

Adolescence - With Special Reference to
Distinctions of Sex.

Grace Enfield Wood.

Between the ages of nine and sixteen is the most vital point in the life of the child for he is leaving his old joys and customs behind and entering upon a new existence. He is full of strange feelings, tempestuous passions, mysteries and perplexities which he cannot understand much less combat in anyway. This is the time when there is the most important change in his physical being from the foetal stage up; when the girl smiles her sweetest and loves the most; when the boy talks the deepest and fights the hardest. This is the period which gives the most trouble to the parent and to the teacher. Rarely, if ever, do we find the teacher having trouble with the pupil except during this transitory state. Rarely do we have pupils dying from brain fever before the age of nine or after seventeen.

This, then, is the time when the boy or girl needs a tender, loving mother, a strong, reliant father and a tactful, helpful teacher. Are the fathers, mothers and teachers of our land fitted to bring out the best there is in the child during this period? Can they keep the confidence of the children entrusted to their care, and lead them safely thro this crisis?

The discussion of separate cases as observed by a number of teachers thro out Kansas may

help some in coming to an understanding of the child during this critical period - a period fraught with peril to many.

This period does not arrive at any stated time but varies with individuals. It is betokened by change of voice; rapid growth and often an almost complete change of character. The child becomes shy in the presence of those of the other sex, especially if his elders are present, covertly takes advantage of every opportunity presented to be near some favored one and when detected and teased by other boys and girls the boy blushes but stoutly denies the charge while the girl in a timid manner tries to refute it but her embarrassment tells the story.

A few detached examples will now be given showing this universal tendency of sex attraction.

One teacher in central Kansas writes :- "My school is not a very good one for making the observations you suggest, owing to the age of my pupils. In playing ball the girls must have their favorite boys do the striking for them, and in playing the old-fashioned game of 'Pull-Away' the boys will always run in the direction of the girls whom they wish to catch them and the girls invariably do the same. I have a girl of fourteen who has a 'pouting spell' every time a certain boy is reprimanded by me.

"In Physiology, I quite frequently give topics

to be recited and, perhaps, several recite on the same topic. If I happen to choose the parties who like each other, they cannot help showing how much it pleases them."

Another teacher writes: "In complying with your request, I have a few observations which may be helpful. There is one girl who rides to school horseback. Every morning a certain boy assists her to dismount and then takes care of her horse. In the evening he always brings the horse to her, helping her on. They are each thirteen years of age.

"Since writing the above, these two have disagreed and have had nothing to do with each other for the last two or three months. The cause was the girl's liking for a boy a few years older, who started to school later.

"In stringing pop corn for the tree at Christmas time, I noticed one boy ten years old and a girl who was nine, working together. They did not care to work unless they could work together.

"A nine-year old girl brought this note to me: 'Roses are red, violets are blue; Sugar is sweet, and so are you.'

I retained the note and asked the little boy who wrote it why he did so. He acknowledged

writing it but said he did not intend her to get it.

"All the girls would rather the boys would sharpen their pencils. Usually it is a certain boy, too. Of course, the boys like to do it.

"In playing, if there is a chance, the boys and girls will 'pair off', i. e., in playing prison-base or blackman, they will catch hold of hands - boy and girl - and go through.

"Now that spring work has begun, the large boys have stopped school. This makes a great difference in the atmosphere of the school-room, many of the girls being very restless and uninterested since. Some, however, appear glad while others appear indifferent.

"Probably it would be helpful and of interest," he continues, "for me to relate the feelings I used to have. I am not ashamed of it and suppose I am like other people in that respect. I can well remember when I was from eight to eleven, how I used to like to play with the girls at school. In Indiana, we children would go to the woods and make play houses. The boys would prepare the material and the girls would do the building. I can remember that if I did not get to pick moss for a certain girl it was not nearly so pleasant, but almost painful. I do not know as I can describe the feeling as love, but it was similar. When I was eight years old I thought one girl

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was the most beautiful of all. I remember her yet, and also remember the gratified feeling I had when I found she preferred me to an older boy who was greatly charmed with her."

Another teacher who has an intermediate room sends in the following: "One boy steps aside to let the girl who sits behind him go ahead in going to and from recitation. Most of the boys have a tendency to try to please the girls or to do something to amuse them. Of course, they are always pleased to lend them their knives, lead pencils, etc. They also love to tease the girls in any way they can. One boy delights in taking the hair ribbon of the girl who occupies the seat in front of him, drop it to the floor, then pick it up and bring it to the teacher as an article found."

