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P. B. Showan
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PART I
INTRODUCTORY

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“No more vital truth was ever uttered than that freedom and free institutions cannot long be maintained by any people who do not understand the nature of their own Government.”

WOODROW WILSON.

“The road to ruin for an ignorant and selfish democracy is far shorter than for any other kind of misgovernment; the fall is greater and the ruin more complete. There is no builder of the common good who builds so nobly and securely as a wise democracy; and there are no hands which destroy so helplessly as the hands of the many.”

Sir HENRY JONES.

CHAPTER I

THE NEED FOR CIVIC INSTRUCTION

THE need for instruction in the principles of citizenship and the rights and obligations of citizens was never more urgent than it is to-day.

Years ago, when the franchise was limited and political parties more or less clearly defined, popular ignorance of civics was deplorable; but to-day, when democracy is complete and fully conscious of its powers, it is essential to our political well-being that citizens understand the nature of our government and their rights and duties as citizens. The approaching disintegration of political parties and the formation of smaller groups in the nation and in Parliament will further accentuate the need for popular civic instruction. Already the belief which sustained our fathers and grandfathers, that democracy itself was the sovereign remedy for social and political ills, no longer sustains us. The present state of eastern Europe shows that democracy is only safe in the hands of an enlightened people, and that adult suffrage may be the prelude to political decay and national downfall.

Education is the main safeguard of democracy; but the success and stability of democratic government depends very largely on those particular aspects of education which seek to encourage and develop:

- (1) the growth of political morality and the community-spirit;
- (2) a sound knowledge of the nature of our government and the rights and duties of citizens;
- (3) a right understanding of the elements of political economy.

It is no longer enough that a citizen should know his duties and rights as a citizen, for, in order to play his part effectively, he must know the elements of economics, because industry and commerce are becoming more and more interwoven with politics. The war has brought this home to us in the strongest light, and the present exhausted state of European nations emphasizes the need for mutual support and international co-operation in economic affairs. Industrial depression in one country affects other countries; and at home unemployment and depression in one branch of industry cause stagnation and depression in another branch—and so the whole tree is weakened. The unhappy state of some of our greater industries and the feeling of helplessness and resentment felt by the masses arise from ignorance of the simpler laws of economics, which have been defied, and in consequence the industries and the whole nation are now suffering.

It is obvious that a knowledge of economics is becoming essential to citizens of every class, and that such teaching must be included in any sound scheme of civic instruction for children or adults. Whether teachers decide to afford the opportunity for this instruction as part of the teaching of geography, as suggested in Part III of this book, or whether they decide to teach the elements of economics as a separate subject, is not of primary importance. It is the general recognition of the urgent need for the inclusion of economic teaching in their schemes of civics which is important¹.

Teachers who have time and opportunity for those

¹ How do “new” subjects become recognized school subjects? Where does the driving power come from? Does the subject become a recognized subject because teachers and educationalists think it worthy and essential—or because outside in the nation there is a general feeling of the need for such teaching?

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branches of social work which enable them to move freely among the working classes and to gain their confidence are struck by the eager demand for enlightenment on economic questions. It is sometimes alleged against adult education that economic and political teaching overburdens the schemes to the detriment of “culture subjects.” But people who take this line of argument often forget that in education—and particularly adult education—demand creates supply. On the whole, the schools of a nation are the reflex of the nation and are generally little better or little worse than the nation itself. A nation which is content to muddle along will have an educational system and schools that muddle along. Enlightened citizens may point out the way; but true national education only arises in response to a desire for culture in the majority of citizens. Therefore, can it not be said that the very demand for civic and economic instruction shown in adult schools not only points to a genuine need for such instruction, but is a silent condemnation of the neglect to afford opportunity for such study in schools?

Further, it must be remembered that youths who leave school often have a voice in deciding matters of national importance in industry, even before they get a vote on political matters. It becomes essential that some well-defined effort should be made in school to teach them the importance of their work, not only as a means of livelihood for themselves, but as a vital factor in the prosperity and welfare of every citizen in the community. However good their intentions and public spirit may be, unless citizens have a reasoned understanding of their obligations to the State and of the elements of economics, they cannot be intelligent citizens. They remain at the mercy of any spurious panacea for social evils.

