

THE YOUNGER GENERATION AND ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE

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FOREWORD

SO MUCH has been written of the younger generation that there scarcely seems room for further discussion. The subject has been dealt with by everyone who has something to say, and lots who haven't. We find it in our novels, our plays, our movies, our magazines and newspapers. Ministers have preached about it; teachers have taught about it; psychologists have analyzed it; sentimentalists have told us how good it really is. What is left to say? We know all about the corruption of modern youth, how the evils of jazz, gin, and sex—the Unholy Three—are leading the youngsters to perdition. We know that there have never been so many criminals (and first-class criminals at that!) among our boys and girls. We know that they are more or less “a godless bunch,” that they do not honor their fathers and mothers, that they are burning themselves out in an endless orgy of sensual pleasures instead of equipping themselves for the task of propagating the race and making way for a better civilization.

But why go on? This is all old stuff; it has been drummed into us to such an extent that even the most omnivorous readers are falling prey to indigestion.

I am going to relate a little story:

A boy, aged eighteen, had a terrific row with his old-fashioned father. The father, blazing mad, burst into a furious denunciation of the younger generation, what

the world was coming to, etc. He concluded by saying:

“Usually a father thinks a lot of his son, admires him. But do you know what I think of you?”

The son flared up.

“Do you know what I think of you?” he countered defiantly.

And that's just the point I want to make. Hitherto all the discussions concerning the younger generation have been conducted by adults who, in one sense, are outsiders. They have had the floor for a long time, and have done all the shooting. But what of the object of their controversy, the boys and girls themselves? What do they think of the situation? What are their views, their aims, their attitude toward life?

The purpose of this Little Blue Book is to answer just these questions—in other words, to offer a study of the younger generation by one of its own members.

Before starting, perhaps it would be well to give my credentials. I am nineteen years of age, born in New York city, educated in public schools, out-of-town boarding schools, and High School. It is true that in my case I have been met with understanding, so that although my problems have been similar to those which confront the American youth of today, their handling was easier. I have made numerous acquaintances among my contemporaries, not only here but in various other parts of the country, and these associations have given me a fair conception of the situation. I am going to try, my best to describe this situation with sufficient clarity and logic to convince the reader that there is another side to the question.

I. THE REVOLT OF YOUTH

SOLNESS, middle-aged master builder, is speaking to the young and impetuous Hilda Wangel:

SOLNESS (*in a low voice*): I must tell you—I have begun to be so afraid—so terribly afraid of the younger generation.

HILDA (*with a little snort of contempt*): Pooh—is that younger generation a thing to be afraid of?

SOLNESS: It is indeed. And that is why I have looked and barred myself in. (*Mysteriously.*) I tell you the younger generation will one day come and thunder at my door! They will break in upon me!

HILDA: Then I should say you ought to go out and open the door to the younger generation.

SOLNESS: Open the door.

HILDA: Yes. let them come in to you on friendly terms, as it were.

SOLNESS: No, no, no! The younger generation—It means retribution, you see. It comes, as if under a new banner, heralding the turn of fortune.

Henrik Ibsen wrote *The Master Builder* thirty-five years ago, a good time before the birth of our present younger generation. But, like Wagner and Nietzsche, he saw the premature dawning of a movement which was to spread throughout the whole civilized world, a turning point in our history resulting ultimately in a complete change. Solness' fears have come to be realized. The younger generation has thundered on his door, has broken in upon him, waving its new banner. The revolt of youth is in full swing, and it is all the more baffling because the world has never been forced to cope with it before.

The reader must not misconstrue the above as meaning that the conflict between the older and younger generation is something new and unheard of. As a matter of fact, it is as old as the race. The elders have always feared the young, who they know must some day replace them, shove them into the background. But what is new is the attitude of youth itself. Hitherto youth has been willing to accept the traditions of the

elders, to look upon them with certain respect, and to bide its time. Now the feeling seems to be that these old traditions must be smashed, completely: youth must revolt, must cast discipline and restraint to the winds and go over to the logical extreme of reckless abandon.

For this reason, the theory that the boys and girls of today are fundamentally the same as the old-fashioned boy's and girls, a theory advanced by our sentimentalists, is pretty shabby. Of course it is, true of some of our boys and girls—not all of them have been caught up in this sweeping movement by any means. But can it be applied to the vast majority? Let us try:

We will grant that in the old days the younger generation did many things as relatively shocking as the things they do today. They disobeyed their parents and defied certain rigid conventions. But it must be remembered that they did all this with a feeling of guilt. They were inwardly ashamed of their behavior, for they recognized it as sinful. If a boy went and got drunk—and we mean always the average boy—he did it on the sly, kept it from his parents. If they found out, he would quail before them in thorough disgrace. Their reproaches would burn him because he felt he deserved them.

Is this true of today? The following story, extreme in some ways but nevertheless not uncommon, will doubtless seem incredible to some of my readers, though I will vouch for its veracity.

I happened to be visiting a friend of mine—a boy of nineteen who was looked upon by young and old as “a fine fellow.” On this particular evening he was going to a party. Before leaving, he came into the living-room, where his father sat reading the newspaper.

“Dad,” he began cheerfully, “can you let me have some of your hootch?”

The father looked up in astonished chagrin. He was a tolerant man, and he knew his son, but this was a little too much!

“I should say not!” he exploded. “I’m not giving away any hootch to be swilled by you and your rowdy friends.”

“Aw, I tell you I’m going to a party,” the son argued sullenly. “You’ve got to have something in your flask or they won’t look at you. Gee whiz, I never thought you were so stingy!”

The father waxed indignant.

“See here, son, you have no business to go out and get drunk like this. I’ll be damned if I stand for it any longer!”

“Listen,” the boy’s tone was insolent and challenging, “suppose I am gonna get drunk. Does that hurt you? I’m old enough to take care of myself. Gosh,” he sighed,

“you’re always begrudging me a good time. I can’t work all day like this without letting go once in a while. It never bothered you. I never came home until I was sober.”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Think of your mother!”

“Mother understands it all,” said the son, triumphantly. “She said you should give me the stuff.”

“Well, you’re not getting any hootch from me.”

The son cursed, then snorted. “All right. I’ll get my own bootlegger, since you’re so darned miserly.”

“Go ahead,” said his father, resignedly. Then, summoning all the firmness that was left in him, he added, “But you won’t spend a cent of my money!”

A few days later I was at his house again. We sat at the table with his parents and his sister.

“How’d you make out at the party?” I inquired.

“Oh,” he laughed, “you should have seen me. They said I was drunk as a lord! Had some of that White Mule—”

“White Mule—what’s that?” asked his mother, with mild interest.

“Pure alcohol,” put in the father. “Pure poison, if you ask me. I couldn’t drink the stuff if you paid me for doing it!”

“It sure is hot stuff,” the boy conceded. “Thought it would burn my throat out. Don’t think I ever got so completely soused. They said one minute I was crying and the next laughing. And I went around trying to hug and kiss all the girls, weeping on their shoulders!”

“You ought to be ashamed—” began the father.

“Aw, what’s eating you?” the son burst out. “It didn’t put you to any bother, did it? Ted let me sleep there at his house, didn’t he?” He turned to me. “Didn’t wake up until four p.m. next afternoon. Boy, what a hang-over I had!”

