

Growing-up — the Great Adventure

GROWING-UP is "A work in progress." As for the critics, "Fools and children should not be shown unfinished work."

Parents are often discouraged or annoyed by criticisms of bystanders — especially by the armchair critics who have never done it themselves and don't really know what they're talking about.

Even the Lord Jesus failed to make His apostles perfect. But just look at the final successful outcome!

GROWING-UP progresses, at least as an ideal, through three stages:

Secure child
Eager adolescent
Mature adult.

These stages are not like changing gears on an old three-speed gear box. Rather, this is a case of fluid-drive. One stage merges into the next, as infancy does into early childhood.

THE SECURE CHILD

The secure child depends on a faithful marriage.

Father and mother build on their own experiences when they were children and adolescents. They modify ideas and ideals in the light of new experience. Thus they lead, guide and educate their children through the varied facets of fallen nature, despite all its instinctual impulses, for better or for worse.

'Education' comes from two Latin verbs:

educare, to bring up;

educere, to draw out, with a specialized meaning of piloting a ship from the harbour to the open sea.

Vatican II favours the idea that **parents are the educators**, while **schools offer specialist teachers** for intellectual formation:

Among the various organs of education, the school is of outstanding importance. In nurturing the intellectual faculties which is its special mission...

Christian Education, GE n. 5(a)

This was before Catholic home-education. In it, parents are also give a *schooling*, which is not the same as classroom teaching done by school teachers.

Various aspects of the secure childhood involve:

"Civilizing the savage";

"Disciplining the child".

FOUNDATIONS for civilizing

- Children saying YES to parents (= co-operation).
- Helping them say NO to self (=obedience).
- Dressing, washing and knowing where their shoes are.
- Not getting everything they ask for.
- Not having too many toys, books, clothes, gadgets.
- Stopping instantly when told.
- Obeying at once.
- Answering respectfully when called or spoken to.
- Coming at once when called.
- Consideration for others through punctuality.
- Becoming increasingly worth of trust.
- Rendering an honest account of their duties.

FOUNDATIONS FOR DISCIPLING

Civilizing is foundational for character, which itself is the foundation for a growing measure of freedom.

Discipling to the Lord requires spiritual growth. Freedom is essential for that growth, for responding personally to His whisperings in the conscience.

A failure in civilizing or discipling leaves the soul open to the persuasions of the Devil.

Inevitably children will make mistakes. They should learn from them. Henry Lawson said, "The young fool must learn what he won't be taught."

Freedom is a challenge to do something difficult:

- Tom Sawyer painting the fence (cf. HO n. 52).
- Shackleton recruiting for the Antarctic (*ibid.*).
- Naaman bathing in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:13).

ADULT CHILDHOOD

'Adult childhood' has nothing to do with childish adults. Rather it is a highly desirable rounding-off a secure childhood. In our time, if it happens at all, it mostly passes unnoticed and without comment.

Girls of about 8 to 13 well brought-up in a family, especially a large family, or a small family with relatives and friends, can often be, and often are, entrusted with adult duties. Without any supportive adult present, they adopt the motherly role:

1. minding little children, baths, nappies and all;
2. occupying them (without using plug-in-drugs);
3. cooking meals, cleaning a room or a whole house;
4. and all without discord, raised voices or fights.

Boys of about 10-14, even when well brought-up, seem less capable of taking on a fatherly role and adult responsibilities. Without adult intervention, they tend to

1. fail in 'constant vigilance, eternal suspicion';
2. neglect essential details in prescribed tasks;
3. or cover their uncertainty with blustering egotism.

Some boys do achieve adult childhood: *Children of the Oregon Trail* 1844 by A. Rutgers van der Loeff is a history of a recently orphaned boy of 13 (growth-spurt then was at 14). He led his six siblings on foot across half of North America. Try to see one of the film versions of his real-life saga.

Moreover, in traditional fiction, boys do reach adult childhood, as once they really did in bush expeditions — look after each other, find their way, camp, cook, observe hygiene, and cope with mishaps better than in present suburban hot house upbringings. See *Bush Boys on the Move* Appendix 3 or *New Boys Go Bush Again* Appendix 6. (A hint for budding authors: you need a plausible reason for getting rid of the adults.)

THE EAGER ADOLESCENT

An adolescent is moving upward through a *stage*, progressing towards adulthood: the word 'adult' is from *adultus*, past participle of *adolēscere*, an incipient, meaning "to grow up" (nothing to do with adultery, *adulterāre*, to make impure, spurious).

That desirable eagerness in a maturing adolescent is in an **eagerness to please**, an eagerness to help, and without getting the grumps or resentment at being asked or ordered to help.

