

How Boys Work and Play at the Young Men's Christian Association



BOYS at work, boys at play—studying in the class rooms, splashing in the swimming pool, throwing somersaults in the gymnasium, wrestling on the mats, dangling in mid-air from aerial rings fighting for one another or among themselves in the battles of the gym or contesting over little mental games—this is the picture of the boys' department in the Omaha Young Men's Christian Association.

The story of the association in Omaha as in every large center of the country is the problem of the city—that is, of the youths who are shifting for themselves and are independent of home—but of boys who have reached the age of 12 years and are just reaching the man-making stage in life.

After the boy has out loose from his mother's apron strings he has reached the most important period in his life. During this stage he is moulded into a good man or into an indifferent man.

The boys of 12 to 18—the period when the Young Men's Christian Association reaches them—are the material out of which men are made. During those years there is more man-making than during any other period of life. It is the all-important and critical period. Before the boy drifts from the period of transition muscles form, habits form, everything forms. Bad habits are the result of bad surroundings.

The Young Men's Christian Association is grasping the problem of the city with a wonderful appreciation of conditions as they exist. It is guided by that supreme good sense that has not since kept it out of politics and out of doctrinal theology, but out of the cant and charlatanry which so often hurt the efforts of morality.

In the association work there is no governing creed, no doctrine. There is that constant aim toward brotherly love and devotion that makes it an unassuming, self-devoted body. The association seeks to open the door of opportunity in the world to whomsoever may enter and to make the young man that enters a good citizen, a capable, forceful man. It aims to accomplish its purpose of dealing with men, not by preaching to them.

In the boys' department of the Omaha Young Men's Christian Association there are 381 boys. Every one of these is identified in one way or another in the activities of the association, whether it be in

the educational department, physical training, social life or religious training. The secretary of the boys' department is E. F. Denton. He is assisted in the executive scheme of administration by William Burton. Mr. Denton came to Omaha in April, 1905, from Ottumwa, Ia., where he was in association work nearly two years. He is a graduate of Grinnell college. William Burton, the assistant secretary, graduated from Oberlin college in 1908. His home is at Crete, Neb. His uncle is Senator Burton of Ohio.

"The boys' department epitomizes the best ideas and work for men," said Mr. Denton. "All features in the boys' work have importance. The name of our association may signify a great tendency toward religious training, but this fact is not essentially true. When we encourage the boys to put up a manly, gentlemanly, square contest on the gymnasium floor we are training that boy to be fair and honest and straightforward. When we give him a good time, in his social life he learns to behave as a gentleman. The religious training is important, but the physical training, the social life and the educational features are just as important.

"The boys' department aims to grip the youth during the years of his susceptibility, his most rapid growth, his fiercest temptations while no other agency adequately meets his needs. It recognizes the whole boy and all his wants and appeals wholesomely to his ambitions. It supplements, not supplants, the home, school, church and club. It directs his service, making the gang a power for good rather than for evil. It preoccupies the boy's life, giving wholesome recreation, opportunities for self-government and inspiration toward higher ideals and to a personal devotion to the greatest of all heroes.

Play is essentially one of the salient features in the boys' department. One of the big events of the year is the annual boys' circus, the last of which was held February 2 and 4. Over 120 boys took part in this event and the 120 exhibition clipped all others.

The circus combined all the attractions of the biggest shows on earth. Its proprietors were "Balum & Barnley," and the manager was E. F. Denton and the main booster Glenn Stein. Besides the main circus attractions, consisting of an industrial parade, the streets of all nations, cowboys, clowns, aerial artists, teddy bears, masked animals, horses, ringmasters, gymnasts and acrobats there were



AMONG THE ANIMALS..