"The girls are always willing to show the boys where the lessons are, should they be absent or forget what was assigned. These are some notes I have found."

Mary, (aged eleven), May I see you home from the party tonight?
Albert (aged eleven).

Dear Sweetheart (aged eleven),

Do you remember the note you wrote in my letter last year?
Frank (aged twelve).

Frank (aged twelve).

Are you going to marry Mary (aged twelve) today?

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You told Inez last night you were.
Florence (aged eight).

Still another teacher writes, "I find the boys are more careful of their language when in the presence of girls. They are more willing to lend to the girls than to the boys. My boys often bring to the girls, fancy stones, bits of ribbon, and other little knick knacks.

"The notes I have found were upon nothing but lessons or play, and no term of endearment stronger than 'dear' was used.

"I am interested in one couple, aged fourteen and twelve. They are somewhat timid towards each other in company, are free and easy when alone. The most restraints seems to be on his side, while she shows she delights in his presence."

In a school in the country were Vera, aged nine, Frank, aged ten, Marie, aged eleven, and Fred, aged twelve. Vera and Marie were sisters and Fred and Frank, brothers. They always walked to school together. No sentimentality was ever evident, tho there was a great love between the children. When teased by the other children, they denied nothing even acknowledging their fondness for one another.

John, aged fourteen, and Bertha, aged fifteen, occasioned a great deal of amusement to the other pupils and an equal amount of perplexity to their teacher in the evident admiration for each other.

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This was shown by little conferences at recess, notes passed during school hours, and glances of evident approval. John at last stopped school to his teacher's great relief, and the friendship waned as quickly as it had arisen.

Bertha was always quick to notice any large boys who came to school and tried to win their good graces at once. She was not studious at all and was not allowed to notice the boys at all, when in her mother's presence. To this, no doubt, was due her extreme silliness. She never went to school after she was sixteen and was married in a few years.

When Etta was thirteen a boy about the same age called for her every morning on the way to school. If it was snowy, he hauled her on his sled. He always carried her books and once in a while would ask her if he might accompany her to some social event in the evening. She always refused but this did not seem to cool his friendship for her. This lasted until the young people were fifteen when the friendship gradually declined.

M, a boy aged eleven, and E a girl aged ten, played together when at home and sat together at school. M would take E out riding in his little wagon which he had trained his dog to draw. They lived next door to each other, so planted some

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melons together, and together defended them from the ravages of the town boys. They often rode around the pasture horse-back E sitting behind M. One day E. came home from school looking very downcast. Her mother asked her the cause, but received no answer. Then she surmised the truth and said, "I know; you and M. have been behaving badly in school and the teacher has separated you." This proved to be the case, and that teacher was never forgiven by E. and M. for his unkindness to them. Their misdemeanor was laughing at an amusing sketch drawn by M. It may be the teacher was unjust as well as unwise in separating them for neither did so well after that. Their love was a wholesome one making each one better.

One day the two children were accompanying their elders to a picnic. On stopping at a house for some more passengers, the two decided they would have pleasanter quarters, so took the easiest seat in the wagon and appropriated the best umbrella with which M. was carefully shielding E. from the sun. No amount of ridicule affected them and they kept their good seat and umbrella.

About the same time, M. Floy and Lulu, two girls about M's age were staying with a sick lady for company. While there they found a game, "Dr. Busby." They immediately named each other

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from the game, M being Dr. Busby, Floy, Mrs. Busby while Lulu was Mrs. Melon. This little play was kept up for over a year. In the meanwhile, Floy moved away, but letters were exchanged, being headed "My dear Mrs. Busby" or "Dr. Busby" as the case might be. Floy, in one letter innocently remarked, "Mary (her eldest sister) says we are small fry to be married, but we are all right, aren't we?" M. was not ashamed of his letters, showing those he wrote and those he received to his mother.

Perhaps the above incidents are sufficient to show there is a relationship between the sexes, the ones given being wholesome relations. Some such relationships, however, are of the opposite character due, many times, it seems to the injudicious talk of older boys and girls and often of parents themselves. Shall we allow the boy or girl to get this perverted idea or shall we keep this love the wholesome love, the sweetest and greatest thing in the world. A few incidents may illustrate the meaning.