By contrast, a **teenager** is an adolescent who is stuck in a *state*, often plodding aimlessly, rather than moving upward through a *stage*. The '-teen' numbers for ages 13 to 19 are simply 10 (*teen*) plus 3 to 9, which more than embrace the years of adolescence.

Is it possible to skip a prolonged *state* of teenage grumps, gloom and rebellion, and move into the *stage* of an eager adolescent?

There were **no teenagers** in Australia before the 1950s, according to a priest long involved in social work and psychology. He quoted an anthropologist from USA who, in the late 1940s, came to study our aborigines, until he found our adolescence far more interesting. There was nothing like it in USA.

He found our 'rite of passage', the ritual for entering adulthood, was the easiest in the world.

Children simply left school, went to work and earned money in adult company, in NSW at age 15 (only 14 until 1943). They were **adolescents**, of course, with their internal confusions, doubts about themselves and embarrassments, though usually concealed, with the uncertainty about their capacity to meet expectations in a world of husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, or priests and Religious.

They were 'adulted' (nothing to do with adultery) as junior adults. There were expectations on their conduct as an inducement to live up to their status.

By contrast, some teenagers today suffer from *teenagitis* (rhyming with tonsillitis and appendicitis). It is an aberration characterized by too much money, the wrong sort of freedom, no responsibilities, few duties, scanty manners. This phenomenon is the scourge of parents and often of the police.

The eager adolescent sublimates (a Freudian term) his rebellious natural instincts from sinful Adam. This **lifts him out of himself** towards co-operating with parents and family, or a boss at work, workmates, and the wider community. It is a matter of character, virtues and spirituality.

He tends not to learn this in school, rather the contrary. School is a less suitable environment.

TOO LONG AT SCHOOL

Lengthy years of schooling hinder maturity by alienating adolescents from parents and siblings and making them peer dependent.

Today's society imposes snares and traps at every turn. It lacks many of the former situations that might have matured the adolescent.

DIFFICULTIES for FATHERS with SONS

Compared to girls, boys are ill-served. Girls at home have mother role-models on the spot, but it is rarer for boys at home to have father role-models for so much of the daily activities.

Thus unless they live on a farm, few boys can

achieve adult childhood compared to girls.

A Catholic world-view upbringing includes catechism and Biblical literacy, vocation discernment and obedience to God and His representatives.

With these rudiments, an adolescent boy will learn how to conduct himself and radiate a good example.

Also, he will have been told:-

- what to look for in a fiancée;
- and how to court her honorably;
- how and why to develop business instincts;
- and to avoid dead-end employment;
- how to budget, plan and save earnings;
- how to uphold the benefits of Christendom;
- how to promote the health of the community;
- how to disciple others;
- how to provide for wife and children in ♥ and \$;
- how to observe the legitimate demands of the state;
- how to handle the illegitimate demands of the state;
- how to understand and beat corruption in churchmen;
- how to serve God without playing religious games;
- how to leave a substantial estate to his descendants;
- how to honour his parents and his Catholic heritage.

THE MATURE ADULT

This third part is too vast for the space available.

Hence this conclusion is simply a further spur to action.

WE KNOW that the world is full of people who are unhappy and confused. Yet we so often miss the priceless chance of teaching our own children something sure and reliable. The commonest answer is that we don't know ourselves what is sure and reliable. But that is not true. By the time we have reached the age of thirty-five or forty, and our children are becoming old enough to be taught the difficult questions, we have found answers which satisfy us as a working basis. Good. Let us teach them to our children.

They will criticize them, attack them, and discard them, for a time at least. Good. We have done our duty. We have given them a basis to work on for themselves. They can come back to it, or find something better. They can accuse us of teaching them wrongly (although usually not of deliberately cheating them) and of trying to thrust our opinions down their throats (however gently we teach them, they will say that); but they cannot say we neglected them, wasting forty years of our own experience and fifteen years of their young lives.

Juvenile courts and mental homes are full of youngsters who were taught nothing useful by their fathers and mothers. It is not that they were badly brought up. They were not really brought up at all. They were never told how to behave.

School meant practically nothing to them. The older children whom they knew were equally ignorant. The films taught them that life meant excitement and daring.

Their fathers never told the boys how to control their powers and arrange their lives. Their mothers told the girls nothing about the real pleasures of life. Nothing.

When we look at the pouted and bestial face of such a boy or girl, ruined at seventeen, and instinctively feel that he or she looks worse than a savage, we are right. A Sudanese tribesman, a Jivaro Indian, a Borneo highlander trains his children far more purposefully and far more successfully than many fathers in the mightiest cities of the world.

The Art of Teaching, Gilbert Highet, in England, in 1951.

On the advantages of homeschooling for maturation see HO nn. 102, 115, and especially 112.

Father James Tierney