EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

ARE WE FULFILLING THE FUNDAMENTAL DEMANDS OF A DEMOCRACY?

HERE in America our educational methods are probably more nearly systematized and universally in practice than in any country in the world. Educational opportunities are less discriminating and educational facilities are open to a greater portion of our inhabitants than is the case elsewhere. We have no educated class in America in contradistinction to those to whom education is denied; nor have we ever subscribed to a belief that it is right or safe that a small part of our people should be highly educated and specially trained while the great majority remained in comparative ignorance. We have always insisted that all citizens should have equal opportunity and freedom for the training which we speak of as an education; and so far as it is possible these opportunities do exist for every child, no matter what may be the social standing or material resources of its family.

This freedom of opportunity to attend school which has always existed to a greater extent in America than elsewhere has a natural origin. I wonder how many persons stop to realize that the system of public education existing throughout America is an inevitable and necessary part of the form of government under which we live.

We who are living now almost 150 years after the foundation of this country can realize very imperfectly the conditions surrounding the establishment of the American Republic. At the time when the colonies first became a free and independent nation, there was the beginning of the greatest experiment in government that has ever been known. Every other large nation on earth had a monarchy in form, ruled by a privileged class and in whose government the great mass of the inhabitants had little voice. The founders of this country undertook something new. Basing their belief on the declarations that "all men are created equal" and that governments "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," they undertook to establish a nation where the government should be created by all the people, and should be conducted by representatives chosen by them—a government of the people and by the people, instead of government by a class or a single individual. And by the medium of popular elections in which all citizens could participate they established the means whereby all of the inhabitants came together at regular periods and, each recording his individual views, the policy of the government and those who were to administer it were determined by the majority.

I repeat that this was then an experiment in government. In a government based upon the theory that all men were entitled to an equal voice in the making of the government, such as our forefathers established here, it was inevitable that public education should be one of the first matters of concern and attention.

This was not due solely to the effort to fulfill the declaration that "all men are created equal" and that "all are entitled to equal opportunities." The establishment of public schools and colleges and the affording of their use to every one, had a more practical reason than the mere desire to carry out a noble theory. It was also because the founders of the Republic, in their wisdom, saw that some measure of universal education was necessary, if this nation, the creation of their devoted hearts and minds, was to live and fulfill their splendid purposes.

Remember that they had departed from all then existing forms of government and were starting on an adventurous journey along paths which were new and untried. They had committed themselves to the proposition that government should not exist through the will of a few who subject-

ed the wishes of the masses to their own, but that the only true and just government was that created and conducted by the people themselves. And being practical men they realized that the sort of government which the people would create and conduct would be an accurate reflection of the degree of intelligence and morality possessed by those who made it. Therefore the necessity that the people who were to make the American government should be an intelligent people; therefore the necessity that the means of education should be open to all.

The establishment of the American government was accompanied with considerable uneasiness on the part of many of those instrumental in its creation. And much of this uneasiness centered in the realization that a universal democracy such as our government was to be could not succeed with a low standard of public intelligence. It is surprising to find how often and how earnestly the early American statesmen took occasion to impress the necessity for public education. Washington was one who particularly sought to impress this necessity, and his letters and state papers make frequent reference to it. In his farewell message—that wonderful advice to succeeding generations—he says "Promote, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened."

This same idea has ever since been present in the minds of many of our wisest men; President Garfield said, "Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither justice nor freedom can be permanently maintained." Another prominent American has voiced his views in the statement that "Universal suffrage, without universal education, would be a curse." Since the introduction of democratic government in the world, men of every nation have held the view that the promotion of education is a vital necessity for a proper citizenship. Even the great Napoleon, whom we are apt to regard chiefly as a warrior, said: "Public instruction should be the first object of government."

What I am seeking to impress is that in any form of government where the powers of the government and its policies originate with and are controlled by all of the people, the first concern must be that the people will have the intelligence and training which will enable them to comprehend the purposes of their government and to regulate it in an intelligent and honest manner. To this end it is necessary that opportunities for education be furnished to all who may become voters; and only by schools created and supported by the people, acting through their government, can this be accomplished.