Mrs. E. never allowed her children to be teased about the boy and girl friends they had. She had one daughter and two sons and the three always played together. The boys never thought they had a good time unless their sister was along. These boys were singularly pure being so remarkable in this respect that a gentleman of

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experience, in speaking of them when they were young men said "The verse 'thinketh no evil' can surely be applied to those boys if to any one." Each boy had his favorite girl friend but he was never made to feel that this was unnatural consequently he did not get the distorted and frequently evil view of such friendships. The daughter was treated in the same way with much the same results.

Surely this was better than a neighbor who was always talking to her children about their sweethearts which resulted in as silly sentimentalists as can be conceived.

An observation was made last summer upon Joyce, a sweet wholesome girl of fourteen who is infatuated with a young man ten years her senior. He is one of the boys mentioned above and is fond of Joyce. This is a sweet innocent love and seems to be due to total lack of self-consciousness in the child. An older sister somewhat worried over it asked the mother if something in the way of caution should not be said to Joyce. The mother, a wise woman, answered, "I'll watch the dear child closely and when it is needed, I'll speak the word but let us not rub off the bloom of innocence." Joyce has no brothers. Is not this friendship with a true pure young man of infinite importance in her development?

Does this feeling change the child for the better or for the worse? Two examples, one of which

came directly under the writer's notice and the other related in her presence will show a change for the better

May, a girl of fifteen made the acquaintance of a boy, George a few months older than she. He was a country boy attending the town school and was very bashful and awkward. May was always friendly to new-comers especially if they seemed lonely. Jennie, her chum, and she used to push each other off the steps in order to get to march in behind George. They did this to tease him. However, as a rule May was kind to him and one evening he confided to a classmate that he thought May the kindest and nicest girl in school. She, of course, lost no time in telling the other girls and they asked him the next day if he said it. He replied "I don't deny it" and ever after that was careful to avoid the girls as much as possible for they teased him unmercifully. He told his mother about it and she comforted him as much as she could, but he told her that he was going to study so hard that May would be glad to call him her friend. This seemed a good incentive, for tho he had cared little for education before, he completed the High School Course two years later. He himself declared it was the incentive he received when May delivered her oration on Commencement Day soon after the above occurred, that spurred him on.

Sam was a boy possessing fine natural abilities,

good general knowledge and an observing mind, but had very little moral growth. His home surroundings were anything but pleasant, his mother being dead and his father a harsh, unfeeling infidel. As it seemed, his highest ambition was to be the leader of a crowd of rowdy boys. He never had anything to say to girls and was seldom seen in society. If he were forced to spend a few minutes with a company of quiet young people, he was ill at ease and seemed only content in company of those of his own type. He had not attended school for several terms but as several of his companions who were attending spoke highly of it, he decided to enter. This decision was not exactly welcome to the teacher as she had heard of him.

The next Monday brought Sam to school. His face wore a sullen look and to the teacher's questions concerning his advancement, he gave gruff replies. She soon discovered he had a fine intellect and by judicious words of praise drew the best from him. Still the pupils hung aloof but one day a word from the teacher caused them to be more kind. Elizabeth, a sweet shy girl of fifteen was especially kind in her modest unassuming way. An affection between the two gradually sprang up. Soon school was out and when it reopened in the fall Sam was on hand, the scowl replaced by a cheerful, happy smile. The teacher saw that the summer

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had increased rather than diminished the affection between Elizabeth and Sam. This, when discovered by the other pupils and friends caused much adverse comment. The next winter passed; Sam was converted and is now the successful teacher of a Bible class which numbers many of his old companions whom he has been able to influence for good. He says his life now is due to the influence of the teacher and Elizabeth who is now his wife. In this case, love changed the coarse wicked boy into a noble Christian man.

These experiences are too often the exception rather than the rule. It is to the opposite class, the parent and the teacher needs to give his best thought and his most earnest help. Let a few examples give the idea.

Gladys and Vera, each fourteen years of age, unfortunately have had the nonsense side of their natures too highly developed. Their teacher had been warned of this and was not surprised to find them cancelling names the first day. She said nothing but took the paper away from them. A few days later the same thing happened again. By this time she had discovered that neither could recite well and from this drew her own conclusions. This time she took the paper remarking that their work didn't show that they had time for such nonsense and it had better not occur again. She felt dis-

couraged to see the trouble beginning but by the end of the month, Gladys had brought up her work to the average and had dropped many of her sentimentalities. Vera didn't bring her work up but the teacher had no more trouble with her. School went on nicely without the accustomed love-making until about six weeks before the close of the term when two girls, Bertie and Inez entered from country districts. Trouble began immediately. If they could find no one in their own grade to flirt with, they would go downstairs and flirt with boys in the third and fourth grades. They cancelled names, sat with the boys during intermissions, stood by them at the board, walked to and from school with them and practically demoralized the whole school. The teacher tried every method she could was unable to do much.

