

The Idol Grows Up

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CHILDREN are the world's greatest idolizers. Nearly every little boy who has ever donned a baseball cap has worshipped at least one hero in the Baseball Hall of Fame. And what little girl has never watched, starry-eyed, as her favorite actress carried her young imagination into the realms of ecstasy?

Most children do pass through many stages of idol worship. Observing the glamorous, thrilling lives led by famous athletes, TV and movie stars, or story book heroes, youngsters begin to wish they could share in such adventures. In their minds these characters become images of perfection and endless strength, flawless personalities who never make mistakes. These people are adopted as idols.

But idol worship nearly always ends in disappointment. The day finally comes when the lovely star is pictured out of costume and without her stage make-up. Perhaps the athlete's good fortune begins to wane, and he is soon replaced by a new hero. These are disappointments to a child. His image of ethereal perfection is brought sharply down to a very common level.

This type of disappointment is not terribly difficult for a child to accept, and soon it is forgotten. It will pass from his mind, leaving practically no scar—with one exception.

When a child learns to love he has progressed a long step from his childish world; for when love enters into his idolizing, the child has discovered an ideal.

Ideals are pillars of permanence that can be used to fashion a life. Ideals are living, growing things that must constantly become deeper and stronger. Idols with clay feet are quickly discarded, but ideals are clung to and held fast despite the tempests of life.

An ideal may exist in several forms. It may begin as an idol and grow up, matured by love. A boy may idolize his father as he teaches him to ride his bicycle or hold a bat. But as the boy grows up to recognize his father's strength of character, wisdom, and loving willingness to sacrifice for his family, this idol achieves the status of an ideal—a model worthy of imitation.

An ideal might also be a philosophy. The discovery and development of an approach to life, with its contradictions and complexities, is often embodied in an idealistic behavior goal. Or an ideal can be that goal itself, the attainment of a wonderful dream.

Idealism, unlike idol worship, is fully able to withstand challenge and even failure, able to sustain a hurt and try again. It is not easily discarded, and, when it is, leaves a mark that even the sands of time could never obliterate.

Idol worship is part of the world of children; idealism is fully grown. The birth of idealism may be painful, for the world does not deal gently with the idealist who will settle for nothing short of his ideal. But an idealism built on wisdom and nourished by love gives man a goal and a dream. Without these two, life is without purpose.