And because public education has this definite purpose, we have standardized our educational system in order that, so far as possible, all our citizens may have equal opportunity of becoming intelligent citizens. But in all this serious and wise purpose which is the reason for public instruction, there seems to me one thing which is most unusual and unfortunate. While we all recognize the fact that the occasion for education is the creation of an intelligent citizenship, when we come to prescribe the subjects to be taught in our schools, we find one of the most neglected of all subjects is citizenship. We furnish public instruction with one of its primary objects as the placing of our people in position to conduct an efficient and honest government, and then fail to teach the practical details of the relation between them and the government which they are to conduct.

I do not mean that you can teach young men and women to be good citizens in the same manner and with the same certainty that you can teach them to spell or write, can teach them mathematics or geology or Latin. There are too many things involved in good citizenship, which are not to be found in any book. It involves the whole

sum of human relations; it comprises not only the relation of the citizen to the government, but his relation to his fellow humans, his relation to his church and to every other activity and relation of his existence. Not only his political life, but his social and his spiritual life as well, are involved in his standing as a citizen. A man who has never been to school may yet be an excellent citizen. And one who has attended the greatest of universities may be a most vicious and unworthy citizen; the very training that he has received may have given him a mental alertness and knowledge that make him a most dangerous and evil member of society. So that citizenship is not a matter of study or school attendance; it comprises the senses of loyalty, courage, honesty, and charity, and all other human emotions.

But it is evidently and undoubtedly true, that no person can truly fulfill the duties which he owes to his government and to his fellow men unless he has some knowledge of the formation and purposes of his government and of its relations to himself and to other men. Of all the human relations that any citizen undergoes, this is the most important—his relation, as an individual, to that powerful authority which we call the government and which he himself has helped to constitute. Have you ever stopped to think at how many points in your daily life your actions are controlled by this authority —whether it be the government of the nation, of the state, or of the county or town? The government says you shall not commit the crimes of robbery or arson or a multitude of other offenses. This probably does not concern you or me greatly because we have no desire to do these things. But the government says you shall contribute so much money each year to maintain the government; or you shall not engage in this profession or business until you have paid a license tax; you shall not run your automobile beyond a certain speed and when you stop it you shall place it in a certain way; if you live in a city, the government says you shall build your residence or place of business of certain material and according to certain plans; the amounts you pay for the conveniences of life—for water, lights, telephones—are regulated by this same authority. Many of these things are trivial. But in the most important things of life, as we live it today, the same is true. The government provides the means of education and its authorities prescribe what shall be studied; it tells you what activities you may not lawfully engage in as a means of livelihood; it determines the manner in which you may convey or devise your property to another; you must conduct your business in a certain way and must report your income, and it determines how much of your income you must surrender for governmental purposes.

The government makes war and calls its citizens to leave their homes and families, to go upon the most dangerous of adventures and to lay down their lives in far parts of the world. It regulates the relations between our country and other countries of the globe, it develops commerce and trade with their consequent reflection in the prosperity and welfare of every humble citizen in the land. All of these things—and thousands more—the government does.

Why, then, is it not of first importance to every citizen that he know something about this government which he has created?

I realize that any true conception of a relation so broad cannot be entirely from books; that the experiences of life alone can teach much of it. But I do believe that much of it can be taught in schools, and I do believe that teaching of the fundamental principles of the relation of the citizen to the government and of the makeup and processes of our various units of government is not only possible but of incalculable benefit in training intelligent and useful citizens.

How can we know whether the government, whether it be the national government, the state government, or the county

government, is honestly and efficiently administered and fulfills the functions of government, unless we know something of how it should be administered and what it is supposed to do?

