

# *A Live Vaccine*

## *The YMCA and Male Adolescence in the United States and Canada 1870-1920*

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### I

The period of life between childhood and adulthood has recently become an object of such fascination to historians that adult concern over youth threatens to become a historical perennial like the rise of the middle class.<sup>1</sup> But the focus and intensity of that concern shifted over time. By the early 1800s, the term "youth" in American usage encompassed roughly the years from age fourteen or fifteen to the mid-twenties, during which young people experienced an erratic mixture of dependence, independence, and semidependence. By the 1870s, the term referred more narrowly to the years from fourteen to nineteen. But the modern concept of adolescence did not achieve wide currency until nearly 1900, when the psychologist G. Stanley Hall popularized the term and gave it scientific authority. Meanwhile, job opportunities for teenagers shrank and formal schooling interfered more and more with paid employment by lasting nearly year-round. Increasingly, middle-class boys put off their first se-

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#### Abbreviations:

AB	<i>Association Boys</i>
AY	<i>American Youth</i>
BWR	Boys' Work Reports, bound volumes at YMCA Historical Library, New York City
EMR MSS	Edgar M. Robinson Papers, Babson Library, Springfield College, Springfield, Massachusetts
NBWC	Canada, YMCA National Boys' Work Committee
NC MSS	YMCA, National Council Papers, MG 28, Public Archives of Canada
YB	<i>Year Book of the YMCA's of North America</i> (New York). Each year's report carried the previous year's statistics until 1903. Thereafter it reported those from the previous May through the current April.
YHL	YMCA Historical Library, New York City
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

<sup>1</sup> John and Virginia DEMOS, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 31 (1969): 632-38; Ross W. BEALES, Jr., "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England," *American Quarterly*, 27 (1975): 379-398; John R. GILLIS, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present* (New York, 1974). A fine new book, particularly strong on nineteenth-century youth, is Joseph F. KETT, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977). In briefly discussing youth work, however, Kett fails to note age gradations within the broad range from ten or twelve to eighteen or twenty-one, nor does his account discriminate sufficiently among different agencies. Perhaps as a result, the book ignores the YMCA after 1900, except for some decidedly peripheral rural projects.

rious job until at least their late teens. Thus for growing numbers of the young, full dependence extended well past puberty, creating the preconditions for modern adolescence.<sup>2</sup> To many observers, the middle-class high school pupil became the model adolescent, submissive to adult control for the sake of future career prospects.

Prolonged adult tutelage was as much an ideal as a reality, however, and required new institutions, such as high schools and juvenile courts, to provide instruction and control. Boys' work arose to fill the free time which many schoolboys enjoyed once school ended for the day and to keep them loyal to established values and institutions. Neither Sunday schools nor young people's societies held teenage boys very well, so boys' workers presented their schemes as new ways to maintain the boys' church affiliation by meeting their recreational needs.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the earliest, largest, and most innovative boys' work agencies, the YMCA junior department was very influential. Not only did it enrol large numbers of American and Canadian boys — 30,675 in 1900 and 260,760 for 1920-21 — but YMCA boys' secretaries were among the first men to claim adolescence as a professional specialty. They helped shape public concern about this newly labelled age group and directly influenced church activities and other forms of boys' work.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this article is to examine how and why YMCA workers developed their mission to adolescents, in what directions and how far it went, and how the boys responded. Of the agencies for youth which proliferated around 1900, none better exemplified adult ambivalence towards adolescence than did the YMCA. Much as today, some experts believed that adolescence had great potential for personal develop-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. chapters 1, 6; Joseph F. KETT, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971), p. 293; Selwyn K. TROEN, "The Discovery of the Adolescent by American Educational Reformers: An Economic Perspective," in Lawrence STONE, ed., *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education* (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 239-251; Michael B. KATZ, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), pp. 257-308.

<sup>3</sup> Boys' workers said that Sunday schools lost 60 to 85 percent of their boys between ages twelve and eighteen. A Sunday school commission estimated that 62 percent of the boys quit from age thirteen to sixteen in the early 1900s. It is vital to recognize, as Kett does not, the failure of young people's societies with teenage boys, since boys' work took shape in part as a self-consciously masculine alternative for younger boys. After two decades of rapid growth, young people's societies had reached a plateau by the early 1900s from which the path soon sloped downward. The average age in groups around Chicago was twenty-five and only 32.5 percent were male. In 85 senior young people's societies in Indiana about 1920, 71.7 percent of the members were eighteen or older and only 39.4 percent were male. Junior societies were less numerous and enrolled mostly children under twelve. INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY-SCHOOL ASSOCIATION, *The Development of the Sunday-School, 1780-1905* (Boston, 1905), pp. 243-44, 670-75; *Boys' Brigade Bulletin*, 1 (15 Nov., 1892), p. 7; *How to Help Boys*, 1 (Jan. 1901): 86-95; 1 (July 1901), p. 48; *Work With Boys*, 4 (1904): 114-125; Walter S. ATHEARN et al., *The Religious Education of Protestants in an American Commonwealth* (New York, 1923), pp. 209-212. Cf. KETT, *Rites of Passage*, pp. 194-200.

<sup>4</sup> YB (1901), p. 259; (1921), p. 217. YMCA men were active in the Religious Education Association and the General Alliance of Workers with Boys.

ment. But it had become increasingly common in the late nineteenth century to regard puberty as a time of danger; explicit formulation of the concept of adolescence strengthened the association of the teens with trouble.<sup>5</sup> Many institutions including Scouting and the public schools, worked accordingly to postpone, bypass, or ignore adolescence. Yet YMCA men remained genuinely ambivalent. They favoured a prolonged adolescence with gentle crises, though they wanted boys to contract only a mild form of the disease. At the same time, they felt an urge to keep boys boyish and, in a sense, preadolescent. The pressures of attracting members and keeping them busy also drove boys' workers towards the practice of simply distracting adolescents through incessant activity. Whatever the tactics, the basic purpose was to keep boys under control and prevent them reaching out for maturity or independence. The boys had a wide choice of responses, though, and only a minority came through as the ideologists of adolescence wished.

The basic pattern was much the same in both the U.S. and Canada. American and Canadian YMCA secretaries came under the supervision of the same International Committee of YMCA's in New York, although the formation of a National Council for Canada in 1912 brought a measure of separation.<sup>6</sup>

## II

No preoccupation with adolescence was evident in the 1850s and 1860s, when city YMCAs engaged in evangelism for all ages and accepted boys down to fourteen or younger as full members. As the job market changed and school attendance grew, however, boys of fourteen or fifteen and young men in their twenties had less and less contact or even common experience. Consequently, older YMCA members tired of the youngsters, and most Associations barred those under sixteen by the 1870s. A few YMCAs tried separate work for boys, but they treated it at first as a kind of home mission to street urchins, many of them very young.<sup>7</sup>

Had the YMCA continued along those lines, it might have followed the course of the mass boys' clubs, whose leaders gave little heed to age as a factor in personal development and admitted hordes of needy pre-teenagers.<sup>8</sup> But YMCA men took a different tack, shifting their interest

<sup>5</sup> Peter BLOS, *On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (New York, 1962); G.W. FISKE, "Prolonging the Period of Adolescence for Employed Boys," AY, 14 (1915): 241-42.

<sup>6</sup> Murray G. ROSS, *The Y.M.C.A. in Canada: The Chronicle of a Century* (Toronto, 1915), pp. 266-69.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar M. ROBINSON, *The Early Years: The Beginning of Work With Boys in the Y.M.C.A.* (New York, 1950), pp. 5-6, 15-20; Emmett DEDMON, *Great Enterprises: 100 Years of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago* (New York, 1957), p. 87; YMCA's of North America, *Proceedings*, 20 (1875): 85-91; 23 (1879), p. 89; KETT, *Rites of Passage*, p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> In 1910, 47 percent of the Chicago Boys' Club's boys were under thirteen. *Darkest Chicago and Her Waifs*, Jan. 1911, p. 20, in Chicago Boys' Club MSS, Chicago Historical Society; AB, 3 (1904), p. 71; *Work With Boys*, 11 (May 1911): 12-13.

from childhood to boyhood and eventually to adolescence and from lower- to middle-class boys. Turning away from the poverty and purported abnormality of lower-class boys, they looked to psychology for insight into the development of what they termed "average" boys. These shifts in clientele arose from a welter of practical pressures and professional ambitions.