PART OF THE WILD-WEST



A FEW OF THE CLOWNS



ZELAYA BAND



PEARY-COOK POLAR EXPEDITION



SOME OF THE ATHLETES



Murphy



THE ORIENTAL MUSICIANS..

side shows galore. President Taft was there for a brief minute when he put on a sketch of his rapid-fire automobile trip through Omaha streets. Cook and Peary were there in real life. They found the North Pole, but Cook got his hands on it first and brought it back with him to dis-

tract the audience. Peary, however, took it away from his foe and disappeared under the tent.

Fun and amusement are necessary features in the boys' department. The boys want diversion, something to lure them to the association rooms. Once they are there, amid games and other attractions and always in good company, they want to come again. Thus, pleasure is one of the ingredients in making up the proper training for the youth in his man-making period of life.

"The normal boy likes fun," said William Burton, the assistant secretary. "There are few places where he can so thoroughly enjoy himself at all times of the year as he can in the Young Men's Christian Association. After school or on Saturdays he likes to don his gymnasium suit and get into the gym for class drill or apparatus work, or, better still, indoor base ball or basket ball. In this age there is perhaps nothing that a boy needs so much as this kind of work, for it develops his muscles scientifically, enlarges his chest capacity, tightens his grip, brightens his eye, and, in short, gives him an avowed purpose in life.

"Nor does the fun end in the gymnasium, for, after every gym class, the boys have twenty minutes in the swimming pool. It is indeed interesting to watch fifty or seventy-five boys in the pool, some swimming, some diving, some splashing, but all having the best time in their young lives. A great many boys take their first lessons in swimming right here in our pool, and many of them have become proficient in aquatic.

"Then the game rooms are scenes of no end of enjoyment. Anyone who has been on in a boy knows the fun that boys can have with games. Cue rone, ping pong, shuffle board, chess and checkers, all have their turn. I have known boys to come early on the days there was no school and remain until closing time, becoming so interested in playing that they did not notice the flight of time. Socials are held at intervals for small groups and at all the boys are asked to remove their coats and indulge in an informal good time. Blind boxing, Indian wrestling, peanut races and similar stunts are thoroughly enjoyed by boys of all ages and sizes."

Besides the indoor sports there are many open air events that lend variety to the lives of the boys and tend to make their experiences more enjoyable.

"Cross-country hikes are a popular feature of the boy's life," continued Mr. Burton. "When a boy is out in the woods by

a large camp fire, with meat cooking over the flames and potatoes baking in the ashes, he begins to realize the freedom of camp life and wants to come again. Excursions through the Union Pacific shops, the street car and electric light and power plants, packing houses and other places of interest are taken from time to time, and these prove of interest to the boys and are instructive.

"Four evenings a week groups of boys gather about tables set for them for a 10-cent supper, after which they separate into smaller groups and meet with an adult to study and discuss life problems of the boys. Sunday afternoons the older boys are invited to a meeting addressed by a speaker of note, and after the address, pictures of the Holy land and other places of interest are shown upon the screen.

"But greater than the gymnasium or swimming pool, or game rooms, or cross-country hikes, or even religious meetings, is the opportunity of forming friendships—friendships that grow richer and more valuable as time goes on. When a boy feels that he has a friend—one who loves him and will help him in the little trials and perplexities of life—then the best and noblest and most lovable traits in him will be summoned and he will develop into a strong and useful man and a desirable citizen."

After all is said it is patent that play must enter to most of the features of association life. This is not alone a feature of the social training of the boy, but of the physical development as well.

J. C. Pentland, the physical director, and his assistant, Mr. Nicholson, design the gymnasium work so as to interest the juveniles in developing their physiques. Exercise in the gymnasium is of little value to the individual unless there be enthusiasm and interest in the work. Sharp contests among the boys, on the wrestling mat, in the basket ball court, in the hand ball court and the swimming pool, all tend to establish competition. The boys are urged to fight for honor in athletics in a manly manner—in other words, to be true sportsmen.

The physical department prescribes scientific muscular exercise to increase vigor of bodily function, give strength to live at one's best, to live abundantly, to avoid the temptations that come with physical dissipation or physical vigor, to give skill in controlling the body, to make the body the servant of the will and the center of the soul. This it does not only through the teaching of the individual in right living, but in promoting public hygiene, wholesome sanitary conditions and public play grounds.

