SHORT ARTICLES

WHAT IS CIVIC EDUCATION?

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MORE is written about the subject of civic education perhaps than any other phase of education. Yet one does not find anywhere a generally accepted definition of the term. What is this civic education? In a National Education Association report on the teaching of community civics, the subject of civic education is made to include practically every phase of the question, how to live. In that sense there is absolutely no distinction between civic education and education in general, and this identification of the term dissipates the problem. Without attempting any specific definition, I shall understand civic education as that which helps to make a man a useful citizen. From the basic meaning of the term it relates itself to the city, and particularly from our standpoint to the city government. But unfortunately most of the civics taught in our elementary schools and high schools and in the universities of the country deals with the state and the nation. The city is an incidental concern, and yet from every standpoint of life and of our education the city is the fundamental phase of government. It is a phase of government with which every individual comes in direct contact. It is the only phase of government in which civic education can be said to deal with the community life. The state is not a community, nor is the nation in any genuine sense of these terms. The state and the nation are merely more or less artificial things compared to the city. *They are merely the over-head charges of the city government.* It is unfortunate that this over-head charge is so excessive and occupies most of our time in education.

If you have ever visited a court where persons are taken in as citizens you have probably been surprised by the formal character of the questions asked by the learned judge. These questions, practically in all cases, relate to the national government, and not to the national government as a living, functioning thing, but as the formally organized thing of our federal constitution. This examination ought to be totally changed and made to deal entirely, or at least to a considerable degree, with the city.

The courses of study that have been outlined by the various committees that have been working on the subject have not dealt with the concrete

¹ Abstract of remarks of Edward A. Fitzpatrick at the meeting of the National Municipal League at Dayton, November 18, 1915.

action of communities, but with the abstract, logical, adult analysis of such things as elements of welfare.

AMERICANIZATION, THE NEW CIVIC CATCHWORD

The favorite catchword of our present efforts in civic education is "Americanization." We must Americanize and we are planning to spend a very great deal of money and effort in Americanizing. Americanize whom? The immigrant! Those who were in attendance at the meeting of urban universities in Cincinnati heard a very convincing analysis of the citizenship of our cities. We were told that there was from 5 to 10 per cent of active interest by the public at one end. At the other end there was from 10 to 20 per cent active interest in government by people who wanted to get something out of it, and there was in between 70 per cent of citizen indifference. If Americanization means anything as a civic movement, which at the present time is its sole meaning, then we ought to Americanize this 70 per cent lump of citizen indifference.

BUREAUS OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Ten years ago to-morrow there was established in New York City the bureau of municipal research, and that movement has extended, as you know, all over the country. It was premised on the proposition that it was an agency for the civic education of adults. Publicity was of its essence, and the reiterated publicity of facts about government was to be the primary means of awakening citizens to a demand for improved public administration. Now that movement is ship-wrecked, and has become largely a private agreement between the board of trustees of the bureau and the city officials in whose office the work was carried on without even letting the public know what was being done; and sometimes a bureau is practically supported by a single individual. Two things will help the municipal research movement: a wider basis of citizen support and a frank taking of the citizenship into its confidence.

CIVIC EDUCATION AND THE COMMON SCHOOL

The great trouble with the whole civic movement is that it has concentrated its efforts on a single instrumentality, the common school. The effort is to make that the instrument of civic education. Fortunately, that is where such a movement must begin, but as a single means it misses the great opportunity. We are told by a competent authority that not very many more than 25 per cent of the children who enter school in this country actually survive the sixth grade. We are told by another student of education that half of the children of the schools leave between the ages of 13 and 15. If this vast mass of children leave the common schools before they get any real civic education, then those interested in civic education ought to look to supplementary means.

CONTINUATION SCHOOLS AS AGENCIES OF CIVIC EDUCATION

One of the most significant of these is the continuation school, particularly as it has been developed in the state of Wisconsin. By the law creating these schools, citizenship is specifically required as a subject of study. There come to these schools our educationally disinherited children. No special courses of study, no technique, no teachers trained to give them adequate conception of citizenship, are now available. Wisconsin is working heroically at the problem. Interest in civic education is here an immediate and pressing duty.

The state of Wisconsin originally required children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen to attend these schools out of the employers' time. At the last session of the legislature this time was extended to seventeen years of age. This is the period of adolescence—what psychologists call the golden age, the age of the deepest emotional impressions. To give direction at this time to the new life energies that will be unleashed is to determine in a very great degree the fundamental welfare of these children—and the welfare of the community in which they live.