In a sense, boys themselves started the process of change. Most YMCA officials of the 1870s had no intention of enlisting middle-class boys under age sixteen. American Associations were promoting a "four-fold program" for "improvement of the spiritual, mental, social and physical condition" of "young men only."<sup>9</sup> Recreation was becoming important, as YMCAs invested in gymnasiums and auditoriums to attract young clerks. But so many boys as well as young men drifted in and hung around that a few Associations set aside a room for them.<sup>10</sup> Then YMCA officials realized that there might be positive advantages to signing up middle-class boys who could pay fees ranging up to \$5.00, who were free to use the gymnasium afternoons when it stood vacant, and who might someday become full members. Accordingly, YMCAs in the 1880s barred street boys and sought out so-called "average" boys for their new junior departments.<sup>11</sup>

Other motives reflected middle-class as well as YMCA self-interest. Believing that good boys needed protection against corruption, which they identified particularly with commercial entertainment and the influence of lower-class boys, YMCA men made boys' work frankly "a matter of prevention."<sup>12</sup> The goal was to keep lads of socially respectable families busy and off the street, for YMCA secretaries saw sin as a spare time activity. Besides, the boys obviously hungered for diversion; they eagerly enrolled for classes, clubs, entertainments, and, above all, gymnastics and swimming. By 1900, 71 percent of all juniors signed up for gym classes, and basketball swept the boys' branches.<sup>13</sup>

Since boys' work was opportunistic and preventive, the men who ran junior departments had no clear rationale for age grading and set widely varying limits, from a low of six to a high of twenty-one. For practical reasons, though, the most common minimum and maximum ages by

<sup>9</sup> C. Howard HOPKINS, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York, 1950), p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> YMCA of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., *Annual Report* (1874), p. 13; (1875), p. 13; YMCA's of New York State, *Proceedings*, 18 (1884): 39-40; YMCA of Buffalo, N.Y., *Annual Report*, 34 (1886): 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Quotation: Robert R. McBurney, in YMCA's of North America, *Proceedings*, 26 (1885), p. 87. See also YMCA's of New York State, *Proceedings*, 25 (1891), p. 75; *The Lever*, 1 (Mar. 1896), p. 11; AB, 3 (1904): 47-48. The YMCA's of the Maritime Provinces published *The Lever*.

<sup>12</sup> George H. ROBINSON, "Boys' Work in Our State," YMCA's of New York State, *Proceedings*, 24 (1890), p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> YB (1901), p. 259; *Boys' Companion* (Brooklyn, N.Y.), pp. 1-4 (1882-1885); HOPKINS, *History*, pp. 259-263; Jasper VAN VLECK, Henry Horace WEBSTER, *The Typical Young Men's Christian Association Man: The Story of a Busy Life for Busy Men* (Chicago, 1893).

1885 were ten and sixteen. The state YMCA secretary for Illinois explained that about age ten boys began "to drift out upon the streets, to make up the knots of eagers debaters on matters of games and sports, and to come within the outer circles of temptation to bad language and its cognate evils." Age sixteen was "the first limit of young manhood" when youths could join the adult Association.<sup>14</sup> Obviously, early boys' workers had no clear concept of adolescence, since the age limits they imposed straddled the age of puberty.

In the 1880s, indeed, boys' workers were just breaking away from the notion that YMCA juniors were "little children" to be turned over to the women's auxiliary for recitations and charades.<sup>15</sup> Enthusiasts for boys' work shared the widespread nostalgia for the life of small-town boys aged eight or ten to twelve or fourteen. Admiration for an idealized, rough-and-tumble boyhood reflected fears that American males were becoming overcivilised and effeminate, the very years that brought men to the gymnasium. The memory of energetic lads who foraged through the woods rebuked the city's sluggish clerks and schoolboys. Charles Dudley Warner, a popular author, echoed a common belief when he claimed that "every boy who is good for anything is a natural savage."<sup>16</sup> The "real boy" brimmed over with vigour; still too young for puberty, he seemed free of the self-doubt, messy emotions, and genital sexuality which made adolescence a threat to male strength and self-control.<sup>17</sup> As a result, boyhood established itself among boys' workers as an appealing alternative to adolescence; much of their ambivalence towards adolescence grew out of a desire to prolong boyhood. Women, formerly active in boys' work, found themselves thrust aside by the 1890s, as YMCA orthodoxy now decreed that boys needed a man's influence.<sup>18</sup> Boys' workers flattered their junior recruits as sturdy fellows who loved exercise, all the while labouring to keep the boys dependent through sheer busyness.

In theory, YMCA activity was not just an end in itself, however. Boys would join because of "the good times they have." It would then be "an easy matter to get them to attend their weekly Gospel meeting." The conservative head of boys' work at the Toronto YMCA described the process sarcastically: "To tickle them first, and save them afterwards."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> I.E. Brown, "Association Work Among Boys," *Watchman*, 11 (1885), p. 185. KETT, *Rites of Passage*, p. 200, exaggerates the numbers of older boys.

<sup>15</sup> Quotation: untitled item, *Boys' Companion*, 1 (9 Sept., 1882), n.p. See also Harold C. Cross, *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth: The Story of the Montreal YMCA* (Montreal, 1951), p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Dudley WARNER, *Being a Boy* (Boston, 1878), pp. 198-99. See also John JOHNSON, "The Savagery of Boyhood," *Popular Science Monthly*, 31 (1887), p. 798.

<sup>17</sup> Henry A. SHUTE, *The Real Diary of a Real Boy* (Boston, 1902). See also Henry R. SPARAPANI, "The American Boy-Book, 1865-1915" (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1971); AB, 1 (1902): 149-150; eulogy to Pvt. John Bernard Cronk, V.C. (1892-1918), on display at the Army Museum, Halifax Citadel, Nova Scotia.

<sup>18</sup> *Boys' Companion*, 1 (11 Nov., 1882), n.p.; ROBINSON, *The Early Years*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>19</sup> B.G. WINTON and C.S. STOWITTS, "What Agencies Can Be Successfully Used in Small Towns," YMCA's of New York State, *Proceedings*, 24 (1890), p. 47; "The Work Elsewhere," *Our Boys* (Toronto), 2 (June 1884), p. 1.

Yet a good many boys docilely took the hook with bait, although somewhat fewer attended religious sessions than gym classes and a quarter of the boys' branches had no religious programme by 1900.<sup>20</sup>

Of all the features of nineteenth-century boys' work, the religious meetings most clearly foreshadowed the idea of adolescence as a time of usable crisis. Older boys often helped in the search for converts and gave testimony and prayer. But adults took care to ban sentimentality or introspection; a boys' meeting must be "full of life and vigor" — even if it led incongruously to "that peace which passeth all understanding." There was no agonized waiting for the Spirit; D.A. Budge, secretary of the Montreal YMCA, expected boys from good families to grow "quietly up into the Christian life."<sup>21</sup>

Various reasons dictated caution. If conversion was to be the culmination of Christian nurture, as men like Budge hoped, it had to come early, before other influences supervened. Young as most YMCA juniors were, they were unready for the sort of traumatic resolution of accumulated doubts traditionally experienced by converts in young manhood. Besides, boys and men alike were fearful that emotional religiosity seemed sissified. Barbara Welter has described how the tone of nineteenth-century Protestantism turned "more emotional, more soft and accommodating — in a word, more 'feminine'." Males became a distinct minority in church and Sunday school.<sup>22</sup> Self-consciously good boys, therefore, feared ostracism and needed reassurance of their masculinity. Henry Cabot Lodge recalled that in his youth boys "had a wholesome dislike of the... religious prig, for they felt that such boys must be insincere and they drove them out from among them." The boys' worker at the Toronto YMCA in 1884 felt obliged to reassure his lads that "a real boy... need not cease to be a boy because he is a Christian." A quarter century later, Toronto high school boys who campaigned for moral uplift met "all kinds of taunts and jeers..."<sup>23</sup> An enduring fear of anything effeminate accounted for much of the YMCA's obsessively muscular Christianity and carried over into a general wariness of emotionalism on the grounds that it smacked of girlish hysteria. By the late nineteenth century, Joseph Kett has suggested, the word "manliness itself changed meaning, coming to

<sup>20</sup> Average gym enrollment in 1900 was 68; perhaps 50 came on average. Attendance at religious meetings averaged 39. The percentage of boys' branches reporting religious activities fell from 92 in 1890 to 71 in 1900. YB (1891): 160-63; (1901), p. 259.