There will be some of you who will think that my presumption is wrong, and that the average young American citizen now has sufficient information about the processes of government. My observation is to the contrary, and I am constantly surprised by the limited knowledge of these things possessed by young men and women who are just starting out to live lives in which their relation to the government plays so large a part. I believe that this lack of knowledge is a great handicap to them, even though they may not realize it; I believe they would be more useful citizens with greater opportunity for successful lives, if these things had been taught them. It seems to me that the greatest deficiency in our school and college curricula is the failure to provide extensive courses in citizenship. We have, of course, in many schools, some teaching of civil government, political science, and so on; but these are not standardized and are incomplete. This teaching should be extensive and treated as the most important of all subjects. They should begin when the child is old enough to understand and continue until he becomes old enough to assume his duties as a citizen.

But what I have just spoken of is merely the foundation for something even more important. It would be of little benefit for every inhabitant of this country to receive a thorough training in the duties of citizenship, if he then failed to utilize his knowledge by an intelligent and active participation in the affairs of government.

I wish to make it clear that I am not urging every man and woman to seek public office or devote his whole attention to public life. But I do mean that it is of the utmost importance to the country that no man or woman should fail to have an intelligent interest in public affairs and should fail to exercise their powers as citizens in the conduct of the government, and should be taught this as a duty. Nothing is more true than that, in any democracy, the government is a true reflection of the attitude of its citizens toward public affairs. We are responsible for the government, we select those who administer it, we control its policies. If we are indifferent to the public interest, the government is neglectful of the public welfare. We make it whatever it is. Not individually, of course, but collectively, we can make it what we choose. If the authorities of government are selfish and corrupt it is because we have allowed them to become so, and in pursuit of our own self-interest have become forgetful of the public interest. If the government is efficient, honest, looking always to the betterment of the condition of its citizens, it is because it represents a watchful, earnest, and progressive people.

So long as we have a system of government in which all citizens participate, that participation should be intelligent and active. We devote enormous expenditures and the efforts of our country's best minds to upbuilding our system of public education, and then forget that the primary purpose of public education is that through an intelligent citizenship we may make this great democracy an example for all the world. Nothing could be more helpful than that our educational ideals be devoted to the political life of the country.

An unfortunate idea pervades the minds of some people that participation in public affairs is something to be avoided. There is a tendency to turn over all matters of public concern to a class whom we term "politicians" and then to berate them very vigorously for everything we do not like; at the same time standing aloof as if our dignity or character would be injured by any participation on our part in public affairs. The state furnishes the means of education in order that its inhabitants may become better citizens. They furnish a

poor return when, in their selfishness, they refuse to devote any of the training thus received to the welfare of the state.

Is it not plain that men whose minds have been broadened by years of scholastic training, who have gained knowledge by study, are more likely to be fitted for positions of civic leadership? Is government not more likely to be honest, efficient, intelligent, when administered by trained and educated men, who bring to the public service the high ideals of years of school and college training? Education is built upon an ideal —the effort to "develop the best that is in the mind and soul." And we make little use of this idealism in the most important of all our activities—the government.

So accustomed did the American people become at one time to the idea that the administration of government was something to be left to the "practical politicians" and that it was an activity not to be engaged in by men of high ideals or special training, that whenever any one possessing these latter qualifications became active in political life, it was the occasion for great comment —frequently of a most sarcastic kind. He was derided as a "highbrow," as "an intellectual in politics," "an impractical idealist," and like expressions. It was quite an unusual event when those who should be leaders in public life undertook to do so.

This condition, happily, is now gradually passing. We are awakening to the fact that the public welfare is not such a lowly thing as to be unworthy of the talents of our best minds and characters. The greatest factor in this changed conditions is the fact that educational standards in America are becoming higher; our people as a whole are requiring a more intelligent outlook on public affairs; they are realizing that the affairs of government are their own concern. Ignorance is the basis of corrupt and inefficient government, and universal education is dispelling ignorance. The beliefs of the founders of our country are being justified.

