

**LETTERS TO
AMERICAN BOYS**

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Letters to American Boys by William H. Carruth

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VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS



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THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENTS

MY DEAR JOE:

As I looked at the top of my head this evening when I came in from the tennis-court I discovered several gray hairs. Therefore I know that I am ripe for giving advice and I shall begin on you. I should not do this if you had not been telling me the other day of some of your difficulties, for volunteer advice is not much more useful than "volunteer" corn. If you don't know what that is, ask some country friend. I knew a solemn clergyman years ago who used to look at the plate which his wife had heaped for him at dinner and say in Websterian tones, "All my life long I have been overwhelmed to potatoes." Most boys, I think, feel that they are overwhelmed to advice. Girls do not seem to suffer from this affliction. Is that because they are all right anyway? Or do the men who have advice to spare not think it worth while to spend it on girls?

You were telling me that you find it hard to feel intimate with your father, to feel toward him as you have been taught that you ought to feel. Now that is a very common complaint. I have had that difficulty myself, and in turn I am sure that my boy has the same trouble. I used to think that I was very wicked because I felt so—felt this lack of affection or cordiality toward my father. But I know that you and John are not wicked, and I believe now that I was not very bad. It is really a practical question, a question

About
helping
boys to
advise

Intimacy
with one's
father

LETTERS TO AMERICAN BOYS

A question of family diplomacy of family diplomacy, and for that very reason we may be able to come to some helpful conclusion about it.

The management of parents It is the question of the management of parents. We hear a good deal of discussion—we older folks do—of the management of children. We have mothers' clubs devoted to this problem, and very funny things they say in them sometimes, and funny people talk in them—people very often who have no children at all. But sometimes I think it would be a good thing to have a convention of children—not too young children, of course—to discuss the management of parents. Did you ever hear what Oliver Wendell Holmes said about education—that we must begin by educating our great-grandparents? We can't very well do that; but it is possible to train our parents if we go at it in the right spirit, aiming to do them good as well as ourselves. **The right spirit** Privately, Joe, I think you had better not show this to any older people because they might think that I am betraying my own side of the case. But this brings out the very trouble—there ought not to be two sides to the matter of the interests of parents and children. If we are to have a convention on the subject, wouldn't it be well to assume that there is no division of interests and to have a convention of parents *and* children?

To get the father's point of view In such a convention, as in all conventions that are to accomplish anything, it would be assumed to begin with that all parties meant well and were willing to be instructed so as to avoid mistakes and serve better the good of all. Now the first step toward learning how to manage a man is to understand him, to get his point of view. I know that your father is trying to be a good father, and I believe that you will admit this, too. But he doesn't seem to have any time left for loving you. He seems to you to be too dreadfully ab-

THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENTS

sorbed in his work, and not to be interested in what you are doing. It seems to you as though he never was like yourself—as though he never was young.

Now, Joe, I am going to tell you a few things about your father that will give you a chance to understand him and to get at him in a way that will do you both good. Joe, your father is only an old boy. There are fellows in Cleveland, where he grew up, who call him "Old Boy" when they meet him. Actual An old boy fact. There are other old boys with gray heads who call him "Joe" to his face, and he calls them "Bill" and "Jack" and what not. They talk to one another, when they meet almost as you and my John do. They joke and tell stories about one another and laugh loud and long; and one day, not long ago, at the Merchants' Outing, they lay on their backs and kicked up their heels at the blue sky and afterward had a friendly game of mumblypeg. Your father does not realize that he is an old man. Day after day ever since he was your age he has gone on feeling like a boy. But he has just gotten into the habit of being staid and sober when you are about. He doesn't mean it, and it would do him good if you could get him out of it. The habit of being staid and sober

I wish you could have been with them that day at the Merchants' Outing. I almost wish that you could call your father "Old Boy," as the other men of his set do. I would much rather hear it than "The Old Man," as some boys call their father. But what I tell you about his feelings is true. Why, Joe, he actually used to gallop round the room on all fours with you on his back, and if you weren't so heavy he would probably do it now if you asked him to. But probably that isn't the best thing to begin with. I would ask mother, I believe, what he used to play when he was a young man—she will know. And then I would ask A youthful heart
Ask about the games he played