<sup>21</sup> Quotations: WINTON & STOWITTS, "What Agencies," p. 47; untitled discussion, YMCA's of North America, *Proceedings*, 26 (1885), p. 84. See also *The Lever*, 1 (May 1896), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara WELTER, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," in William L. O'NEILL, comp., *Insights and Parallels: Problems and Issues of American Social History* (Minneapolis, 1973), p. 307; KETT, *Rites*, p. 119. About 1920, only 36.3 percent of Indiana Sunday school pupils fourteen through nineteen were boys. ATHEARN, *Religious Education*, p. 289.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Cabot LODGE, *Early Memories* (New York, 1913), p. 72; "A Real Boy," *Our Boys*, 2 (Apr. 1884), p. 3; Taylor STATTEN, "High School Clubs," AB, 9 (1910), p. 187.

signify less the opposite of childishness than the opposite of femininity.’<sup>24</sup> Rhetorical ‘strenuosity’ substituted for personal independence.

### III

YMCA boys’ work lacked a theoretical framework beyond the four-fold formula that boys should strengthen their physical, mental, social, and religious capacities, until G. Stanley Hall and his many popularizers focused the attention of boys’ workers upon adolescence and gave them a body of esoteric knowledge upon which to base a claim to professional status.<sup>25</sup> Hall’s ideas directed attention towards older boys and sharpened awareness of potential crises in the teens.

Hall’s basic postulate was that psychological development occurs in stages, during which children recapitulate as instinctual drives those traits which proved useful to their race during successive phases of its cultural evolution. From eight to twelve the boy is a replica of early pygmies. Then after a virtual new birth the adolescent emerges, an evolutionary product similar to men of medieval times, but still not fully modern. Hall insisted that failure to live out the instincts of each developmental stage “almost always means retrogression, degeneracy, or fall”.<sup>26</sup> He hated precocity, and his writings provided strong support for efforts to prolong immaturity.<sup>26</sup> The task, wrote a commission of YMCA boys’ workers, was to insure “adequate growth in every line before the specializations of later life”.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the value of a sheltered adolescence became a twentieth-century commonplace, especially for middle-class boys of the sort the YMCA served. In the minds of parents and boys’ workers, nothing must lure these teenagers off the path, clearly marked by the early twentieth century, which led through extended education to white collar employment.

Hall fixed the stereotype of adolescence as a critical period of storm and stress, full of promise but prey to moral degeneration.<sup>29</sup> To Protestant boys’ workers, his version of adolescence promised a rich religious harvest, coupled with a warning to act before the frost struck. Edwin Starbuck, a student of Hall’s confirmed statistically what evangelists had increasingly recognized, that during the nineteenth century youth had be-

<sup>24</sup> KETT, *Rites*, p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> As guides, see William Byron FORBUSH, *The Boy Problem: A Study in Social Pedagogy*, intro. by G. Stanley HALL, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1901); Ronald Tuttle VEAL et al., *Classified Bibliography of Boy Life and Organized Work With Boys* (New York, 1919).

<sup>26</sup> G. Stanley HALL, *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York, 1904), II, p. 72. See *ibid.*, I, pp. ix-xv.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. xv-xvi; II, pp. 417-432. See also FORBUSH, *Boy Problem*, appendix.

<sup>28</sup> ASSOCIATION OF BOYS’ SECRETARIES OF NORTH AMERICA, *Reports of Commissions: First General Assembly, Association Workers with Boys... 1913* (New York, 1913), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> G. Stanley HALL, *Youth: Its Education, Regimen, and Hygiene* (New York, 1907), p. 135.

come the time for conversion; after age twenty, Starbuck claimed, it was unlikely. Yet researchers also asserted that crime peaked at an age little beyond that of conversions. More prosaically, around puberty many boys quit school and drifted into "blind alley" jobs.<sup>30</sup> Behind the fear of adolescent precocity and unsettledness lurked the spectre of teenage sexuality. Not only did impurity taint religious faith; boys' workers shared the longstanding belief that semen was, to quote the head of the YMCA's physical department, "the sex fluid... that makes a boy manly, strong, and noble." Thus masturbation, which YMCA secretaries considered the most frequent and damning sin of boys, threatened ruinous depletion of the strength which character builders associated with wholesome boyhood and vigorous manhood.<sup>31</sup> By extension, all adolescent emotionalism fell under suspicion as a betrayal of the masculine ideal of rational self-control. Taylor Statten, then YMCA National Boys' Work Secretary for Canada, warned that turbulent feelings could "dethrone reason and moral lapses ensue".<sup>32</sup> Boys' workers, educators, and parents were all determined that adolescents, once safely barred from intellectual independence and the world of work, must not reach out for autonomy through sensuality and emotion. By building a quarantined world of boyish recreation and attenuated moral and religious questioning, YMCA men hoped to keep their juniors under control.

#### IV

Hall's ideas reached the YMCA first through Springfield Training School, a controversial normal school for Association secretaries, the paid officers who ran most YMCA programmes locally and at higher levels. Among the faculty was Luther Gulick, an innovator in physical training whose department introduced basketball and invented the YMCA's red triangle. Hoping to professionalize boys' work, Gulick studied with Hall and returned in 1898 to teach students the new psychology.<sup>33</sup>

Gulick's prize pupil was Edgar M. Robinson (1867-1951), a Baptist grocer from St. Stephen, New Brunswick, who had entered boys' work as a volunteer and made a name for himself with large, evangelistic camps

<sup>30</sup> Quotation: *Scouting*, 7 (15 May 1919), p. 25. See Edwin Diller STARBUCK, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness*, 3rd ed. (London, 1911), p. 38; *Association Outlook*, 7 (1897): 37-43; *The Lever*, 5 (July 1900), p. 46. The age of conversion had fallen since the 1700s. BEALES, "Historical Child," p. 387. The data were valid only for evangelical Protestants, of course.

<sup>31</sup> George J. FISHER, "Health and Endurance", in BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA, *Official Handbook for Boys* (Garden City, 1911), p. 232, reprinted in Committee on Canadian Standard Efficiency Training of the National Council of YMCA's of Canada, *The C.S.E.T. Manual for Trail Rangers* (n.p., 1918), 125-26. See also *Association Outlook*, 7 (1898): 197-201; Winfield S. HALL, *From Youth into Manhood* (New York, 1910), pp. 37-57.

<sup>32</sup> "Danger Lines in Using Boys," AY, 11 (1912), p. 99.