And there you have it in a nutshell. As I said before, the real change has been one of attitude. Most boys and girls of today, far from being ashamed of their conduct, advertise and boast about it in the presence of their own families. And the reason they do not feel guilty about it is that they no longer regard it as sinful. The boy I spoke of thought it perfectly proper to ask his father for some “hootch,” thought it justifiable to go and get drunk.

It is on this change of attitude that the present movement of revolt is based. It explains why boys and girls of the best families are indulging in drinking, smoking, and promiscuous potting. They simply can’t see anything wrong about it. Nor can the older people convince them that it’s evil. I overheard a mother saying

to a friend: “I don’t know what to do about my daughter. She goes out with strange fellows—the worst kind—and lets them kiss and pet her. I’ve tried to show her how sinful it is, but she doesn’t seem to understand.”

I do not want to give the impression, however, that all the young people of today have this attitude. As has been mentioned, not all of them have been caught in the big movement. One can find a vast number of boys and girls who are living quiet, conventional lives, who respect their parents and adhere strongly to the old traditions. Likewise, there is that class of serious-minded youths—the potential artists and thinkers (a surprisingly large number as I will attempt to show later)—who feel that jazz, drink, and sex are superficial pleasures, appealing only to the physical side, and not to the intellectual. These “are not to be confused with the old-fashioned children. The former are “good” because of their morals, because they regard the wild life as evil; the latter, because the life has no attraction for them, because they prefer staying quietly at home to going around with the “gang.”

Of course many boys and girls with the old-fashioned point of view are “having a good time” on the sly, keeping it from their parents because they recognize it as wrong. On the other hand, we find just as many who, though they have the new attitude and believe in absolute freedom, don’t go in for the fast life at all. And those who do go in for it don’t necessarily go to the extreme. Some are moderate in everything, some draw the line on drink, others on sex, and so on.

But, taken by and large, the condition I have described is widespread enough to constitute a movement and it is on the movement itself that we must focus our attention.

“We have seen that the revolt is based on a new attitude of youth. What, then, are the underlying causes of this attitude? Exponents of the younger generation have offered various explanations. One woman writer says the reason for it is that the children have been spoiled. A quarter of a century ago, she explains, a group of educators advanced the theory that rigid discipline handicapped a child’s natural development. This theory was misinterpreted by parents and teachers, who thought it meant that they must do away with discipline entirely. Consequently, we have the first generation brought up under no restraint. They have been given the free rein, and they don’t know how to use it. Besides, they have no sense of true values, for their parents have turned over to them all the soft comforts of the machine age—limousines, electricity, radio, movies, etc.

While this argument sounds plausible enough,

I don't think it would stand up under close scrutiny. First of all, have these children been brought up under no restraint? Such theories about discipline have been advanced all through the ages, and there was always a small percentage of people to take them, seriously. But it seems to me that parents, generally speaking, are pretty much the same as ever: some of them more lax, some of them very rigid in their discipline. For the majority of them to cast aside all correctives, whether mild or severe, would be contrary to the law of nature which makes parents parents. No, the fault hardly lies with them: the revolt of their children came in spite of them, not through them.

As to the second point, it is doubtless true that the machine age has had a great deal to do with the revolt—but not in the superficial way this woman suggests. She seems to forget that very many children were not brought up in such soft surroundings nor given such luxuries. The poor still live in crowded, badly-ventilated tenements, with gas lighting and little heat. They have no limousines, though it must be admitted that most of them manage to afford radio and movies.

Well, there are several other theories. Some writers hold that jazz and the movies have corrupted modern youth—the one by its obvious sensual suggestiveness, the other by the “loose life” it often depicts. The remedy in this case would be to abolish jazz and “purify” the pictures, but are these genuine causes? How did the movies and jazz become what they are? Wouldn't it sound more plausible to call them an outgrowth, rather than a cause of the present movement?

In short, it would seem that the true answer has a deeper and more complicated source: that one can't lay down any particular dogma. Let us go back to the early part of this century, when the younger generation came into the world, and let us trace over the years from that time to the present. Perhaps, then, we shall be able to find some clues.

II. THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

WHEN the present younger generation came into the world some strange changes were taking place, changes so extreme that we have called this epoch “The New Age.”

To begin with, the advanced era of machines was dawning. The automobile, the airplane, the telephone, etc., had just been invented: man was constantly seeking new mechanical devices to perform his labor. Now, as I have mentioned, many children did not share the luxuries and comforts of machinery. But, nevertheless they were all brought up in the spirit of the machine age, the spirit of efficiency and speed—in a word, materialism.

However, to my mind, this was only one big factor in a movement which hinged on something far deeper. And I mean by this the death of Christianity.

Right here is where some of my readers will take violent issue. However, I must ask them, to bear with me, to remember that I am merely a member of the younger generation trying to describe the situation as I see it.

To continue, when we came into the world Christianity was on its last legs. Here was where the materialistic spirit of the machine age played its biggest part. Such inventions as the airplane, the telephone, the huge skyscrapers, certainly disputed the existence of God, and made the miracles described in the Bible seem insignificant. Science and art had dealt the death-blow. The theory of evolution and the new psychology were triumphing. The influence of Nietzsche, who himself was still unrecognized (this being only a few years after his death) was spreading over the whole civilized world. His work proved beyond doubt that man was clinging to a dead thing, decayed and rotted, and that he must seek something new and greater. But was this new thing to be some form of religious worship? No, he was to seek it through himself, through his own development, his own power.

Now, all the old traditions of civilization had been based on Christianity, which laid down a specific set of morals, dictating what was right and what was wrong. Its death meant that these traditions would have to be smashed, and new ones set up. The older generation naturally refused to accept this fact. Planted in puritanism, they had grown up in it. In spite of the new materialistic environment, they still clung frantically to the dead religion. In fact, to save it, they tried to apply it to business, in the form of “service to the people,” muck-raking, etc. Recently they've become even more desperate than this: we find Bruce Barton writing that Jesus was the original Babbitt, a real, red-blooded heman, and a peach of an advertiser. (What is the world coming to?) And on this sad amalgam of Big Business and Christianity such cities as Los Angeles—though not

all of them are so appropriately named—grew up: with Real Estate and Revivalism booming together. What could furnish more conclusive proof that Christianity is dead, that its apparent strength in America (some people have the sad conception that it is more powerful than ever) is nothing but a mirage, or a last frenzied crusade on the part of the “old faithful” adherents?

Of course the impulse behind this new crusade was an unconscious one. Most people did not even realize what was happening. But, belonging to the “old,” they fought instinctively against the “new.” The Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments must be upheld at all costs, must remain the code of the race. Consequently they embraced anything which “ballyhooed” these one-sided, tattered principles, whether it was Fundamentalism, Revivalism, or Christian Science.

However, we must not neglect to mention that brave minority of artists and thinkers among the older generation, the valiant little group who were ahead of the race, who knew that Christianity was dead and sought to stamp it; out entirely, who, in short, raised their voices in revolt even before the younger generation was heard of. Of them it can be said that they “paved the way” for the big movement.

This brings us back to our main thesis once more.

It was shortly after Christianity had breathed its last, faint breath that the new generation came into the world, the first generation to be brought up in an entirely different environment.

