

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## EDUCATIONAL COMMENT

### THE SCHOOL MUST TRAIN GOOD CITIZENS

**I**N HIS last annual report just made to the trustees of Teachers College, Columbia University, Dean James E. Russell presents the tremendous problems facing the public schools of America. He states that the object of public education is no longer a selfish one; its aim is to train good citizens. He believes that the modern boy and girl can no longer be muzzled; that controversial questions of economics, politics, science, and the like can no longer be ignored. The biggest problem in Dean Russell's opinion is to select and prepare materials concerning these modern problems for use in our public schools. He says:

"The schools of today may or may not be better than those of a generation ago, but they are obviously different. Intelligent parents must be impressed with the fact that the school work of their children is very unlike that which they themselves had. Even the casual observer of educational events must be aware that startling changes have taken place in the ideals and practices of public education within the past thirty years. Whatever may have been the professed aim

of the old school, the actual results were to the advantage of the individual in competition with his fellows. But with the coming of public school systems, complete from kindergarten to state university and supported at public expense, it was inevitable that in time the emphasis should shift from individual preferment to social needs. The American public school at present, whatever its virtues or defects, is the measure of public interest in the maintenance of American ideals.

"Good citizenship as an aim in life is nothing new. Patriotism, intelligent devotion to civic welfare, wherever found and at all times, bespeaks an education that is consciously acquired. But good citizenship as a dominant aim of the American public school is something new. For the first time in history, as I see it, a social democracy is attempting to shape the opinions and bias the judgment of on-coming generations. Public opinion, back of school boards, fixes our educational creed and controls all our undertakings. Any other control, even state control except within limits, is inconceivable while we maintain our present ideals of American democracy.

"Recently, in the Oregon case, a decision preserves to parents the right to choose what school they will for the education of their children, provided that nothing be taught inimical to the public welfare. From the viewpoint of the schools, the Tennessee case has a far wider significance than an imaginary conflict between science and religion. The Oregon case turned on the freedom of learning; the Tennessee case questions the freedom of teaching. The issues involved are of vital importance in the future development of public education. But neither of these issues was raised for a hundred years, and neither of them could have been raised until the public became aware that what was actually taught in the schools had some effect on the character and beliefs of the learners. The trend of public opinion in matters educational is part and

parcel of the tendency of the times to shape conduct by legal enactment.

"The acceptance of good citizenship as the dominant aim in public education imposes a severe burden upon teachers who have grown up under conditions hitherto generally prevailing. What is a good citizen? What should he know? What should he do? Reduced to concrete terms, answers to these questions will try the best of our social philosophers. A survey of what knowledge can best be used in daily life may suggest some criteria of excellence in the making of school curricula. They want to know why these things are and what are the facts back of them. The modern school-boy may still be forced to do what his parents did in school, but his education will be got, as theirs was, outside of school hours. The formation of character goes on apace regardless of teachers or schools. The question is, how can school work contribute most to the making of the good citizen?"

"Some would avoid controversial questions. But children who read the newspapers, listen to the radio, participate in political campaigns, and engage in sectarian controversies cannot be muzzled. Some problems of trade and transportation, of capital and labor, of political policy and international relations must be faced in the modern school. I mention these in particular because they are the most perplexing of all the problems that the teacher meets. They cannot be ignored; they must be honestly and impartially treated."

#### DANVILLE, VIRGINIA, ACTIVITIES

Danville, Virginia, famous for its solution of labor problems without appealing to prejudice, without the slightest friction between employers and employees, has passed a large bond issue by a large majority. Superintendent G. L. H. Johnson of Staunton, Virginia, becomes superintendent, and William B. Ittner has been employed and

empowered to give Danville the best school-house architecture in America.—A. E. Winship, in the *Journal of Education*.

#### MISS FINLEY IN VIRGINIA

One of the most active workers of the American Humane Education Society is Miss Blanche Finley, with headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. Through her efforts humane education has been introduced generally into the schools of Richmond and also into many rural schools. Last spring she conducted a large prize poster contest, which stimulated a greater interest than ever before on the part of pupils representing nearly every school in the city. The humane film, "The Bell of Atri," has been shown widely in the schools, and many stereopticon addresses have been given. Miss Finley also often speaks before adult audiences, such as Women's Clubs, Parent Teacher Associations, etc.—*Our Dumb Animals*.

#### THE BOY REMEMBERED!

The outstanding figure at the Dayton trial was the high-school boy who was cross-examined on the witness stand and remembered what his teacher had taught him.—*The New York Times*.

Nearly two-thirds of the entire teaching force in the public schools of Virginia devoted from 6 to 12 weeks during the recent summer vacation to professional study.

All-schools day is an annual event in McPherson County, Kas., attended by thousands of patrons, teachers, and pupils. The program consists of pageants, concerts, fêtes, athletic contests, and musical and dramatic features. It is a real community affair in which city and country people join. The occasion has done much to stimulate interest in the schools of the county.