<sup>33</sup> Laurence Locke DOGGETT, *A Man and a School: Pioneering in Higher Education at Springfield College* (New York, 1943), pp. 19-29, 90, 105-06, 129; *Training School Notes*, 6 (1898), pp. 5-6; Luther GULICK, "Boys' Work Necessary," *Association Outlook*, 8 (1899): 162-179; Ethel Josephine DORGAN, *Luther Halsey Gulick, 1865-1918* (New York, 1934).



and conferences. Robinson panicked when he caught echoes of modern Biblical criticism at Springfield, but he soon recovered and took to the psychology of adolescence with the enthusiasm of a man come late to learning. He remained a seeker of converts, gifted at getting boys to take the plunge. Earlier, he confessed, he had relied upon Scripture and dogma, whereas Gulick led him to seek "scientifically sound" principles.<sup>34</sup> Robinson went on to build a career on Gulick's sometimes muddled ideas. The two men propagandized so relentlessly that the YMCA's leading journal protested: "There is danger that conversion will be regarded, as... 'an adolescent phenomenon,' and that conversion after the period of adolescence is not only improbable but impossible."<sup>35</sup> At the Employed Officers' Conference in 1900, Robinson argued that the remedy for ineffective religious programmes was to shift from adults to adolescents. The delegates pledged \$1,775, and he became the YMCA's first International Secretary for Boys' Work.<sup>36</sup>

The new ideology speeded acceptance of boys' work. Formerly, there had been no explanation why it should be more than an afterthought run by volunteers or in spare moments by the general secretary who had charge of each local Association. Now enthusiasts claimed that it was central to the YMCA's task of saving young men, since it influenced them at their most critical age. From 1898 to 1903, as Gulick and Robinson spread the gospel of adolescence, junior enrolments surged upward 20 percent a year. For the first time, local YMCA's employed substantial numbers of salaried boys' workers: 43 by late 1900, 107 by early 1904, and 637 by early 1921.<sup>37</sup>

The new boys' secretaries were wretchedly insecure, however. Many came from the lower middle-class and only 19 percent of those hired from 1909 to 1913 had college degrees. The recruits were too young to demand respect — 64 percent under age 25 — and boys' workers earned less than other YMCA secretaries. On the job they felt harried, "drowning in detail", and ten hour days, six days a week were commonplace.<sup>38</sup> Because they worked with children, other men insinuated they

<sup>34</sup> ROBINSON, *Early Years*, pp. 118-125; DOGGETT, *A Man and a School*, pp. 144; Eugene C. FOSTER, ed., *Second General Assembly, Association Workers With Boys, May 19-31, 1920, Report of Proceedings* (New York, 1921), p. 23; H.W. GIBSON, *Twenty-Five Years of Organized Boys' Work in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, 1891-1915* (Boston, 1915), p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> The original is clumsy. "Conversion and Adolescent Phenomenon", [sic], *Association Men*, 26 (Oct. 1900), p. 25. On these ideas' spread, see Exec. Comm., International Committee of the YMCA, Minutes, Mar., June 1899, YHL; *The Lever*, 5 (Jan. 1901): 9-20.

<sup>36</sup> ROBINSON, *Early Years*, pp. 126-27; First Biennial Conference of General Secretaries of the YMCA's of North America, June 6-10, 1900, Minutes, YHL; Exec. Comm. International Committee of the YMCA, Minutes, June 21, Sept. 20, Dec. 20, 1900, YHL.

<sup>37</sup> YB (1901), p. 259; (1904), p. 9; (1921): 222-23. If this growth was a rebound from the depression, it came late. Regression equations show average annual growth rates of 5.5 percent (1890-98); 20.1 percent (1898-1903); 8.7 percent (1903-1921). YB (1890-1921).

<sup>38</sup> Quotation: H.T. WILLIAMS, "The Intellectual Life of the Leader of Boys", in C.B. HORTON, ed., *Reaching the Boys of an Entire Community* (New York, 1909), p. 233. See also AY, 4 (1915): 3-9; "The Boys' Work Secretaryship," unsigned typed MS, 7 Apr. 1915, YHL. The mean age of Ontario and Quebec boys' secretaries in 1920 was twenty-seven. Boys' Work Secretaries of Ontario and Quebec, Minutes, Jan. 24-25, 1921, NBWC Box, YHL.

did women's work. Thus David R. Porter, the International secretary for high school boys, had to assure recruits, "The man who loves boys is not a freak incapable of other matters..."<sup>39</sup>

Boys' secretaries felt pulled two ways. The easy way to keep up membership was to admit younger boys, who were eager to join and relatively amenable to discipline.<sup>40</sup> Yet leading boys' workers such as Harry T. Baker, an ardent proponent of home study, contended that in order to raise their status and bring order to their lives, boys' workers must professionalize themselves. New professions were springing up in response to social problems; in this case the problem would be adolescence, and that meant favouring older boys. Any new profession needed some prestigious form of expertise; again the answer was knowledge of adolescence. Besides, by recruiting older lads, boys' workers could become less like elementary teachers, who were mostly women, and more like high school teachers, more of whom were men.<sup>41</sup>

At the grass roots this expertise was thin. Although one boys' secretary in six attended Springfield, most got their training at two-week summer institutes, repeated over several years, where the courses had imposing titles such as *Social Aspects of the Religious Life as Related to Adolescents*.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, boys' workers were pathetically eager to improve themselves. Billy Burger, long-time New York State boys' secretary, confessed a lasting fondness for psychological jargon to compensate for lack of formal education, and even Robinson complained that men went "psychology mad".<sup>43</sup>

## V

In order to concentrate on adolescents, most twentieth-century boys' branches set age limits of twelve to sixteen and increasingly eighteen.<sup>44</sup> In so doing they raised the members' minimum and maximum ages two years above the nineteenth-century averages, but stopped short of requiring that the boys have reached puberty, which came on average around fourteen. Boys' workers still wanted adolescents to carry over boyish traits. In fact, they posited the existence of a gang age, running from ten or twelve to fourteen or sixteen and thus corresponding to the

<sup>39</sup> "The Boys' Work Secretaryship: A New Profession," *AB*, 8 (1909), p. 51. See also W.H. BURGER, "The Passing of Boy's Man," [sic] *Association Forum*, 1 (Oct. 1920): 13-14.

<sup>40</sup> *AB*, 7 (1908), p. 253; 10 (1911), p. 279.

<sup>41</sup> *AB*, 8 (1909): 49-55, 84-86; 10 (1911), p. 235. See Bernard BARBER, "Some Problems in the Sociology of the Professions," in Kenneth S. LYNN, ed., *The Professions in America* (Boston, 1967), pp. 18-19, though formal definitions obscure the ideological drive behind claims to professional status.

<sup>42</sup> DOGGETT, *A Man*, pp. 141-45; Association of Boys' Secretaries, *Reports*, p. 74; E. Clark WORMAN, *The Contribution of Silver Bay to the Professional Training of the YMCA, 1902-1952* (n.p., 1952), pp. 5-17; transcript, 1954 Boys' Work History Consultation, YHL.

<sup>43</sup> "Revamping Religious Work With Boys," *AY*, 1 (1912), p. 215; [William H.] BURGER, *A Million Miles in New York State* (New York, 1946), p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> *AY*, 1 (1912): 20-23.

nostalgic image of boyhood, during which boys preserved the energy of little savages while learning through gang life the conformity to group imperatives demanded by a corporate society. On occasion Gulick and Robinson even asserted that adolescents were in the savage or gang stage, in other words, still safely boyish.<sup>45</sup>

Following this theoretical lead, many boys' workers, especially those outside the YMCA, concluded that the remedy for adolescent turmoil was simply to distract the boys and stretch their boyhood. Ernest Thompson Seton, the nature writer and founder of the Woodcraft Indians for boys, claimed that "the boy from ten to sixteen years is ontogenetically and essentially a savage." His plan, which centred on Indian-style camping with awards for woodcraft feats, was designed to get boys out roaming the woods the way small boys had traditionally done and to busy them with earning distinctions.<sup>46</sup> Along the same lines, Scouting took boys outdoors and offered them an array of badges to tap the gold star hunger in any schoolboy. This was particularly true in the U.S., where the Chief Scout Executive, James West, said that Scouting "takes the boy... when he is beset with the new and bewildering experiences of adolescence and diverts his thoughts... to wholesome and worthwhile activities."<sup>47</sup>