And, since new goes to new, from the very start the younger generation associated itself with the new spirit. They could not accept the old traditions because, unlike their parents, they had never known any other environment. In other words, they had no tangible evidence that Christianity was alive, they had never seen the time when it was vital enough to command real belief. Try as they would, the parents could not “enlighten” them. Every argument of the older people was refuted by the materialism they saw around them. And it was this materialism that had led them to demand concrete facts before they could be convinced. Show them an airplane flying in the clouds and they would accept it as true. But tell them that there is a God, who is “everywhere,” punishing evil and rewarding good, and they would doubtless reply, “How could there be such a God? Prove it to me.”

I once heard a minister trying to convince a modern flapper that her rouged lips, bobbed hair, short skirts, etc., were sinful.

“Why are they sinful?” demanded the girl, eagerly.

The younger generation will readily take up any argument.

“Because they are immodest,” said the minister.

“Immodest?” she retorted. “Where do you suppose modesty would get you these days? The boys wouldn’t look at you. You’ve got to be attractive if you want to catch a husband. And what’s the crime? It’s more of a crime to be an old maid, isn’t it?”

“But such petty vanity is evil. It is against the law of God.”

“How do I know that?”

“The Bible tells us so.”

“God didn’t write the Bible,” said the girl, with a sophisticated air. “A bunch of men wrote it. And if there is a God, how do men know what his law is?”

“God revealed himself unto them,” replied the minister, reverently, “and spoke unto them.”

“Well, then, why doesn’t he speak to me if I’m wrong?” A mischievous gleam came into her eyes. “Listen, you say he does not like immodesty, don’t you?”

“Exactly,” said the minister, falling right into her trap.

“Well, listen”—triumphantly—“when he put Adam and Eve on earth did he put any clothes on them? No; all the pictures show them nude. And for all I know,” she added guilelessly, “God himself goes around with nothing on.”

The minister could not answer this. Speech had deserted him.

The attitude of this girl is typical of the younger generation—and once more I must add that I mean only the majority of boys and girls. Some, of course, do not see the thing so clearly, do not quite understand what is driving them against the laws of Christianity, but many of them do. Hence, they hate anything “Christly.”

How, then, could they be taught to live according to the Christian formula of morality? The old ideas of right and wrong don’t influence them because they no longer believe in them. And this explains their attitude, the attitude that what they are doing is perfectly right. They are not moral but, in the Christian sense, unmoral.

Under such conditions, what can discipline do? You can’t discipline a person’s deeper nature, force him to accept something he cannot see. I am going to cite another case to illustrate this point.

A minister, whose code was strictly puritanic, brought up his son under the most rigid discipline imaginable. The boy was forced not only to attend church regularly, but also to listen to his father’s sermons at home. It was drilled into him day after day that smoking, drinking, and sex were evil, and that he

would he punished by God if he succumbed to sinful temptation. At the age of eighteen the boy came home drunk. The father almost murdered him: then gave him another one of his sermons and locked him in his room to meditate on it. For awhile it seemed that the son had learned his lesson. But, in a year's time, he broke loose altogether, and he is still leading a licentious life. Of course his father threw him out, but he has earned his way and is quite independent. Recently his mother tried to effect a reconciliation. The father said his son could return home if he promised to be "good." The boy refused, saying that he was "good enough," and sick of all these "Christly notions."

But I have got somewhat ahead of myself. To look back over several years again, we see how the first seeds of revolt were planted, and extensively, defying the law. Night life blossomed out, with all its frenzy of jazz and sex. And the movement spread.

What of the older people? Strangely enough, Prohibition proved too much for the majority of them. Thus, for the first time, some of them began to break the old traditions, too.

As soon as they went this far, a more complete surrender was inevitable. By breaking their own traditions they had practically acknowledged that the new spirit was the stronger. Many of them followed the very path which youth had chosen. If they succumbed to age they would have to remain in the background. So they literally tried to become young again. Women bobbed their hair, powdered and rouged their faces, shortened their skirts. Men dressed in "loud" clothes, took up with young flappers, and learned the latest dances.

Sometimes, of course, this change on the part of the older folks took a higher form. That is to say, it could be a mental rather than a physical change: they reversed their opinions, discarded their old pet dogmas, and opened their minds to the modern trend of thought and culture.

As for the rest of the older generation, the "back-numbers," they are still clinging to the corpse of Christianity, busily applying the pul-motor to it in a vain effort to keep alive the old doctrines of puritanic belief. They can't understand how America has become so "corrupt," how such widespread "immorality" can be prevalent.

And so we find ourselves in the present age. I have tried to show, as completely as my limited space permits, the reasons for the new attitude of the younger generation, and will now take up the conditions to which this attitude has given rise.

III. CRIME

EVERY movement has what Roosevelt called "its lunatic fringe." There is always a bad extreme, a touch of violence and lawlessness. Thus the contention that the whole younger generation is a bunch of criminals, because certain boys and girls have committed some shocking crimes, is hardly fair. Such crimes are not typical of our youth today, but represent only a small percentage who have been completely unbalanced by the movement, have become fanatics, as it were. The same thing happened when Christianity first swept the world.

These extremists merely "overdid" the thing, carried the revolt to the very limit. For them it was not enough to defy certain conventions, to flout their parents, to go in for jazz, drinking, and sex: they had to throw off all restraint, break up all prevailing law and order. Consequently they turned to crime.

Thus we find some boys and girls, even from the most respectable families and with the best upbringing parents could give, committing brutal, degenerate murders. We find gangs of youthful bandits, dope-crazed youngsters who do not realize what it means to take a human life.

But I don't think the present crime wave (possibly the worst America has ever confronted) is to be blamed altogether on the younger generation, though it is doubtless a part of the big movement. There are plenty of older criminals who have always been "enemies of society," and to whom the breaking of old traditions meant a new opportunity for "cutting loose." The War, with its wholesale slaughter, had the effect of lowering the value on human life, of making individual murders seem almost insignificant. It taught these men, directly or indirectly, to shoot down in cold blood, to use their deadly weapons (and such weapons as the machine gun came right out of the War) without the slightest hesitation.

Prohibition also did its share. It gave rise to an entirely new type of criminal, the bootlegger. This led to the terrific gang warfare, the practice of "hi-jacking," which is being waged so openly at the present time. And here the government finds itself practically powerless, because, for the first time, the people are half on the side of the

criminals—they want their liquor, and these men are the only mediums through which they can get it.

I have dealt with this situation somewhat briefly because, while it is undoubtedly one of the vital problems of the day, it plays only a small part in the revolt of the younger generation. It is the left fringe of the left wing, the worst extreme, and therefore not to be thought characteristic of our boys and girls.

IV. PARENTS AND CHILDREN

WHILE, as I have said, the clash between the older and younger generations is as old as the race, the present attitude of the children toward their parents makes it one of the most unique and vital problems the world has ever confronted.

In the "old days" the parents had a specific set of rules under which to bring up their children. Christianity, all the traditions of puritanism, supplied these rules, and the word of God, added to discipline, was sufficient to drill them into the boys and girls. In other words, if the children broke any of the rules, they were aware of the fact that they had sinned, and consequently they took their punishment with the knowledge that they deserved it.