A year has elapsed since then. The teacher this year has been annoyed all year and has had no better success than the teacher of the previous year. They have two more girls with them this year and call themselves "The Big Four." Each girl has her lover and they go to parties together, and not infrequently are out walking until after ten. Why will the fathers and mothers be so careless of their boys' and girls' good names. It can't help but end disastrously to a large degree. Their parties are kissing parties; their amusements are all of this order. The exquisite bloom of maidenhood

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and boyhood is being destroyed. What is the cause?
How can it be helped?

In a school in central Kansas, one mother came to the teacher very much disturbed about her boy, aged thirteen. She had discovered a number of letters written him by a girl three years older than he. Some were only silly, while others were positively vulgar. The teacher advised her to have a frank talk with her son telling him the dangers lying in such a path. She replied that she felt she couldn't talk to him on the subject but wished the teacher to try to do something. That mother was a coward and her son's failure was largely due to her lack of character. In one letter the girl said, "I think you are the nicest looking boy in school. Your hair is so black and your eyes so bright. No, I don't remember that I promised you a kiss, but if I did, I suppose you'll have to have it. I'll meet you at the alley this evening. This from a girl of sixteen who was brazen enough to tell the Superintendent that she didn't see anything wrong in that note, when he questioned her about it.

Her companion, Jennie, aged fifteen, absolutely failed because of her silliness. The same Superintendent warned her that her frequent meeting with a boy her own age was causing adverse criticism by the men on the street and that, as a friend, he would advise her to be more prudent. Her sister

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a girl of eighteen, interviewed him later telling him it was none of his business how often Jennie walked with Homer and that her mother didn't disapprove of it.

In this same crowd was Myrtle, aged fourteen and Vernon aged fifteen. Their teacher intercepted a note which began "My dear darling Sweetheart" and which deplored the fact that he had not had the pleasure of escorting her home from church the previous Sunday night. He informed her that he was lame because the old cow had stepped on him the night before, and ended up by assuring her that she was dear. He signed his name very lovingly and added S. W. A. K and B. B. S. W. C. which were to be interpreted most sentimentally. The teacher found out that the two had been out walking one evening the week before from eight thirty to eleven. It is likely no harm was done but why did her mother allow her to be so placed into temptation? She failed to pass her grade and cried most bitterly. The teacher could not sympathize much with her for it was but the result of her foolish and unwise conduct.

These are the conditions to be met by teachers and parents. This feeling is no stranger to any of us. It must be guided so as to become the sweetest thing in life instead of the most sordid and debasing.

How is this to be done?

A few suggestions might be made altho this subject is one not well understood by educators.

One thing is that too many teachers try to repress, absolutely, all feelings of this sort. This is a mistake for these are natural feelings and must be guided, not repressed. If the spontaneous evidence of them is denied, this leads to hidden love which soon becomes perverted. We realize we had the same feelings and if we are wise we will analyze our own nature and see the effect of repression on us.

It is human nature to want to indulge in forbidden pleasures. Why forbid the joy which comes from companionship with one the child loves? Too many children are brought up alone. They miss the love of brothers and sisters as well as much that is wholesome in the way of self sacrifice. These are the ones who so often make trouble in their perverted ideas of companionship with those of the other sex.

One mother who was a companion to her son was told by him that he liked a certain girl but the boys and girls at school teased him. She answered "Never mind. It is nice for you to like her for she is a nice girl and I want my boy to choose good pure girls as his friends." He felt free to tell her of his pleasant little chats with her. Such a

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boy will not go far wrong.

Teachers may have the confidence of their pupils in the same way if they will. Isn't it something to be proud of that a child so respects and loves his teacher that he can confide in her all his joys and pleasures and be guided in the right paths? Such a teacher can then guide these transient feelings so they will prepare the way for the higher, permanent intellectual and spiritual interests.

"If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust, but if we work upon immortal souls, if we imbue them with principles, with the just fear of God and love of our fellow men, we engrave on those tablets something which will brighten to all eternity."