But the work of the physical directors of the Omaha Young Men's Christian As-

sociation is not confined to the narrow limits of the gymnasium. The scope of the physical training department extends to the public schools of the city, to the Park Wilde home and to the social settlement. Every Monday evening Mr. Nicholson goes down to the social settlement, where he has formed a class of archery into a gymnasium class. These boys are put through gymnastic stunts and taught to exercise properly and instructed as to the best manner of taking care of their bodies. Much interest is manifested by these boys, who are unable to maintain memberships in the association. Friday evenings a gymnasium class is conducted at Park Wilde in the same manner. Also on one evening of each week a social is held for the boys under the direction of some Young Men's Christian Association worker. Gymnasium classes meet in the Vinton, Train, Fairman, Park, Lechro, Central and Franklin schools at regular periods during the week and are in charge of some leader from the Young Men's Christian Association. The invasion of the public schools by the physical directors is heartily welcomed by the boys and has become an important part of the curriculum of the schools. School teachers unite in promoting the work.

Of course, religious training is of importance in the work of the Young Men's Christian Association. While a boy's body is being built up physically, while his mind is being trained to overcome the problems of life, it is also well that he should be taught to live according to the example set by the humble carpenter of Nazareth, in so well devised to elevate character as the religious life of the association the

secretaries endeavor to infuse human interest into the work in order make the training appeal to the average boy.

"The deeper life of man must be studied," said L. T. Crossman, the director of religious work. "The Young Men's Christian Association began as a distinctively religious organization and has sought during the years of its growth and expansion to be true to the spirit of its inception. Its chief duty is to win men to the leadership of the master. Faith is what we want—faith in the teachings of Christ and of the disciples. The association feels pledged to continue an aggressive policy to realize the purposes of the community. Not to make itself prominent, not to reflect honor upon the institution in Omaha, but rather to infuse the spirit of Christian living and Christian brotherhood amongst the men of the city, is the motive that impels it to service. It is wrong to think of the Christian activities of the association as being confined to the religious department. A man's whole life is sacred and all the work of the association, when properly done, is Christian. The distinctly religious activities, for the sake of convenience in promotion is delegated to a so-called and often improperly regarded, religious department."

One of America's most gifted orators once said, "The most important orators are not the ones with smoking chimneys, but schools, colleges, churches and Christian associations of young men which can draw the raw material of an intended life and turn out goods priceless in value, which cannot be measured in dollars and cents. The United States has great grain elevators, but what it needs most of all is brain elevators. There is no institution so well devised to elevate character as the Young Men's Christian Association and the

boys' department is the most important branch of all."

The past ten years have seen a wonderful development in social and fraternal life the world over. There is a spirit of brotherhood prevailing nearly all life. Fraternalism is looked upon by eminent men to purify business, elevate politics and to weld the nations into harmony. Questions of government can be forgotten, politics may be laid aside and when these features in human life are discarded it is plain to be seen that it is a bond of religious fraternallism—a common belief that binds us all together. There is a greater tragedy than the death of a man by accident or by fire. Such a one suffers only a short time. It is infinitely worse when a young man is going to ruin by dissipation, for the tragedy of his ruin extends through the years that follow.

"The map next door" is shown to be a powerful factor in the training of men. It is influence that counts most in developing boys in ways that are either right or wrong. After all it is true that the times demand worthier lives of us all. There are men who cannot assert faith in their fellows because they have been faithless before their fellows. When a man acts as though he has not yet found himself out he cannot hope to set out to find his brother successfully. More men come to the Christian faith under the guidance of the man next door than under the influence of the pulpit. The absence of young men from church is not to be blamed upon the ministers, however. Young men in the church have an obligation to perform and they must share such blame with the leader of the flock.

There are two more departments in the Omaha Young Men's Christian Association