These new forms of boys' work fascinated YMCA men. Although some thought that Indian make-believe would attract only very young boys, a good many secretaries adapted Seton's ideas for camps and clubs.<sup>48</sup> At first they took up Scouting even more enthusiastically. Taylor Statten eagerly set up troops in Toronto. E.M. Robinson, who saw in Scouting a means to improve church boys' work and enliven the YMCA's junior departments, took the initiative to organize the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) in 1910. For its first year the BSA was virtually a YMCA auxiliary, but soon there came a parting of the ways. Friction arose because Scout leaders often reaped where Association men had sown; by 1920, about a quarter of the BSA's executives were former YMCA secre-

<sup>45</sup> Luther GULICK, "A Study of Boys," typed MS, n.d., YHL; AB, 7 (1908), p. 227; Edgar M. ROBINSON, "Boys as Savages," *Association Outlook*, 8 (1899): 243-258; T.J. BROWNE, "The Clan or Gang Instinct in Boys," *ibid.*, 9 (1900): 223-274; John SCOTT, "A Study of the Social Instinct and Its Development in Boy Life," *Association Seminar*, 13 (1904-05): 257-270, 285-308, 355-379. Boys' ages at puberty varied widely. See Bird T. BALDWIN, "A Measuring Scale for Physical Growth and Physiological Age," in NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION, *Fifteenth Yearbook* (Bloomington, Ill., 1916), I, pp. 11-16. A boys' worker who demanded juniors be fully adolescent got only 3.5 percent twelve-year-olds and 11.7 percent thirteen-year-olds. C.H. Barnes to E.M. Robinson, 5 Dec. 1914, BWR.

<sup>46</sup> Quotation: Ernest Thompson Seton to W.I. Talbot, 12 Apr. 1905, photocopy in Ernest Thompson Seton MSS, Seton Memorial Museum, Philmont Scout Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico. See IDEM, *The Birch-Bark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians, Containing Their Constitution, Laws, Games, and Deeds*, 5th ed. (New York, 1906).

<sup>47</sup> James West, untitled speech, n.d., in West File, Boy Scouts of America, National Headquarters, North Brunswick, N.J.

<sup>48</sup> Edgar M. ROBINSON, "Ernest Thompson Seton: An Unforgettable Personality," typed MS, [1941], EMR MSS.

taries. There were differences of purpose as well. For Scouting failed to recruit the older boys whom Robinson thought it vital to win. In addition, Scout leaders normally eschewed Protestant evangelism, nor did they confront adolescent problems as directly as YMCA secretaries.<sup>49</sup> So by sloughing off Scouting, the YMCA confirmed its own uniqueness.

This is not to say that boys' secretaries abandoned diversion. When boys paid their fees, they expected exercise and recreation; boys' workers complained that the juniors' importunate demands reduced them to mere "privilege selling." In 1909 and again in 1919, more than twice as many boys enrolled for gymnastics as for Bible classes.<sup>50</sup> Boys' workers also laid on entertainments and a profusion of stunts and specialty clubs. A single issue of the boys' bulletin at Toronto's West End YMCA reported on basketball, baseball, two harriers' clubs, a craft display, a Scout troop, a hiking club, and three track and field meets. As a result, complained one secretary, Associations were overrun with "pool-sharks, gym-hounds, water-rats, and stunt artists."<sup>51</sup> Boyish activism, in short, had free rein, and the boys were delighted.

## VI

Boys' secretaries cautiously adapted their religious and moral instruction to the purported needs of adolescents. Fearing that old-fashioned mass meetings induced pro forma compliance, and finding that boys stayed away, they turned to Bible classes and personal interviews, sometimes pressuring boys to attend.<sup>52</sup> They were even less willing than their amateur predecessors to encourage "any sort of hysterical response". "Boys from thirteen to eighteen are passing through tremendous... changes", cautioned Fred S. Goodman, the International Committee's Secretary for Special Religious Work. "The less they think of their feelings and the more their thoughts go out in loving regard for their Master, their parents, brothers, sisters, and companions, the better."<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, YMCA men were more insistent than religious educators that conversion should be delayed until adolescence and more willing to provoke a mild crisis. The key, according to Robinson, was emphasis "upon

<sup>49</sup> David I. MACLEOD, "Good Boys Made Better: The Boy Scouts of America, Boys' Brigades, and YMCA Boys' Work, 1880-1920" (Unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1973), pp. 236-260, 277, 282, 371; AB, 9 (1910), p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> Seventy-eight percent vs. 37 and 79 vs. 35 respectively. YB (1910), p. 296; (1920): 103. Quotation: editorial note, AB, 5 (1906), p. 321. See also Report of the Boys' Work Committee, 11 Mar. 1920, BWR.

<sup>51</sup> Quotation: A.R. FREEMAN, "I Want to Join the 'Y'," AY, 19 (Mar. 1920), p. 22. See AB, 1 (1902): 59-61; *The Elevator*, n.v. (Apr. 1910).

<sup>52</sup> AY, 15 (Nov. 1916): 1-2; Edgar M. ROBINSON, "The Forward Step Meeting for Older Boys," typed MS, n.d., E.M. Robinson Letters and Statements Box, YHL. Kett's assertion that all forms of boys' work relinquished "any vestiges of pietism" after 1900 obviously does not apply to the YMCA. *Rites*, pp. 222.

<sup>53</sup> Untitled report by Charles W. GILKEY et al., *Messages of the Men and Religion Movement* (New York, 1912), V, p. 150; GOODMAN, "Bible Study by Boys," AB, 2 (1903), p. 26.

the objective rather than the subjective phases of religion" and upon "the virile or masculine type of religious expression".<sup>54</sup> The possibility of a teenage identity crisis fascinated and troubled YMCA character builders. Their response amounted to an inoculation to produce a mild form of the disease and forestall more turbulent or deeper experiences.

Emphasis upon the objective and masculine took varied forms. A few boys' workers tried teaching the Bible in athletic terminology. More significant were the "life questions" courses of the second decade of this century, which treated everyday problems, from the use of profanity and slang to work attitudes, sex, and religion. The goal was to objectify religion and permit some adolescent speculation; yet the courses were not widely popular because the boys occasionally took their pretended intellectual independence seriously. In Newark, according to a conservative observer, "the groups became mere ethical societies..." One "had to be stopped, and that with great difficulty, in order to prevent its exerting a weakening influence on the Christian work in the school."<sup>55</sup> Service activity was easier for adults to channel and hence more common. Older boys taught Bible classes and led gym squads, while in Toronto a group of eleven to fifteen-year-olds set themselves the task of stamping on discarded cigarette butts so young smokers could not retrieve them.<sup>56</sup>

The most important innovation was the Forward Step, which became popular around 1910. Each boy received a card which invited him to check off a pledge: "1. Accept Jesus Christ as my Savior and Leader. 2. Unite with the Church. 3. Teach a Bible class. 4. Give systematically. 5. Do committee work. 6. Read the Bible and pray daily. 7. Give up the habit of...." The first decision remained primary, but now it was part of a series, as boys' workers urged boys who claimed to be Christians to do something specific. The decisions were often hasty and poorly followed up, but they epitomized the YMCA dream of exploiting adolescent religious susceptibility to secure commitments, then turning attention from emotion to matter-of-fact service and cultivation of good habits.<sup>57</sup> Since adolescents were not to taste even a young man's guarded independence, the Forward Step reduced the introspection once so common among older converts to a pallid checklist. It did so the more easily because the YMCA ethos made sustained introspection seem effeminate; real boys must be doers.<sup>58</sup>

In dealing directly with adolescent sexuality, YMCA men tried even harder to avoid arousing the boys. Distraction and sublimation remained their main weapons. Though lectures and personal interviews were com-

<sup>54</sup> E.M. Robinson to C.B. Horton, 5 Aug., 1908, EMR MSS. Cf. George Albert COE, *Education in Religion and Morals* (Chicago, 1904), p. 234.

<sup>55</sup> Francis P. Miller, report, [c. 1915], BWR. See *The Lever*, 14 (June 1909), p. 11; Jeremiah JENKS, *Life Questions of School Boys* (New York, 1912).

