elect do not do their duty, they are themselves responsible. I find as a result that they also have a new sense of respect for law and order. You know the opinion boys have of the police. The boys want to see the fun in everything. Now, there is considerable fun in some policemen, in others there is none. The boys try to find it though, and so the policeman is made the butt of a great many practical jokes. It is bad that a boy should have a poor impression of a policeman, and they seldom see one without trying to "get him going" as they say. I had an incident that occurred in connection with the Old Boys' Brigade when we used to drill in the basement of a church, and notwithstanding warn-

ings to the boys to behave themselves, a policeman came in one night and said, "Are you responsible for those boys?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "They are a terrible nuisance out there and give me a great deal of trouble. They try to get me to chase them, and then when I do chase them, they rush around the corner, and I cannot catch them." Now, I did not want them to do that, and I tried to remedy it. The next night I referred to the fact that apparently they were not satisfying the policeman on that beat. I told them also that we were organized members of the Brigade, and under our constitution must have respect for authority, and I said, "Now, this man is a sergeant, and when you go out, you should salute him and show him respect." That night they went out with a rush as usual, and a little while afterwards in came the same policeman more excited than ever. He said, "Why, the boys were worse than ever to-night. They came up and saluted me. They not only saluted me one at a time and singly, but they marched past in companies and platoons and battalions and saluted me every time they passed, and," he says, "I have simply run in here to escape them." I had to laugh in his face, I can assure you. I said, "But, did you salute them back?" "What! salute those young plagues! I did not." I then told him that I had told the boys to salute him and show their respect for him, and that he should salute back. The next night I told the boys again what they should do about this saluting business, and they kept on saluting the policeman until he saluted back, after which they went on about their business. I think if the police would only remember that they had been boys themselves once upon a time, it would aid very, very materially.

This commonwealth idea has developed into great proportions, as you will realize when I tell you that we have four provinces, which elect members, and we have ministers with various portfolios. They have to vote supplies and raise revenues, and each province gets its proportion to carry on the work of government, which is conducted on Dominion lines as far as it is possible to do so. We make some mistakes, and many amusing things arise out of this work, which I have not time to tell you of. And there it is, imperfect, but, I claim, one of the best things we have along the line of educating citizens.

Our organized commonwealth decided to have a national bank, so we put in a branch of the Penny Savings Bank, and that is the national bank. Then, they must have a standing army on a peace basis. There was quite a discussion over that,

there being many strong advocates of peace principles, but they thought that for ordinary protection we must have a standing army. Then, there must be a press, and a little paper was published all through the summer called the "Bumble Bee" because it would sting if everything did not go right. Other periodicals were issued also.

Then, they must have some joint stock companies. This arose from the fact that some of our Old Boys had been making investments in Cobalt stocks, and when they tried to locate the mines, they did not just know whether the mines were in existence. "I put twenty or forty or fifty dollars into this thing, and now I cannot find anything about it," was the usual complaint; so I thought we should have some education along this line, and had some lectures delivered by some of Toronto's prominent promoters and brokers.

The Broadview Boys' Bee Company, Limited, was organized. They started bee culture with only one swarm of bees at first, and paid 50 per cent. the first year. Now, you can see at once that was a dangerous thing to do. They saw it too afterwards, and now when they make 40 or 50 per cent. per year, they only declare 15 or 20 per cent. dividends. It was 20 per cent. this year. And they are keeping a surplus to invest in more bees. The stock of this company, which sold generally for 10 cents, could have been sold at any time during the summer at 20 cents.

There is also the Broadview Boys' Trading Company, which supplies sweaters, uniforms, etc., required by the boys. Their parliament requires the incorporation of all companies, and they cannot do business without it. They have to pay a fee for this incorporation, and their dividends are taxed, and in this way the treasury of the commonwealth is supplied.

But we must hasten on. One feature I like that has developed as a result of this commonwealth idea is that we are much broader as an institution, and I may say that when we adopted "Broadview" as a name, we did not take it altogether on account of the name of the street, but because we wanted to give the boys who came to us a broad view of life generally. There is, of course, in institutions of this kind a great danger of catering to classes. One class will say they will not stay if we are going to allow others in. We have had, from the commencement, every type of boy from the poorest, to the sons of the best people in the city, and while there has been a tendency such as I have mentioned, or at least was in times past it has apparently passed away since we came to be a commonwealth. Everybody must work

together; all religions, all nationalities, and all colors, and this has created a breadth of view that has been delightful, and the claim that older boys will not work with younger boys has been very largely overcome. The little boy of twelve years of age has a vote, and the larger boys who want that vote look after the interests of the small fellow. So you see how the commonwealth idea works to counteract these class feelings, and these boys are just carrying out in a small way the larger things of life, and are playing at things which later on in life they are going to be doing in real earnest. They look upon it as a serious matter just as you gentlemen look upon your citizenship in the larger affairs of life.

Now, my time is up. I have not referred to every branch of our work, but may say that the social and the spiritual features are looked after as well as others that naturally arise. I have tried to give you some little outline of what I believe is very important. I am not an educational expert, and have not made a study along scientific lines, and of course people come to me and say, "You are all wrong." However, I have given you some idea of what has followed the taking up by a layman of work that has become to a certain extent educational, and I feel very strongly now that many of these features should be introduced into our public school system, and I think that if they were, it would result in better citizens and better men.

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