COLLEGE AND CIVIC EDUCATION

A group of college professors representing the American Political Science Association told us in so many words that "the large amount of time and emphasis given to the study of such subjects as general political science, comparative government and international law shows that foreign affairs receive more attention than do home affairs." And again: "The function of college instruction in politics is to train for citizenship as well as to train for the professions. In performing this function colleges too frequently confine attention almost exclusively to the theories of the origin of the state and the nature of law and sovereignty, in fact, to a consideration of abstract notions and principles which find scant place in the actual operation of governmental affairs." And finally, that "students of politics like those of other fields have been inclined to philosophize and work out abstract principles rather than to search laboriously the records and activities of society in its myriad and complex operations." They said also that the colleges of the country ought to avail themselves of the many opportunities of service to their communities and that bureaus of governmental reference and research ought to be established. The exact words are: "that the department of political science furnish aid and be in readiness, in equipment and spirit, to render advice to government officials not only in the making and enforcing of laws but also in extending assistance in whatever special fields the instructors in the departments are competently equipped." At least some of the college professors are beginning to realize the social obligations of the university and the immediate opportunity in the field of civic education.

CIVIC EDUCATION AND SCHOOL TEACHERS

An article in one of the English quarterlies made the comment that "the school teachers are the least civic of men." An editorial in *The Survey* recently pointed out certain civic shortcomings of teachers. The opportunity of normal schools and training schools in affecting the large number of people who are going out to teach our schools, does not seem to be realized, except in rare cases, as for example, the work of Dr. E. C. Branson in connection with the Georgia club at the State normal school in Athens, Georgia—a work, by the way, that he is carrying on in his new position at the University of North Carolina.

If a digression may be permitted here, if it be a digression, I should like to say that woman suffrage has absolutely no grounds in its favor except its educational one. The direct participation in government by women would be unquestionably a great and very welcome civic factor. One of its most beneficent results will be the civic education of the vast number of women teachers all over the country to whom is committed the education of our children.

SOME FUNDAMENTALS OF CIVIC EDUCATION

There are a number of things—appreciations or attitudes, if you will—that our present attempts in civic education are not teaching. I should like to name some of these briefly. One is the very simple fact that *there is no progress in mere law-abiding*. The reverence for the constitution and the law as things perfected and complete must be changed. We must recognize both the statute law and constitution merely as instruments in achieving the social welfare. The proper attitude of citizens toward the law is not one of resignation or adoration, but of alert questioning and desire to improve.

Another thing that we do not teach is that *everybody is wise*. There is a bold challenge to American democracy in a motto like that of *Leslie's Weekly*, "Let the thinking people rule." It is merely an expression of the current unbelief in the basic principle of American democracy. There is a Napoleon story that will illustrate this point. Talleyrand in speaking to Napoleon said, "There is somebody wiser than you, Napoleon, and wiser than all your ministers." Napoleon asked, "Who is that?" Talleyrand answered, "Everybody!" Lincoln knew this profound lesson of democracy. His remark that you can fool some of the people all the time and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time, is simply an expression of his faith in fundamental democracy—that in the long run the common judgment of ordinary men is wiser than all the experts that exist.

Another thing that we do not teach is the *actual process* of government as distinct from the formal organization in charters and constitutions. I had received some fairly good instruction in government so far as ordi-

nary school and college instruction went, but when I was placed in a legislature with a school program to put over, I did not recognize any of the text-book processes in the actual processes that I had to deal with. It is this failure to provide this contact with government that is perhaps the fundamental failure of our educational system, but particularly of our universities.

Still another thing we do not really teach is the significance of the vast number of civic agencies in their relation to government both as critical and as co-operative agencies. The wonderful transformation of the chamber of commerce movement in this country is a striking example of the usefulness of these agencies in civic work.

And finally, we do not give an adequate conception of the significance of the court as an agency to aid or hinder the social welfare. This final arbiter of our democratic destinies is treated in terms of a reverent phraseology. The denial of elementary justice in the twentieth century because of fifteenth century precedent never gets into the class-room. The political affiliations of judges are tabooed. Perhaps one of the most essential things in our industrial life is a real understanding of the significance of the courts. Yet no attempt is made to give this in the schools. If education is going to mean anything in an industrial democracy or in a social democracy, our citizens must understand the actual function of the judiciary and its actual operation.

WHY STUDY MUNICIPAL PROBLEMS? ADVANTAGES AS VIEWED FROM THE STUDENT'S STANDPOINT

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DURING the academic year 1914-15 it fell to the present writer's lot to conduct a Saturday class in municipal problems in the University of Southern California. It was essentially a teachers' class, for each year the university schedules a number of Saturday and late afternoon classes for the special convenience of school principals and teachers of Los Angeles and near-by towns.

The class numbered upwards of forty members, of whom fifteen were registered as graduate students. The work of the first semester was devoted in the main to political, economic and administrative aspects of the city, including the examination of many typical charters and a study of the changing forms of city government. The second semester's work was largely in the field of that emerging science called urban sociology.

In the course various methods of instruction were employed. Lectures, required text-books, specially recommended works, extensive collateral