<sup>56</sup> *The Elevator*, n.v. (Ap. 1910); AY, 20 (Jan. 1921): 34-37. YMCA's reported only one junior in 33 serving as a leader by 1920-21. YB (1921), p. 217.

<sup>57</sup> Editorial note, AB, 8 (1909), p. 96. See NBWC, Minutes, 9 Nov., 1918, YHL.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. William JAMES, *Psychology: Briefer Course* (New York, 1966), p. 162.

mon, the hope was that one or two sessions would quench a boy's curiosity before he opened Pandora's box. A Canadian manual gave typical advice: "Answer questions frankly, but avoid discussions which are apt to become morbid." Matthew Crackel, a boys' secretary in Cleveland, handled his interviews similarly: "With the average boy the subject is mentioned but once... The boy is given a chance to ask questions and his mind is set at ease."<sup>59</sup> Whether or not their curiosity was satisfied, boys learned not to press adults on touchy issues.

## VII

High-pressure methods survived most fully at camps and conferences. Camps offered a calculated balance of boyish activism by day and serious evangelism at the evening campfire. Efforts built up towards the climactic Sunday evening meeting. This was the scene at Brooklyn's Camp Tuxis: "The boys... are unusually thoughtful and tender. The stars twinkling overhead [and] the sighing of the breeze in the tree tops... tend towards turning the mind of the boy towards the God of nature... A few of the older and more manly boys give their personal testimony and now and then a tear falls unheeded down some cheek. It is the critical hour that settles a boy's destiny..." Secretaries boasted of hard cases who left camp as professing Christians, though some "problem campers" resisted.<sup>60</sup> Once safely home, however, most boys backslid, for camp directors had encouraged confusion between the wind in the trees and the Holy Spirit. As a result, at some camps vespers in the tents replaced campfire crusades; but only slowly and reluctantly did camp directors follow the trend away from emotional pressure tactics.<sup>61</sup>

Older boys' conferences dated from the 1880s, when they had served to forestall teenagers from forming their own associations. Boys' workers concentrated their most intense evangelism there, especially after 1910, as they distinguished more sharply between early and middle adolescence. This distinction was important, for 'Y' men became very leery of encouraging premature adolescent turmoil among younger, boyish boys, but with picked lads aged fifteen and up they still pressed hard for decisions.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YMCA'S OF CANADA, *The Canadian Standard Efficiency Tests: An Outline Programme of Study and Activities for the Four-Fold Development of Canadian Boys*, 7th ed. (n.p., 1915), p. 43; CRACKEL, "Individual Sex Instruction," AY, 2 (1913), p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> Quotations: Harvey SMITH & Irving COBLEIGH, "Some Interesting Things About Camp Tuxis," AB, 3 (1904), p. 121; Erdman HARRIS, in Minott A. OSBORN, ed., *Camp Dudley: The Story of the First Fifty Years* (New York, 1934), p. 122. See also AB, 2 (1903): 68-73.

<sup>61</sup> OSBORN, ed., *Camp Dudley*, pp. 31-33, 58, 121-27; AY, 4 (1915): 97-103; E.M. Robinson to John R. Mott, Robinson to Mott Box, YHL. Early camp converts were mainly twelve to fifteen, often violating strictures against preadolescent conversions. AB, 2 (1903), p. 101; 3 (1904), p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> GIBSON, *Twenty-Five Years*, pp. 28, 41-42, 55-56; ROBINSON, *Early Years*, pp. 44-45, 140; IDEM, "Forward Step," *Association Seminar*, 12 (1903-04), p. 148; *Watchman*, II (1885), p. 141.

High school work, which grew rapidly after 1910, followed a similar course. Each Hi-Y club had an Inner Circle who were to proselyte their peers. High school secretaries tried to tap adolescent concerns, often using evangelistic methods. They ran Find Yourself Campaigns, during which each boy could discuss his life work, as 'Y' men portentously dubbed his choice of occupation. At crusades for clean living, boys pledged to throw their weight "in favor of Clean Speech, Clean Living, and Clean Athletics."<sup>63</sup> Hi-Y sponsored Campaigns of Friendship at which interviewers worked like car salesmen to elicit decisions for Christ. Arthur Cotton, the International Secretary for High School Boys, suggested three minutes to "establish friendly relations"; twelve to "consider problems"; five to "secure definite decision"; and five to record the results. Nonetheless, anxious boys wanted interviews and sometimes came back for seconds.<sup>64</sup>

At high school and older boys' conferences the Forward Step sometimes hit tender spots. For good boys had learned that morality consisted of avoiding bad habits. They were quite ready to condemn classmates for "'mushing' or 'fussing'... in the dark class rooms" at school dances. Smoking, they knew, marked off the "bad" boys; a Canadian boy saw it as evidence of "accompanying habits", adding that "SMOKING IS THE KEY TO IT ALL..."<sup>65</sup> Young church members had their own struggles, especially with masturbation. Thus one boy wrote David Porter: "As I listened to the awful meaning of your words... I seemed to have a trembling all over me. I pray God that it was the exit of a personal sin and habit that I have and that I may let you know soon that I have conquered this and that Jesus is my standard." According to Robinson, other confessions were sometimes too frank to print.<sup>66</sup> Of course, many boys remained untouched. Even at conferences, only half to two-thirds took a Forward Step, and in high school campaigns the majority simply stayed away. Occasionally boys resisted, as in a town in Texas where Arthur N. Cotton found a group known locally as the "Filthy Fifteen" so well entrenched that he got nowhere. Nonetheless, many boys attended YMCA conferences — one out of every eighty-five teenage boys in Canada in 1917.<sup>67</sup> Condemnation of bad habits hit home among adolescents, though by fostering shallow religious experiences and theological vacuity.

<sup>63</sup> NATIONAL BOYS' WORK BOARD OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL OF CANADA, *The Mentors' Manual; A Handbook for Leaders of Trail Ranger Camps and Taxis Squares*, 3rd ed. (n.p., 1923), p. 259. See C.C. Robinson, report, Dec. 1915, BWR; H. Parker LANSDALE, "A Historical Study of YMCA Boys' Work in the United States, 1900-1925" (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1956), pp. 80-88.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur N. COTTON, "A Continuous Campaign of Friendship Among High School Boys," typed MS, [early 1910s], Hi-Y to 1937 Box, YHL.

<sup>65</sup> R.E.C., New York, and C.N., Canada, in IDEM, "Talks to High School Boys and Girls: Suggestions from High School Boys," n.d., in Hi-Y to 1937 Box, YHL.

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous boy in Edgar M. ROBINSON, "Was This an Accident?" AY, 4 (1915), p. 13; ROBINSON, "Forward Step".

<sup>67</sup> Arthur N. COTTON, "Significant Experiences in My Work This Year," [Dec. 1913], BWR; Francis P. Miller, report, Dec. 1915, BWR; AY, 4 (1915), pp. 74-76; 15 (Dec. 1916), pp. 8-9; Canadian National Council of YMCA's Minutes, 24 Jan., 1918, Vol. 48, NC MSS. For a table of resistance, see H.L. MENCKEN, "Adventures of a Y.M.C.A. Lad," in Alistair COOKE, comp., *The Vintage Mencken* (New York, n.d.), pp. 18-25.

## VIII

Clearly YMCA boys' work was fragmented. While the regular programme offered recreation and Bible classes for all ages twelve to eighteen, more intensive evangelizing sought out older boys, and many juniors cheerfully enrolled in some activities while dodging others. Furthermore, the Associations did not cooperate effectively with the churches. In response to these problems, leading YMCA boys' workers tried after 1910 to develop what the Canadian group called a more "*unified programme of work*", usable by church groups to keep boys "loyal" during the "storm and stress period..."<sup>68</sup> YMCA leaders envied the success of the Scout movement, which was outgrowing the junior departments with a portable programme that volunteers could use in the churches. For their part, YMCA organizers tried to outdo Scouting and produce a thoroughly balanced and objective system of character training which nonetheless addressed all the needs of adolescents. The programmes were to be age-graded as well, for YMCA's by the second decade of the twentieth century normally separated early and middle adolescents around age fifteen.<sup>69</sup> Not surprisingly, the effort to fulfill so many goals in one scheme spawned complete regulations.