Aside from certain moral conventions about right and wrong, some of the chief rules were as follows:

General Rules

1. *The father was the head of the household.*—A law handed down from the very beginnings of civilization. The father was the undisputed ruler of the average family, His wife and children must regard his word as law, and obey him. For his part, he must set a good example to them, lest "the sins of the father be visited upon the children," and must strive to lead a moral, upright life. Now, of course, not all fathers did this—but if they had shortcomings they were not to show them to their children. By their conduct at home, they must make good models.

2. *Children must honor their parents.*—This, right out of the Ten Commandments, was a most rigid convention. The child must constantly recognize the fact that his parents were older than he was, and consequently he must respect them, look up to them. Whatever his parents did or said was correct, and their wishes must be obeyed.

3. *Certain subjects must not be discussed by parents and children.*—We of today can scarcely imagine the stress

that was laid on this rule. For example, it was a heinous sin for parents and children to discuss sex. Such problems were not even to be thought of—the word must never be mentioned in the home.

Rules for Boys

1. *Boys should pattern themselves after their father.*—The prime ambition of a boy should be to follow his father's footsteps, to preserve the honor of his father's name. Consequently he must look upon his father as his chief advisor and mentor.

2. *Boys must either learn a trade or go into a profession, i. e., through college.*—The choice, as a rule, was left to the parents, and was often based on an old family custom. For instance, one family might have a tradition that the eldest son of each generation must be a doctor. The son would accept this—unless he had an exceptional nature—and strive for the goal that was already set for him. On the other hand, if the family was in bad straits, it was up to the boy to go to work and support them. The father would usually choose his trade, and get him his first, position.

3. *If boys "break loose" they must do so in secret.*—This may seem a rather strange rule, but it was a tacit agreement between parents and children. Nature made people accept the fact that when the average boy reaches adolescence he is inclined to have a brief "fling," a period when he sows his wild oats. But such a thing was morally sinful. Therefore, the boy must do it on the sly, must not let his parents find out about it. If they did find out, he was disgraced.

Rules for Girls

1. *A girl should pattern herself after her mother.*—This the same as the boy following his father. She must go to her mother for advice—though never advice on the forbidden subjects—and learn how a woman should conduct herself in social life.

2. *Virginity was a girl's most important asset.*—A girl who lost her virginity was unworthy of a husband. She must cherish it, must remain "pure" until her marriage. And this was perhaps the most Important rule concerning girls.

3. *Girls must be modest and reserved.*—Man was the fighter, the aggressor; but in woman modesty and reserve was the ideal. She must dress simply, concealing her body, and she must never "make advances" to the men. They must seek her out and become her suitors.

4. *Girls must learn to be good housekeepers.*—It was the wife's duty to look after her husband, to see that he lived in comfort. Therefore she must know how to cook, clean, sew, etc.

5. *Girls must be refined.*—It was understood that men, on the average, were somewhat rough and untutored,

because their chief duties were purely practical—they must go out and earn a living. But in their wives they looked for culture and refinement. Consequently a girl should take up some higher pursuit, like music, painting, etc.

While these rules, which I obtained from a member of the older generation, may not cover the ground completely, I think they will suffice to show the general code of life and conduct under which parents used to bring up their children. Of course some families did not adhere to them as strictly as others, some rejected one or two, made certain concessions here and there, but, taken by and large, all were steeped in the tradition whence these rules emanated, and that tradition made the problem of handling children a far more simple one than it is today.

To begin with, under such rules parents could more or less ignore the deeper problems of their children—the problems of sex, etc. They never had to contend with such problems because they were never brought into their homes.

But today they can no longer ignore them. The children come into the house and openly flaunt the subjects before their parents. They may come, home drunk, or perhaps they invite a crowd in for a “wild party,” with drinking and promiscuous petting. And the problems are brought directly into the home through many other channels. They are discussed with candor by our books, our newspapers, our magazines, the radio, and so on.

Thus, for the first time, the parents are brought face to face with brutal, undeniable facts; and, unfortunately, they have found themselves surprisingly inadequate in the crisis.

The old rules hold no longer: they are as dead as the traditions which gave birth to them. The children flout every one of them, scoff at the old puritanic ideas of virtue, and often look down upon their parents.

Show the set of rules to a boy and girl with the modern viewpoint, and their reactions will doubtless run something like this:

The boy will say: “All of that is pure bunk. What dumb-bells they used to be! Now look, I’ll take the three rules about the boys. I should pattern myself after my father? A heck of a lot I’d amount to then—working in a stuffy old office [or, perhaps, some other criticism of his father]. And, as for the second rule, nobody’s going to tell me what to do or where to work. If I want to go to college I go. If they say ‘no’ I’ll get out and shift for

myself. What do I owe them? Then, the third rule: boys should break loose in secret. That’s a lot of applesauce! Why should I do it in secret? I’m not ashamed of it, and I couldn’t have a good time if I did it on the sly.” And so on.

And the modern flapper: “Don’t tell me to pattern myself after mother. She’s too mid-victorian, and when I see how she slaves for dad it gives me a pain. No man’ll get me to slave for him like that. Cooking and drudging isn’t my line; my husband will either have to get me a maid, or he eats out! And gosh! they certainly used to keep the girls in glass cases, didn’t they? The poor, frail creatures! I’m glad times have changed: now at least a girl can get some enjoyment out of life. Why shouldn’t we have the same privileges as the boys? We’re just as good as they are. And as for catching a husband, you can’t get him with modesty these days. You’ve got to chase after him, grab him by the neck, and make him say ‘I do.’ That stuff about refinement and culture is a lot of hokum. No one will look at these highbrow, wishy-washy girls who sit in the corner and play Chopin on the piano. No, you’ve got to join the gang, show them you’re a good sport. You’ve got to know all the latest songs and dance steps, how to wear your clothes and bring out your best attractions.” And so on.

Of course if their parents were of another type the criticism would run a little different. But I think this will illustrate the change that the new attitude of youth has brought about.

What has caused this apparent inadequacy of parents? Why can they no longer command their children’s respect and obedience?

It seems to me that there are two aspects to the case: First, the parents who are trying to be young themselves; second, the old-fashioned parents who still try to uphold the old code.

On first thought it would appear that there should be no struggle between the parents who have come over, as it were, to youth’s side of the fence, and their children. But, as a matter of fact, the situation here is in some ways even worse than in the other case. Briefly, though the older people are going the fast pace themselves, they don’t want to see their sons and daughters doing likewise. In other words, they still have the attitude that it is morally wrong, that they must keep their children away from it. In addition to this, they demand the traditional respect and obedience that parents have always received.

But, to put a brutal question, how can children look up to parents who are obviously no different from

themselves, who are doing all the things they do and yet telling them it is “bad”?

Take the following example. A very modern mother was lecturing her flapper daughter on drinking:

“But,” argued the daughter, “you do it yourself.”

“Yes, but I am older than you, child,” the mother explained.

“What of it?” the daughter retorted. “You can’t carry your liquor at all. I saw you get pretty drunk on two cocktails the other night. Gosh, I could drink ten of them without losing my poise. Don’t you see, I’ve really more right to drink than you have.”

Now, isn’t this a perfectly logical argument? How are you going to refute it?

In short, it’s the old story about “practicing what you preach.” Though, unfortunately, even parents who do this find themselves unable to cope with the situation. Which brings us to the other aspect of the case.

