

BOYS' SELF- GOVERNING CLUBS

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Boys' self-governing clubs by Winifred Buck

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WINIFRED BUCK

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BY

WINIFRED BUCK

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION

THE original and most famous boys' club was organized nearly twenty-five years ago, and is known to-day as the St. Mark's Place Boys' Club. This organization now owns a large building, which all of its several hundred members have the privilege of using as often as they please. The government of this club is practically entirely in the hands of grown people.

About ten years later an attempt was made in the Tenth Ward of New York City to change the street gangs which infested the neighborhood into small self-governing clubs. These self-governing clubs differed from the St. Mark's Place Club in that they never had more, and rarely as many, as thirty members, who, instead of having the right to enjoy at any time in the afternoon or evening the many privileges of a large building, had only the right to occupy one room, and that at stated intervals.

But it was in the matter of government that these little organizations differed most from their distinguished prototype. While the boys of the

St. Mark's Club had a merely nominal voice in the government of their club, the boys of the transformed gangs managed all their business affairs themselves, in some cases even to the extent of paying completely for the rent of their room. The attendance of a sensible grown person at their meetings of course insured their success, but he or she acted in an advisory capacity only.

These small self-governing clubs eventually became a veritable force in the neighborhood where they were started, and they now fill all available rooms in the settlements, missions, public school buildings, and, unfortunately, Raines Law hotels in this locality, and they have to a very appreciable extent outdistanced the gangs in popularity.

Now, it must be remembered that self-governing clubs only are to be discussed in this book. My justification for assuming this task is the fact that I have had twelve years' experience in managing clubs organized upon the principles just suggested and to be more fully discussed hereafter. During two years of this period I have been "adviser" in a club of boys from eight to twelve years old; during eight years in a club of boys from twelve to fourteen; and during four years in a club of boys from fourteen to sixteen years old. For two years and a half of this period, again, I organized and retained general supervision of first six, and,