

SEVENTEEN

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(in the 1941 School Magazine)

Three years ago I suggested in the Doon School Magazine that at 14 a boy should have acquired habits of competence in various departments of his life—in his school work, in his games, in his social life. Last year I went on to write that at 16 he should be developing his taste.

At 17 must come another quality, less instinctive and requiring a maturer mind : he must acquire a capacity of judgment. It is at this age that education for democracy shows the widest divergence from education for the totalitarian state, but it is important to define, and to define clearly, the limits within which judgment has no place but must give way to authority and, conversely, the sphere of thought and action in which the individual must be free to work things out for himself.

Firstly, in the realm of study, a boy must be free to choose the subjects to which he will devote his main intellectual energy. The decision about this must be based on a clear conception of the career he means to follow. In reaching this decision, his parents and his teachers must, from their wider experience, explain to him the type of life that will result from various careers, the talents necessary for success, and the scope he will have for service and the happiness that will come from effective service. But when the decision has been made, he must surrender himself to the discipline that must be imposed in order to acquire the qualifications for his career. Some parts of this discipline may be distasteful, but he must submit without question to the routine prescribed by his teachers. That is to say, if a scientific degree is necessary for the career of his choice, he must readily agree to work at the full curriculum that is imposed on him; although he would be happier to spend his time in making perfumes or ink or soap, he must, if his teacher orders it, spend his time instead in learning the intricacies of the structure of organic compounds, or the routine of calculations in physical chemistry, things that he might neglect if the choice were his own and not

his teacher's. In economics, he must swallow the dry bones of the law of price movements and not only learn to discuss the opinions and conclusions of politicians.

If he wishes to be a high-jumper, he must submit himself to training and practice with the advice of an expert; he must not question the correctness of his teacher's methods.

If he is a member of a college or school, he must be relied on to conform with the rules that are imposed for the health and common benefit of the majority. In what parts of his life, then, will he be free to exercise his judgment, and in what ways will the school or college be exceeding their proper dominion if they limit it?

He must have a wide freedom in the choice of his friends. I have known of schoolmasters who have thought it fit to insist that a boy should not associate with certain of his fellows, for fear that he should acquire a lower standard of conduct; but such an action neglects the most fundamental characteristic of friendship—that it is a mutual relationship and one which must spring from no root of penury in the heart. Confident in the power of good over evil, a man with judgment can seize on the quality which attracts him in another and use it as a channel for mutual strength. His judgment must sift the wheat from the chaff.

He must have freedom in the use of his leisure and exercise his judgment in choosing the way to use it. While at school, he will sleep for nine hours in every twenty-four; he will work at his books for six hours; he will exercise his muscles for one and a half hours; he will eat for one and a half hours; he will wash for half an hour; he can allow half an hour for dressing and still there are five hours in each day. Can he not spend some of this five hours in thought—in summing up his failures and successes of the last day and in planning something better for the next? (Some may call this prayer.) And some time in wonder—in watching the birds or the stars or the beauty of some work of man? And some time in creating beauty himself—this may be in a painting or work with chisel or lathe or in perfecting the grace of a swallow-dive or a hand-spring or even in writing a letter with some extra care that it reflects the happiness of his own life? And some time in service that brings no reward to himself? And some time in the enjoyment of interchange of fellowship with his friends and some time in the delight of books? Perhaps all these things are part of a life of dedication or prayer. The spell is only broken by blasphemy—the blasphemy of blindness to beauty, of neglect to do any task with all the care and energy that you can put forth, of wilful destruction, of cruelty, laziness or greedy self-indulgence. There is much

room for judgment in the use of the leisure which comes even in a busy day.

Finally, when a boy reaches the age of 17, he will have an increasing responsibility for others and in this he will need a great power of judgment. His responsibility may be clearly defined as a praefect or the captain of a team, but even if this is not his task he is now of an age and size when his influence over his neighbours is bound to matter. At 16, he acquired taste, a sense of the beautiful and ugly, of the strong and the weak, of good and evil. Now, at 17, he must judge how he can best bring these standard to bear on those around him. Judgment as to when to speak and when to be silent, when to put things right by precept and when by example, when to learn and when to teach, when to act and when to wait.

Now there is a year left of your school life—only one more year of preparation before you have to meet the struggles of the world alone, armed with the internal strength that you have gained in the shelter of the school.