The conflict between the old-fashioned parents and their children is a far less complicated matter. The children (and, I must repeat, I refer only to those children who have the new attitude) look upon their parents as open foes, barriers which must be overcome. The older folks are “hack-numbers,” “mid-victorians,” and “Christly.” Therefore they are to be “put in their places,” and their wishes ignored.

How, then, can parents command the respect of their children? There is, of course, the theory of rigid discipline. But, as I think my little story about the minister’s son proves, it is hardly applicable to the majority of cases. The spirit which prevails among the younger generation is too strong to be subdued by mere discipline. The children must associate with other children, whose views they will presently absorb. When the parents forbid them to do certain things, they will ultimately revolt, assert themselves. What will discipline do then? If you punish them, they will think you most unjust—for in their mind they have done no wrong. The results may be disastrous. The boy or girl may pack up and leave. “All right, let him starve!” some parents will say. But they do not starve; they find jobs and independence. And their disrespect has increased rather than diminished.

An excellent illustration of this point is found in J.P. McEvoy’s play, *The Go-Getters*, which ran here some months ago. In this play a modern son infuriates his father by coming home drunk, after having wrecked the family car—which he took without permission. It was too much. The father tells him to get out. But his mother intervenes, and makes the father back down. So

the son is told to go to bed and it’ll all be forgotten. The boy, however, feeling that he has been unjustly offended, packs up and leaves—explaining in a note that he’s sick of “eating the bread which is begrudged me.” As for the car, “it was no good anyway, and it would have fallen apart by itself in a few days.”

A few months later the son breezes in cheerily, his dress clearly indicative of opulence and well-being. The astounded father, an office drudge all his life, learns that his son has built up a tremendous and immediate success as a salesman: not only is the boy his own boss (an ambition which the father has secretly cherished all his life) but he is pulling in a better salary than the old man ever dreamed of. The play—that is, the revised version—ends with the father giving up his old job and humbly joining his son as a partner.

And this story is repeated over and over again. What, then, is the answer? Some writers urge that the parents become comrades of their children, get in with them, and through “man-to-man” talks, try to give them a more healthy point of view. Part of this is excellent. In many cases, we find harmony between parents and children who treat each other on an equal basis. But the moment the “man-to-man” talks begin, the friendship is in danger. For the children simply can’t see the elders’ viewpoint, any more than, the elders can see theirs.

No, you can’t appeal to them through their emotions any more than through brute force. Not that they are unsympathetic, but they consider your arguments false, and their absolute belief in their own convictions gives them a hardness which it is impossible to break through. The result of a “man-to-man” talk is usually: “Aw, dad, can the hokum. Be yourself!” Or “mother, don’t be so childish. I know what I’m doing.”

When it comes right down to it, how can one really advise the parents what to do? Even if we look at some of the instances where mothers and fathers are getting along with their children—and it must be admitted, there are several such instances—will we be able to pull any formula which could be applied by the vast majority, the mass? Let us see.

People marveled at the close companionship between a widow and her rather wild son. She explained the situation as follows:

“It is true I don’t approve of the life my son is leading, but, on the other hand, I realize it would be useless for me to interfere. As long as he insists on doing so, I won’t stand in his way. He appreciates my attitude and takes me into his confidence. All I’ve demanded is a little love, a little attention. He gives that to me in return for my

tolerance, my not preaching morals to him.”

Now many people will condemn the viewpoint of this widow: after all, they could argue, she has not solved the problem, but merely avoided it. And for the majority of parents, old-fashioned or modern, to avoid it, would be physically impossible. They can't see their children carrying on without trying to put a stop to it. That would defy the law of nature, the law which has always made parents fight instinctively to protect and guide their young.

Well, as a matter of fact, there are some parents who have really solved the problem: *i. e.*, they have not only won their children's respect, but have actually succeeded in slowing down their pace. Here is one case:

A father, a highly-cultured professor in one of our universities, saw his son starting to go in for the wild life—drinking and promiscuity. He felt that such a life was physically and mentally unhealthy for the boy, and that it was incumbent upon him to correct the young man's ways. But did he try to do this through rigid discipline or “preaching”? No, his was a far more subtle method, though it was nothing new. Bit by bit, he sought to get his son interested in something other than jazz and sex, something into which he could throw the same exuberant energy and expression. In this particular case it was mechanics, toward which the son (who studied law) had always shown a mild inclination. The father set aside one of the rooms in the house as a shop, brought in a supply of tools and materials, and, when the boy returned from school each day, went in there and worked beside him. The son soon became so intensely absorbed in his work, threw in so much energy, that his hunger for night life and wild parties began to leave him. He did not give them up entirely, but he indulged so moderately that he was really beyond criticism. Recently this boy took out a patent on an ingenious device, and is as proud as a peacock of his accomplishment.

Needless to say, mechanics is not the only means by which one can “channel off” a youth's vigorous energy. Indeed, it might be almost any form of expression. For certain children, something more creative—writing, painting, or music—is best suited. And then an outlet to which almost every boy and girl has access is sports, which I will take up next.

But how many parent could work this trick? How many are deep enough themselves? And, above all, how many have the personality? When it comes right down to it, the latter quality is the only one which can really win over the children. If a boy sees in his father a vital

and compelling personality, he cannot help respecting and admiring him. But, unfortunately, personality is not something that one can simply go out and acquire: it is an intangible quality, inherent in one's character.

Thus, as I said, one can't lay down any advice which would suit the majority of parents. My conclusion—though I may be accused of pessimism—is that the problem, considered as a whole, can be solved by time alone. True, the parents have the utmost cooperation of our foremost educators and thinkers, who are advancing new theories about the handling of children day after day. True, our schools are experimenting constantly, seeking healthier forms of self-expression for the boys and girls—such as self-government, more stress on extracurricular activities, etc. But, in the light of cold reason, all this is like putting toothache drops in a bad cavity: while they may afford temporary relief, the cavity remains unchanged. In other words, no “theories,” regardless of how high-sounding they may be, can reach the real core of the matter. History has proved that whenever anything “new” comes along, the “old,” with the logical instinct of self-preservation, strives to repress it, fights it with stubborn and relentless fury until, paradoxically enough, it is no longer “new,” but an established convention. Then, and only then, can there be any full reconciliation.

V. PHYSICAL ASPECTS

IF THE boys and girls of today are corrupt and dissipated, they certainly don't look it. Medical authorities have told us that there has never been a healthier crop of youngsters. The boys, on the average, are tall, rugged, and strongly built. The girls are beautiful—in fact the number of beautiful girls is amazing—well-formed, powerful, and, all in all, pretty perfect specimens.

So we see that every movement has its healthy paradox, its good extreme as well as its bad. Life has always furnished a balance for everything: the present age of intemperance is balanced by the age of physical well-being. The spirit of youth is more than a spirit of “loose living”: it is also a spirit of strength and vigor, of the young hero glorying in his muscles, putting them to use. And so, at the same time that youth broke down the barriers of tradition, flouted parents and indulged in so-

called immorality, the Open Air movement blossomed out. Can one call this a coincidence?

There are several reasons for the abundance of health we see among our boys and girls. To begin with, marvelous progress has been made in the realm of hygiene. We have been taught to take better care of ourselves than our predecessors. Otherwise, it is evident that the life some of the youngsters are leading would undermine their constitutions.