Taylor Statten was the instigator. While boys' secretary at Toronto, he had looked for a ready-made programme; he found that make-believe Indians, if uncontrolled, turned savages indeed, and that Scouting did not mesh easily with 'Y' work, but from his experiments he gained an enthusiasm for tests and awards. When he became boys' work secretary for Ontario and Quebec in 1911 and for Canada in 1912, he made development of a new programme his major goal. By 1911 a planning committee of YMCA laymen and Sunday school leaders was at work. Upon the advice of an American educational psychologist, Herman H. Horne, they sought a balanced programme by following the Y's old fourfold formula, clustering tests under each of four categories: intellectual, physical, religious, and social. American boys' secretaries set up their own planning committee in 1913, but they followed the Canadian model closely except for changing some names.<sup>70</sup> Before 1920 separate manuals were available for boys twelve to fourteen (Trail Rangers in Canada, Pioneers in the U.S.) and fifteen to seventeen (Tuxis boys in Canada, Comrades in the U.S.). The Canadians called their version Canadian Standard Efficiency Training; the Americans labelled theirs Christian Citizenship Training in an apparent effort to counter the Boy Scouts of America's sometimes strident nationalism. The Canadian plan owed its inception in part to rising currents of nationalism, but the manuals included little specific in-

<sup>68</sup> Italics in original. NATIONAL COUNCIL, *Canadian Standard*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Policy Adopted by NBWC, June 1918, in NBWC Minutes, YHL; AY, 15 (Apr. 1916), p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor STATEN, "The Genesis of the C.S.E.T.," *Canadian Manhood*, n.s., 2 (Feb. 1920), p. 3, 16; (Mar. 1920), p. 4, 14; C.A.M. EDWARDS, *Taylor Statten: A Biography* (Toronto, 1960), pp. 21-49; AY, 18 (Sept. 1919), p. 2-3. Cf. Herman Harrell HORNE, *The Psychological Principles of Education: A Study in the Science of Education* (New York, 1918).



doctrination beyond flag lore and the inevitable celebration of the land's vastness and potential. The theme of service and sacrifice figured prominently, however, for proportionately Canada's bloodletting in the Great War far surpassed the of United States'. Voices spoke from Flanders' Fields in the form of short biographies of Christian, "four-square" young Canadians who "made the supreme sacrifice".<sup>71</sup>

The standardizers upheld formal symmetry as the remedy for adolescent quirkiness. They made much of the only available Scriptural text — "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" — which a U.S. manual interpreted ungracefully as meaning that "Jesus Christ had the most symmetrical life of all the men that have ever lived." The programme planners hoped to even out unbalanced adolescent development and address adolescent problems and "life decisions" within the safe context of fourfold symmetry.<sup>72</sup> Thus for Tuxis boys, sex education came under the intellectual category and the requirements were cautiously impersonal: simply to attend two meetings where the leader read a book on the subject. Trail Rangers, apparently deemed less reliable, were questioned on leaving a "clean trail".<sup>73</sup> Vocational guidance came in as social training; Canadian boys were to attend career talks and, if over fifteen, fill out self-analysis forms. The physical requirements pushed boys to learn a variety of games. Religious requirements were extensive but stuck mostly to actions rather than feelings or beliefs. Trail Rangers won points for attendance at church, Sunday school, and Bible class, for Bible knowledge, daily prayer, and Bible reading, and for participation in a course on church membership. In addition, American boys underwent a more intrusive "spiritual analysis". However these tests did not exhaust the list; there were dozens more, with points for everything from swimming to daily bowel movements.<sup>74</sup>

Ideally, a boy would grow in "efficiency" by working to raise his scores. The year began with an interview at which the leader graded him in every category. "Although the problems dealt with are largely personal ones," a Canadian manual explained, "the purpose of the interview is to centre the boy's attention as much as possible upon objective interests and activities... in order to prevent... morbid and extreme introspection."<sup>75</sup> The point system externalized everything. In an early American version, the scores were plotted on a chart with two axes at right angles

<sup>71</sup> NATIONAL BOYS' WORK BOARD OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL OF CANADA, *The C.S.E.T. Manual for Tuxis Boys...*, 3rd ed. (n.p., 1922), pp. 92-97.

<sup>72</sup> Quotations: Luke 2: 52, in STATTEN, "Genesis," p. 3; [YMCA], *Manual for Leaders, Comrades: A Program of Christian Citizenship Training for Boys Fifteen to Seventeen Years of Age* (New York, 1920), p. 109; NATIONAL COUNCIL, *Canadian Standard*, p. 12.

<sup>73</sup> COMMITTEE ON CANADIAN STANDARD, *Manual for Trail Rangers*, 70. See *ibid.*, pp. 30-31; National Boys' Work Board, *Manual for Tuxis Boys*, pp. 38-41.

<sup>74</sup> Quotation: *Manual for Leaders, Comrades*, p. 58. See *ibid.*, pp. 34-36; COMMITTEE ON CANADIAN STANDARD, *Manual for Trail Rangers*, pp. 38, 46, 55-63, 71-72; NATIONAL BOYS' WORK BOARD, *Manual for Tuxis Boys*, pp. 50-54, 64-72, 80-82.

<sup>75</sup> NATIONAL BOYS WORK BOARD, *Mentor's Manual*, pp. 191-92.

such that the perfectly symmetrical boy was a square. After bringing each boy to a "wholesome discontent" with his misshapen self, the character doctor prescribed remedial activities, the group of boys undertook a year's work centred on the tests, and a second charting session followed.<sup>76</sup>

In the end, the effort to encompass all aspects of adolescent development in one programme and measure the results proved hopelessly cumbersome. Although the C.S.E.T. claimed 13,421 boys in 1919, it did not catch on in Sunday schools and depended almost wholly upon YMCA initiative. Then in 1920 and 1921, financial difficulties forced the National Council to turn responsibility over to the denominational advisory boards and the Religious Education Council of Canada. Many 'Y' men seemed relieved.<sup>77</sup> In the U.S., the C.C.T. programme grew slowly through the second decade of the century mostly within the YMCA, and only flourished after 1920 as local and state Associations designed simplified manuals.<sup>78</sup> The attempt to overmatch Scouting had failed.

## IX

The fate of the standard programmes suggests a guarded verdict on the outcome of YMCA boys' workers' ambitions. When compared to the Boy Scouts of America, the YMCA attracted a higher proportion of boys who were indisputably adolescent. Whereas the median age of Scouts in 1919 was under fourteen the figure for YMCA juniors was fifteen or a bit higher. Many 'Y' boys were in their middle or late teens. From 1916 to 1921, the proportion either in high school or out at work in any given year ranged from 50 to 61 percent.<sup>79</sup> The YCMA spared older boys the indignity of associating with small fry by dividing most groups around age fifteen, and the provision of team sports helped juniors to accept the extension of boyhood with good grace, since young men played these same sports. Basketball, the great game of the YMCA, was much more commonly played by high school than elementary school boys. By com-

<sup>76</sup> Eugene FOSTER, "Announcement Relative to the Forthcoming Program of Christian Citizenship Training for Boys," flyer, 1919, at YHL. See AY, 3 (1914), p. 123; 15 (Feb. 1916), p. 18; (Sept. 1916), p. 3; [YMCA], *Manual for Leaders, Pioneers: A Program of Christian Citizenship Training for Boys Twelve to Fourteen Years of Age* (New York, 1919), pp. 1-92, 265-67.

<sup>77</sup> Ross, *Y.M.C.A. in Canada*, pp. 105-07; National Council of YMCA's of Canada, *Ten Year Policy, 1920-1930*, in NBWC Minutes, YHL; Exec. Comm. of the Canadian National Council of YMCA's, *Minutes, 1919-1921*, vol. 48, NC MSS.