The indifference that many citizens have to the affairs of government, has led many to feel that the government is a thing apart from them, something in which they have no interest and to which they often have a feeling of antagonism. Out of this feeling grows distrust of authority, disregard of the law. Forgetting that they, together with their fellow citizens, have created the government and, through their elected representatives, have made the laws, they appear to regard the government as some strange and hostile authority bent upon oppressing and annoying them. Therefore they have no hesitancy or reproach in evading or disobeying the law whenever they are inclined. A better understanding of the purposes of government and a more active interest in it, would go very far toward lessening that disrespect for the law which is so prevalent in this country at this time.

Much of the distaste of the average busy citizen to taking part in public affairs grows from his feeling that what he calls "politics" is a business or vocation apart from his and that the men engaged in it are usually selfish and insincere and frequently dishonest. He regards the whole matter as a tricky and dubious activity. That such a feeling exists is the result solely of our own indifference. I grow quite resentful at the state of mind of those persons who, adopting an attitude of superiority, talk glibly of the dishonesty of politics, and suggest how much too good they are to take part in such affairs. "Politics" is defined in the dictionary as "the branch of civics that treats of the principles of civil government and the conduct of state affairs; the administration of public affairs in the interest of the peace, prosperity, and safety of the state." And I know of no man in America who is so superior that he lowers himself when he takes part in "the administration of public affairs, in the interest of the peace, prosperity, and safety of the state." The public service is not unworthy of any man; the difficulty is that too few men are worthy of it. It is the finest service of all because it is for the benefit of all our fellows.

Every day we see about us men who,

having the advantages of ability, energy, and educational training, pursue industriously throughout their lives the business or profession that they have chosen, but who give none of their talents to the common good. Fitted in every way to be leaders in every moment for the benefit of the community, they devote their lives solely to their own interests. They accumulate fortunes, perhaps; they die and are deemed successful men. By every standard of right thinking their lives are pitiable failures. For they have thrown away their opportunities and have passed through this world leaving it no better for their having lived in it. And that is the highest tribute, the great accomplishment—that every man should be able to say truly that he tried to make life better for those who are to follow him.

You may perhaps think that what I have said bears very remotely upon the subject of education, the subject in which you are interested and some phase of which is supposed to be the subject of this talk. I think not. The training which we call education must have some purpose, some object; and that purpose is that men and women shall be better fitted to play their parts in life.

We must believe also that life has some aim, that we are going somewhere; that nations have ideals and destinies. We cannot believe that mankind is but a species of animal life which reproduces generation after generation, throughout the centuries, having no purpose and adding nothing to its spiritual or social good. Neither can we believe that the only purpose of mankind is, through scientific investigation, to seek out and apply the mysteries of the air and earth and other physical phenomena to the material needs of the race. Educational training having that as its only object would soon find these conducted in a world of anarchy.

Aside from that spiritual development which we associate with and attribute to religious training, the great aim of mankind and of every nation must be the growth of understanding and the betterment of man's relation to man—an understanding of the obligations and duties of the social relation —with the development and establishment, as primary principles of human conduct, of the attributes of charity and tolerance, and —above all—justice.

And progress and development, as it affects the social relation, comes through the orderly processes of established government; comes through the united effort of men acting through the only agency which can express their common purpose. Surely to interest oneself in such a thing should be the first pride of a citizen; and surely, those of you who are to train others can find no nobler purpose than to teach them this duty.

JOHN PAUL

THE JEFFERSON LITERARY SOCIETY BEGINS ITS WORK

AN EDUCATIONAL UNIT IN EIGHTH GRADE ENGLISH

EDITOR'S NOTE:—The student teacher felt the need of a literary society in the eighth grade, but did not wish to suggest its organization herself. At her request two of the College literary societies prepared programs of special interest to the children and invited them. Following the first meeting the children showed much interest, but made no positive request for a society of their own. But the second program brought their need to a consciously expressed stage; "Why can't we have a society in English class?" came spontaneously from all sides. So strong was their purpose that the ensuing steps in the organization of the society came naturally with only a minimum of guidance from the student teacher.

I. *What the Children Did*

A. They decided to organize a literary society.

B. They examined constitutions and books on parliamentary law to find out how to organize.

C. They organized the society by:

1. Electing a temporary chairman and a temporary secretary.