New remedies and preventives for diseases have been discovered and put into use, so that life is lengthened and sickness cut down.

The war also played its part in the development of health. With the demand for good physical specimens, strong men, physical training was instituted in all our important schools and colleges; gymnasium exercise was made compulsory. The Boy and Girl Scout movements suddenly loomed big and important; plenty of members were found and trained.

And out of all this came a movement which has played the biggest part of all—the rise of modern sports. Absorbed in the youthful spirit of speed and vigor, America turned its attention to athletics, calling upon its young to supply them. In our schools sports became the chief extra-curricular activity; there were so many different teams—varsity, junior, inter-class, etc.—that every student could “get in the game.” Even business firms instituted teams to play against one another, so that the young people who worked would have a chance too.

Nor was this confined to boys alone by any means. The modern girl has also turned herself to sports and physical culture. Which brings us to another phase of the great movement.

There has been a complete change in the attitude of woman. With the breaking of the old traditions, including the puritanic code of feminine modesty and reserve, woman decided to place herself on an equal plane with man, both mentally and physically. She no longer considers it virtuous to be frail or weak—“wishy-washy,” to use the popular expression.

Though this refers chiefly to the girls of the younger generation, it is also true of many of the older folks who have come to identify themselves with youth and its attitude. On the other hand, many girls of the present generation still have the old feeling that man is their superior, that woman’s place is in the home, and that she must always be “the weaker sex.”

As a result of the new attitude, however, we find women doing all the things men do—going into

business, politics, sports, etc.—and, in fact, doing them in many cases as well as the men themselves. Today the term “weaker sex” is used as a bit of irony: or else it is applied to the males!

Look at the majority of girls today and, while many of them are rather “wild,” they will be found physically better than their predecessors.

However, it must not be assumed that sports are “reforming” the younger generation—that is, in the Christian sense of the word. Only in extreme cases do we find a boy or girl giving up the fast pace completely and equipping himself through “clean-living” and temperance. Men like Red Grange are not typical of the youths of today: Gertrude Ederle and Helen Wills are not really examples of the “American Girl.” The majority, it will be found, do give serious attention to physical development, to strive to build up a “sound body,” but they will not surrender the freedom they have fought for so strenuously. Often this freedom—whether it be drinking, smoking, or promiscuity—is taken as a matter of principle, without consideration of its physical effects.

This is manifest in certain of our younger movie and stage stars. They are living a fast life (we read of one scandal after another) and yet they are perfect physical specimens, who keep in good training.

I have mentioned the fact that the number of beautiful girls, even in the old sense of the word, has increased enormously. Recently I got hold of an old “Annual” of one of our women’s colleges. Looking at the various photographs, I was amazed at the plainness and even homeliness which seemed to characterize the girls of that time. The number of “good-lookers” was so negligible that I could count them on my fingers. And, I must add, I was judging them by the old standard of beauty. A member of that generation (a man, of course!) agreed with me wholeheartedly.

The latest issue of the same “Annual” makes a strange contrast. In this case, the number of plain girls is negligible.

What has brought about the change? I hold that it too hinges on the new attitude.

It will be remembered that puritanism was strictly against the sensuous, if a girl had beauty she must hide it, dress down to her shoes and up to her neck, and so forth. But, with the revolt against puritanism, the sensuous side has come into freedom.

Today a girl strives to be as beautiful as she can. If she has a nice pair of legs, she’ll show them, and she won’t hide her figure with an uncomfortable corset. In

short, she has popularized what used to be the practice only of courtesans and actresses—the wearing of bright, flimsy and scant dresses, the use of rouge and lipstick. The result has been partly to simplify the clothes of women. Now girls of every class are “well-dressed,” whereas in former times a poor girl could scarcely afford the elaborate wardrobe, all the heavy finery and arrangements—the severe pompadour, etc.—which were required to make “beautiful clothes.”

Doesn't this to some extent explain the existence of so many beautiful women? The girls of today are enabled to bring out their chief attractions, and have every scientific aid to beauty at their disposal.

To conclude, our younger generation is in such perfect physical shape that it would seem needless to worry about the future health of civilization. After all, when it comes right down to it, was the mid-victorian “lady,” who had a wasp-waist and fainted at every breach of convention, was she any better equipped to propagate the race than the modern girl, with her strong physique, her undeniable beauty, her hardness to the knocks of life—all summed up in the simple creed of “Be yourself: look and act natural”?

VI. INTELLIGENCE OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

RECENT nationwide surveys have proved beyond doubt that the younger generation of today, taken by and large, is more brilliant and sophisticated than any previous generation: that the boys and girls mature far more quickly, and their minds are so naturally flexible that they can absorb the most difficult and modern subjects. And this brings us to another positive phase of the situation.

In former times education and business were two diverse things, college clashed with trade, and so on. A boy, as a rule, chose one or the other (or rather his parents usually did the choosing). If he went to college it was to take up a profession—medicine, law, teaching, etc. Here a brief digression is necessary. It may be argued that a great many non-professional men and women of the older generation are college graduates. This is true, if we are to accept the old meaning of the term “college.” In those days “college” was really little more than what high school is today—in fact, the two were rolled into one course, of seven years, I believe. To have a schooling

similar to that afforded by our modern colleges, one had to take post-graduate courses in a university, and it is to these I refer.

Thus, to get back to my original subject, only those who intended to go into a profession took these courses. If, on the other hand, a boy went to work early—which very often happened—the chances were that his education would be dropped altogether. He would have to pick up what culture he could as he went through life.

But, as they say, “times have changed.” Today education and business, far from conflicting, are linked hand in hand. Our modern universities have courses in trade as thorough and complete as in the professions. A boy goes to college to become a bond-salesman just as he would to become a doctor.

As to the other aspect of the case, we now have a law for compulsory education. If a boy goes to work early today, he can't drop his education by any means: he must remain in some school until he is seventeen or a high school graduate. The law goes even further: if, at seventeen, he has not yet gone through grammar school, he must continue until he has done so. Thus, where in former times it was hard even for the most naturally brilliant boy who went to work to acquire advanced knowledge, today it is accessible to every child.

With girls the change is even more radical. In the past, their chief purpose was to prepare themselves for marriage. This did not mean that they were to be enlightened on those subjects which every wife and future mother should know, but merely that, in a superficial way, they must make themselves “marriageable.” For this purpose there were finishing schools, through which they could be “polished” and refined, and taught the rudiments of household duties, such as cooking and sewing.

Today there are very few of these “finishing schools”—those that still bear the name now teach a great deal more—and their pupils are recruited from the old-fashioned girls or the daughters of high society, who must keep the old order “refined.” Since women have placed themselves on the same sphere as man, they follow the same route in education, and the compulsory law applies to them also. Marriage does not necessarily conflict with a career. A girl may go into business or into a profession, for which she trains in a regular university.

And so, where in the past many children remained quite ignorant, today they must have at least an elementary education, and most of them are further advanced than that.

A more recent and sudden development, however, is this early maturity of the boys and girls.

When I first entered high school in New York, all the “freshies” were over fourteen years of age—except for a few precocious children. But, term by term the freshman class kept getting younger, until, at the time of my graduation, the halls were swarming with little wide-eyed kiddies. And I am not exaggerating at that. One of the boys was so young that his father brought him to school each morning.