<sup>78</sup> List on A.N. Cotton to W.D. Murray, 21 Oct., 1920, *Boy Scouts-YMCA Relationships Box*, YHL; H.T. Baker to A.N. Cotton, 27 Nov., 1920, BWR.

<sup>79</sup> YB (1916-1921). The median age for a large sample of Scouts in 1919 was 13.8. ATHEARN, *Religious Education*, p. 224. The median age of YMCA juniors in Buffalo in 1905 was 15.2, with 29.7 percent aged 16 and up. AB, 4 (1905), p. 190. In Holyoke, Mass., the mean age was 14.9. AY, 16 (Oct. 1917), p. 13. In 22 rural counties, YMCA boys had a median age of 15.5. H. Paul DOUGLASS, *How Shall Country Youth Be Served? A Study of the "Rural" Work of Certain National Character-Building Agencies* (New York, 1926), p. 69. See also ROTARY CLUB AND YMCA, *Facts Gathered from Trenton's Boy-Life Survey* (Trenton, N.J., [1922]), p. 9.

parison, Scouting's rambles to the woods struck older boys as rather juvenile, the sort of thing that little boys did. Even so, Associations had trouble holding boys aged fifteen through seventeen. In their study of Muncie, Indiana, the Lynds found that Hi-Y was the most successful religious club among high school boys, but lacked prestige compared to fraternities or even school clubs.<sup>80</sup>

YMCA recruitment had real weaknesses, moreover, as the Associations appealed less intensely than Scouting to boys of twelve or thirteen and recruited fewer boys overall. Protestant evangelism and middle-class bias narrowed the YMCA's denominational base. Catholics were much underrepresented. In addition, among the juniors who attended conferences and took Forward Steps, there were relatively few Anglicans compared to Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, for the YMCA ethos appealed primarily to the more evangelical Protestant denominations.<sup>81</sup>

Substantially reducing the significance of membership totals was rapid turnover. Locally, 50 percent renewals represented an achievement. The fact that "membership in most Associations meant a purchase of privileges" cut two ways. Older boys liked the independence they enjoyed as customers, but insofar as they simply paid fees for swimming and basketball their involvement was "calculative" rather than "moral" and hence not intense or lasting.<sup>82</sup> How many boys went further and made some "moral" commitment to YMCA values? Religious involvement was fairly wide but often shallow. The proportion of juniors enrolled for Bible classes rose to 42.7 percent in 1920-21, but those who signed up attended an average of fewer than thirteen sessions. It may have been significant that boys generally scored lowest on the religious tests in the standard programmes. The number of Y boys who were deeply touched religiously was fairly small, as the proportion who made "decisions for Christian life" varied from about 4 to 7 percent per year. Many of those decisions were not lasting either, since, just over a third as many joined a church each year.<sup>83</sup> Very few of the boys formally pledged themselves to Christian

<sup>80</sup> Robert S. & Helen Merrell LYND, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York, 1956), pp. 216-17; Emory S. BOGARDUS, *The City Boy and His Problems: A Survey of Boy Life in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles, 1926), pp. 117-19. On older boys' recreational preferences, see George E. JOHNSON, *Education Through Recreation* (Cleveland, 1916), pp. 39, 57; Edmund S. BRUNNER et al., *American Agricultural Villages* (New York, 1927), p. 215.

<sup>81</sup> In heavily Catholic Holyoke, Mass., 'Y' juniors were 37 percent Catholic. AY, 16 (Oct. 1917), p. 13. At 25 Canadian conferences, only 10.6 percent of the boys were Anglican. National Advisory Committee for Co-operation in Boys' Work, Minutes, 10 May 1917; 7 Jan. 1918, in NBWC Minutes, YHL.

<sup>82</sup> Quotations: FOSTER, ed., *Report*, p. 48; Amitai ETZIONI, *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations: On Power, Involvement, and Their Correlates*, rev. ed. (New York, 1975), p. 10. See also YMCA OF MONTREAL, *Annual Report*, 46 (1896-97): 29; AY, 16 (Feb. 1917), p. 6; 19 (Mar. 1920), p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> AY, 15 (Dec. 1916), p. 7. In 1909-1910, 1919-1920, and 1920-21, the reported percentages of YMCA juniors who professed conversion were 4.7, 4.0, and 6.8 respectively. Some boys phrased decisions in very personal terms, others in clichés. AY, 4 (1915): 11-15; YB (1910), p. 296; (1920), p. 103; (1921), p. 217.

vocations, and of those who did, all but a handful chose YMCA work, indicating that they had not pondered the matter very deeply. Only a very small fraction of YMCA juniors, then, made serious commitments, though veteran boys' secretaries told of boys who returned years later to say the 'Y' had changed their lives.<sup>84</sup>

As befitted the YMCA's crowded programme and the desire of boys' workers to make religion objective, their prize boys displayed a busy earnestness. A secretary described one such paragon: "He is hard as nails and wiry as a cat... and can put boys larger than himself flat on the mats. Saturday morning he teaches a Bible class and Sunday finds him in his Sunday school class... His evenings are spent in study... and when his bed time comes it finds him tired and ready for sure enough sleep. In the morning he starts for school with clear eye, ruddy cheek, and quick step... The Devil has no show with a boy like this." Another lad, a converted "Hebrew", had passed through a crisis. "Before I came in contact with Y.M.C.A. fellows, I was a fellow without a belief, a creed, an object, a purpose, a God. I was all at sea." Now he closed a letter back from college with a tag from Longfellow: "Life is real, life is earnest."<sup>85</sup> Neither boy was remotely typical, but each embodied a version of the YMCA ideal — adolescence tamed and channelled.

Such boys were a distinct minority for many reasons. Hall's portrait of adolescent turbulence was almost certainly exaggerated: many boys were merely diffusely restless. In Rochester, New York, for example, those who quit school to work stayed on average only nine months per job, while William Boyce, a Chicago newspaperman, estimated that his average newsboy lasted only five months.<sup>86</sup> It was unremarkable that many boys who joined the YMCA soon quit. With fees due each year and a programme fragmented among clubs and classes, arrangements encouraged a calculative orientation. We may also speculate that boys chafed at the secretaries' patent offer of a mere simulacrum of independence. Pupils already toed the mark at school, and boys' workers could not offer equivalent rewards for submission. The shallowness of YMCA teaching, compounded by efforts to reduce adolescence to a formula, may likewise have spurred boys to leave. To add to the instability of the junior departments, turnover was high among boys' secretaries because their professional status was still dubious and their working lives hectic; specialization on adolescence had proved no panacea. Departments remained un-

<sup>84</sup> AY, 18 (Apr. 1919), p. 9; 19 (May 1920): 34-36.

<sup>85</sup> H.E. MONTAGUE, "High School Honor Boys," AB, 7 (1908), p. 85; "A College Boy's Letter," AY, 3 (1914): 320-21.

<sup>86</sup> Y men interviewed 1,115 boys. AY, 18 (Apr. 1919), p. 15; William Boyce, undated MS, [c. 1912], Boyce File, Boy Scouts of America, National Headquarters, North Brunswick, N.J. On more recent adolescent quiescence, cf. Daniel OFFER, *The Psychological World of the Teenager: A Study of Normal Adolescent Boys* (New York, 1969), pp. 183-192; Frederick ELKIN & William A. WSTLEY, "The Myth of Adolescent Culture," *American Sociological Review*, 20 (1955): 680-84.

derstaffed and short of volunteers. In consequence, many boys received general directives rather than personal guidance.<sup>87</sup> They were busy, but without the earnestness their mentors wanted. They were sometimes free, but in ways that were trivial; they could practise jump shots or learn the side stroke or simply leave.

<sup>87</sup> ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYED OFFICERS, *Report of Commission on the Boys' Work of the Young Men's Christian Association* (n.p., 1921), pp. 2-3.