I think this startling maturity is due mainly to the remarkable access to culture which is offered the children of today—and the doors are constantly opening wider. No longer are they forbidden to learn the problems of life, to express their own views and formulate their own ideas. They were given the free rein in our libraries, our schools, our theaters, and all kinds of illuminating literature is directly at their disposal—so close at hand, in fact, that they cannot ignore it. They come upon it in books, newspapers, magazines, and it is even brought to them over the radio.

Besides, one must not overlook the wonderful strides that have been made in education. The old idea of teaching one set of things to the whole mass has been discarded. Now, more and more, we find educators striving to bring out the individual proclivities of each child, trying to make him develop them. And while this is not true of all our schools, it is rapidly becoming widespread.

The result, it is true, leads to specialization. Each child concentrates on his own particular gift, and his schooling is economized so as to include only those things which will be of direct benefit to him.

But, the very fact that the children are more specialized helps them toward earlier maturity. In rapid time they can go out into the world thoroughly equipped for their chosen tasks. And they make good. It is no novelty now to find young men under twenty-one holding responsible positions in big corporations; in fact the modern cry in business is always for “young blood.” And the same is true of the girls.

To find out why the children of today have such flexible and sophisticated minds, we must delve into a deeper source. Again, I hold, this hinges on the death of Christianity, the breaking of old traditions. Hitherto children were content to swallow all the ideas of fundamentalism, the Christian formulas relating to life and death, etc. They were literally forbidden to think or probe on their own hook: everything was explained for them. But now, with these formulas visibly dead, the younger generation falls in line for

the deeper and more intelligent subjects; a movement of free-thought has blossomed out among them. Our schools, recognizing this, have been forced to change their policies completely. Even in our high schools we find instructors dealing with such subjects as the theory of evolution. (Ah yes, we remember the Dayton trial, the so-called triumph of fundamentalism. It served to show, through a most entertaining bit of vaudeville, how dead the old traditions really are. And practically the whole younger generation scoffed at Byran and rooted for Darrow.)

Then, too, the old taboo on art has been lifted. America is just awakening to the fact that art is one of the most essential things in life, and the younger generation is surprisingly well informed about it. And I do not mean by this the old “schoolish” classics—Longfellow, Milton, Dickens, etc.—but the greatest and most revolutionary art, the modern work of such men as Nietzsche, or our own native Walt Whitman. In the past, to have brought work like Whitman’s before our children would have been scandalous: it broke the rigid puritanic law which banned the sensuous. And even now, though Whitman is given his place as one of the “American Poets” (a high school course), some teachers are very reluctant to deal seriously with him. I had such an instructor.

“We will not devote much of our precious time to Whitman,” he explained. “His stuff, as you know, is formless and crude. It is not poetry like that of Longfellow, for instance.”

Whereupon one of the boys took violent issue—discussion is now allowed in the class room: another advance!

“Longfellow,” he argued, “is doggerel, schoolboy stuff. If it’s great so is Edgar Guest. Where’s the flame or inspiration in it? It’s just a lot of hokum, Christian morals. Besides, how can you call it native American? He simply imitates the English poets, and poorly at that!”

The teacher was aghast. “And do you mean to say that Whitman is greater than Longfellow?”

“Exactly, sir. Whitman was the first truly American poet. His work is an expression of America. And though his stuff may be crude, it’s original, which is certainly more than you can say for the stereotyped stuff of Longfellow.”

This boy, it is to be understood, was not by any means exceptional. At present he is taking a business course in New York University,

The younger generation knows what to reject and what to accept. Most of them are agnostics, and most of them will scoff at “hokum.” They welcome anything that is new and original, especially if it is American. I once heard two flappers holding a most earnest conversation:

"I read everything he writes," said one. "He's got such a refreshing style, hasn't he?"

"Yes, but best of all is his gift of epithet. He has this country diagnosed, and he's telling them something."

And were they talking about some old classic pedant, like Samuel Johnson or Burke? No, they referred to H. L. Mencken.

Now, I will admit that not all our boys and girls are as advanced as this. Some of them, it is true, are "dumb-bells"; some of them do not know that art exists. But if you compare the amount of really sophisticated youngsters to the number that used to exist, the results will be surprising. Take, for example, our modern chorus girls. The popular conception is that they are "beautiful but dumb." Recently some stern professors, deciding to investigate this fact, put a group of them through the well-known intelligence tests. The girls not only scored as high as university graduates but, in more than one case, excelled them!

In short, the younger generation is much keener than most people believe. They may be "insolent" and "fresh," but they have the courage of their convictions, which is more than a great many older folks can say.

VII. THE DEEPER MINDS

HOW many artists will the present generation produce? Will there be enough to make the American "renaissance" that so many Europeans, among them Romain Rolland, have predicted? I think the answer is unquestionably in the affirmative.

From the foregoing remarks, it will be seen that the potential artist of today has every sort of encouragement. In former times, art was held in contempt, and the average family felt disgraced if one of its children showed any inclination toward becoming an artist. But now this has all changed. Art is coming into its own: it is looked up to, rather than scorned. Real talent is given an opportunity for expression, and there is no longer any excuse for an artist to be "stifled."

Take this typical case:

A well-known artist, a writer, grew up with the last generation. At an early age he had to go to work, and was caught in the relentless machine of industrialism and Christianity. It took him years to extricate himself; it meant a painful struggle to find his true path.

Everything worked against him. No one came and opened the door to art for him: he did not discover the great modern artists until he had grown up. Nor was there anyone to teach him how to reject the bad and accept the good—the Christianity about him was so powerful that he identified himself with it, and it almost, ruined him. He was well over twenty-seven before he really began to mature as an artist.

Now, it so happened that this man's son was also a born artist. But, it was his good fortune to be born in an age when everything relating to art was at his disposal. The doors to great and new literature were open—he could find great art with ease because everyone recognized what was great. He could reject Christianity at once, because it was visibly dead. In short, all the things which his father had to struggle for, through years and years, were handed to him on a silver platter. As a result he matured with amazing rapidity, and began to express himself at an age when his father had just been groping, wondering "what it was all about."

Under such conditions, isn't it obvious that the present generation will produce an unusual number of artists, both minor and major?

However, the artist born in this age doesn't have everything his own way. As always in the history of art, he must put up a big fight to earn the very privilege of being an artist. While he welcomes the freedom which has been won for him, he must reject the materialistic spirit that goes with it. This is not always an easy task. It means, first and foremost, that he must dissociate himself from "the mob," and must seek his art through his own individual development.

Therefore, as a rule, we find these young artists fleeing from jazz, sex, and the other wild pursuits of their generation. They are looked upon as old-fashioned, "back numbers," because they will not join the crowd. But they are groping, seeking to discover what lies beneath all these superficialities, to find an expression for America, not of the moment, but of the future.

Another thing which often makes it difficult for them is the emphasis on physical development which we have spoken of. To a certain type of sensitive child physical training and sports are revolting: he cannot stand them.

In short, the thing that causes the young artists the most suffering is the fact that they are not "regular fellows" (or "regular girls"). They feel this strongly—sometimes it gives them a painful inferiority which makes it hard for them to adapt themselves to the world.

But when we realize how much worse it was for the artists of the older generation, that, despite this

fact, very many of them attained great power in their expression, we can see that an artist born in America today is lucky.

I have met with several. Some of them have already turned out amazing work, some of them are still groping. But it is my opinion that we shall be hearing from them all very soon, and that they will have most important things to say.

VIII. SEX

WE NOW return to the majority of the boys and girls and take up a situation that is shocking the world, a situation that is causing perhaps most of the worry and anxiety about the younger generation.

If there was anything that the old puritanism was strickly against it was sex—in fact, the sensuous in all its forms. Sex, except in marriage, was vile and sinful: it must never be discussed in the home, and it must be suppressed as far as possible. But with the death of Christianity the repression has been lifted. And since the taboo on sex can be defended mainly on the grounds of puritanism, we find our boys and girls believing in absolute freedom—and taking it.

With the boys it is not much worse, though far more open, than in the old days. As I said before, the average boy always sowed his wild oats, only he did so on the sly.

But in the old days a decent girl wouldn't think of such things, unless it was a case of such extreme infatuation that she could not help surrendering herself. The boys then had to resort to "bad girls"—the rougher class, and prostitutes.

Nowadays, with the change in the attitude of women, we find many "good girls" believing in sexual freedom. As I said, women have placed themselves on an equal plane with men, and consequently demand the same rights. If a man can sow his wild oats, why can't a girl? They ask—and answer the question themselves.

And while it must be admitted that a host of modern girls draw a sharp line on sex, even though they go to the other extremes, the number of girls who do not draw this line is so large that the fact deserves discussion.

Has the old idea about virginity disappeared? These girls will tell you that it is silly. "Why," asked one flapper—for such things are discussed openly these

days, "why should we come into marriage 'pure' any more than the boys? We want to live a little bit too before we settle down."

Most boys, I have found, feel different about the matter. I know a young man who has had affair after affair, and yet he has said: "The girl I marry must be a virgin. I'm not against girls having freedom in sex, but I don't like the idea of taking that kind for my wife."

Why? Because men still look upon women in the old light; they are the pure vessels, in some ways sacred, and only to be surrendered to the man they marry—a symbol of their servitude.

But in the past there were other things besides this idea of virginity, besides the law of God, that kept girls from sexuality. Above all was the fear, the terrific fear of motherhood—the punishment that Nature would inflict upon them. Even today an unmarried girl who bears a child is broken and disgraced. A doctor told me that when these poor girls—some of them pitifully young—come into the hospital, they keep imploring: "Don't let my parents know."

But the fear, generally speaking, has been removed. The progress of birth control is enough to reassure any girl. They know how to take precautions. Of course this often means unscrupulous practices, but I doubt that they will remain unscrupulous. Recently I read in the newspapers that the Women's League of New York has passed a resolution urging that birth control be legalized. In this they were backed by a number of prominent physicians and nurses who studied the situation thoroughly. We are beginning to realize that it is morally much more of a crime for a young unmarried girl to be forced to bear her child (and this also applies to parents who cannot afford to clothe and feed another child) than to be offered a means of escape.

And so we see that there is neither moral scruple nor fear to keep the girls of today from sex.

Now, is this new freedom in sexuality on the part of the boys and girls good or bad? A thousand arguments have been advanced against it: it is said to corrupt the mind, undermine the constitution, etc. Besides, constant sexuality soon sickens one, so that sex loses its glamor altogether. How then can the race be honorably propagated?

To take up the first argument, *i.e.*, that sex corrupts and undermines our children, doesn't the abundant health of the present generation dispute this? Certainly, since boys have always indulged in sexuality, the situation is better for them. It is far healthier to have fewer sex relations with prostitutes. There is less chance of disease, which used to be so prevalent among

the boys (a doctor told me that in the old days every boy was expected to contract a sexual disease during some period). As for the girls, it seems to be perfectly healthy for them, too. Again I must say: look at their physique, look at their health and strength compared with the girls of the past generation. Authorities who have really given serious thought to the problem have agreed that complete repression is unhealthy. It leads to nervousness, to perversions, to sickness and weakness. But of course there are many sides to the case: one shouldn't be dogmatic. This whole change in womanhood is so unique and different from anything we have ever witnessed that, until we are further advanced, it would be hard to draw any positive or final conclusions. Perhaps it is wrong for a girl to give up her virginity before marriage: perhaps that is why Nature gave her a body so different from the males. On the other hand, she may be perfectly justified in demanding her freedom. Time alone can answer the question.

Now, as to the second argument, we will grant that sex often loses some of its glamor for these boys and girls. But isn't this just as well? It means that marriage will be based on something deeper than more sex—on true love. In the old days many marriages failed because the man and woman had been only sensually attracted: the only way to satisfy their desires honorably was to marry.

At all events, the theory that these boys and girls are not equipped to carry on the race seems ridiculous. Now that they are growing up, we are able to see just what kind of parents they make. Their children, as a rule, are most healthy: again a doctor told me he had never seen so many healthy babies as were coming into the world today. But, the reader may ask, how are these babies to be brought up? Will the present generation, because it believes in freedom, do away with all restraint and discipline, give their children the free rein? Or will our boys and girls, upon becoming parents, change their attitude and practice a most rigid discipline in self-defense—that is, to keep the revolt from turning against them? Frankly, we don't know; though it is my opinion that when the coming generation reaches adolescence, conditions will have changed completely, and the problem of parents and children, if not solved, will have become a comparatively simple one.

I have touched on this whole situation rather briefly because, to repeat, we do not know enough about it to go any deeper. But I think the reader will agree that, whether this freedom in sex among the boys and girls is good or bad, it is a necessary factor in the big movement, the revolt of youth.

IX. CONCLUSION

“AT ANY rate,” a very resigned father said to me, “this younger generation has no kick coming. The kids today, whether we elders like it or not, are living their own lives, having everything their own way, and taking all the privileges they want. Certainly, then, they ought to be satisfied. They ought to be happy.”

But are they satisfied? Are they happy? Look at them. To all outward appearances they are a gay lot, who enjoy a “good time” and love to make merry. Yet, underneath this gaiety will be found a deep wistfulness, a spiritual hunger, a pall of doubt and uncertainty.

Why? My conclusion is that these boys and girls are groping for an intangible something which jazz, sex, drinking, and the like cannot supply. The “loose life” represents only the revolt of youth, not the freedom which youth really desires. Therefore, I don't believe this age of wildness is a permanent one. It is merely the chaos preceding the laying of an entirely new foundation. Eventually these restless youngsters will find the great, “treasure” they are searching for, and will quiet down to lead a more peaceful existence. And their children? Well, I think that their environment will be made up of something deeper than all these superficialities, and that they will use their freedom—which doubtless they won't have to fight for—on a higher scale.

Already we can see the dawn of a new movement. Out of all this materialism, this speed and frenzy, a new culture, a native flowering of art and philosophy, is slowly emerging. With the ban on the sensuous lifted, people are yearning again for beauty, in all forms: beauty in men and women, in literature and painting, and even in the more practical things of life—the modern skyscrapers, airplanes, Steamships. And wasn't it just such a demand that led to the building of ancient Athens, to the “Golden Age” of Pericles? And the youth of Athens—what of them?

In short, I agree with those who look for an American renaissance, for great strides in the realm of art, thought, and beauty. And this new culture, or whatever one wants to call it, is the very spiritual fulfillment which American youth is seeking today.