It is easy for enthusiasts to overstate the part played by national education, and particularly by civic instruction, in general social improvement; and it is courting disappointment to expect too much, for we cannot afford to base our claims for civic instruction in schools *solely* on the ground that it may prove a beneficent social force in the future. “That naïve faith in schooling as a grand panacea for human ills which characterized the age of Bentham and Brougham no longer sustains...nor can we trust implicitly in the diffusion of knowledge, nor even when we accept with Kidd the mighty force of an emotional ideal ‘imposed in all its strength through the young’ can we trust one generation to settle the destiny of the next.”¹ Therefore any scheme of civic instruction worthy of its place in the school curriculum must have other claims. It must have an educational value for school purposes, giving pupils a sound body of useful knowledge and affording them valuable mental training. Otherwise time cannot be found for such teaching in schools, because it is certain that in the present overcrowded state of school curricula some other less valuable subject-matter must give way to make place for civic instruction. The question of how the time is to be found will be treated later. For the present, it is well to ask what attention is being given to civic instruction in the majority of schools to-day. Teachers themselves are the only people who can answer such a question, because the fact that no time is definitely allotted to “civics” or “civic instruction” might convey a wrong impression of the attention given to the subject.

In many schools valuable instruction is being given in this division of culture where no mention of it is made in the timetable; and in others, where time is allotted and “set lessons”

¹ Findlay, *Introduction to Sociology*, Appendix I.

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given, very little real instruction is afforded. It must be recognized that many of the “lessons in civics” given in schools to-day are hopelessly dull and educationally valueless¹. It would be better not to teach the subject at all if it must be dull, for civic instruction which is dull is not only valueless but dangerous. Therefore it is necessary to ensure that the civic instruction in any school complies with a moderate standard of attainment in those aspects of the subject (suitable for school purposes) which are essential to a reasoned understanding of citizenship.

Let us try to define the needs of a young citizen to-day, so that the attention given in school-schemes to these matters may be gauged.

It is not too much to ask that a youth on leaving school shall have received deliberate and systematic instruction in order that he may have:

Firstly—a respect for the institutions of government in the past; and the material and knowledge on which he may be encouraged to build a sound public sentiment;

Secondly—a knowledge of the machinery and structure of English government to-day, and the duties of a citizen in relation to it;

Thirdly—a knowledge of the elements of economic science, such as the laws of supply and demand, the meaning of wealth, capital, production, exchange, and the importance of labour etc.

Lastly, and perhaps most important, his schooling should afford him:

(a) practice in testing the sincerity of human action and

¹ Cf. *British Association Committee on Training in Citizenship* (Section L, Edinburgh, 1921), page 364: “I know one sure way of sickening boys of Civic Duties, and that is to have a lesson called ‘Civics.’ Any teacher of History who is worth anything of course works it in incidentally.” (Opinion from Cheltenham.)

- the accuracy of written evidence, so as to give him training in judgment, observation, and expression¹;
- (b) some training in self-government, before the struggle for existence in the world strangles his altruism and whilst the good of the school is the supreme law.

Although many headmasters may be satisfied with the provision made in their schools for teaching these subjects, many more will have the feeling that great improvement can be made. It must be admitted that in the last few years much more attention has been given to civics than formerly. The claims of the subject begin to be pressed by some teachers, by the Civic Education League, by the British Association Committee on Training in Citizenship, and by other bodies. Many books dealing with the subject have been written and some very helpful school books have recently been published; but on the whole it is fair to say that civic teaching is still very much neglected and often entirely shunned as beyond the purpose of the school or the function of the teacher.

In schools an ignorance of the elementary facts of citizenship is disclosed from time to time by a chance answer or question; and teachers who set a simple test-paper, such as can be found in any good primer of citizenship, will be surprised at the results, unless their experience is different from that of the writer. A chance question asked in the fourth form of a good secondary school first prompted him to suspect that ignorance of the constitution and its working to-day which is undoubtedly prevalent in many

¹ History and geography can afford scientific training. The material examined is the record of human thought and action. Many pupils leave schools to-day without ever having had a "printed lie" pointed out to them; and it is not surprising that they go through life readily accepting as truth any statement they see in print.... "What can't speak, can't lie!" Thinking, as apart from mere reading, must be encouraged at all costs.

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schools. Only one pupil out of a class of thirty knew the meaning of the letters “J.P.” after a man’s name. This, of course, is only a trivial thing, but it was significant. Further questions revealed a blissful ignorance of matter which it had been taken for granted the pupils knew. Thus to them the Cabinet meant “Mr. Lloyd George and his friends,” and although this might easily be mistaken for precocious political insight, it only showed a care-free, honest ignorance of the English Constitution. It is surprising to find that children in primary schools often have clearer ideas on these matters than older pupils in secondary schools, especially as many of the lessons on civics in some schools, where such lessons are given to-day, are often the dullest and driest of lessons. This is true not only in England but also on the Continent, and it arises not so much from bad teaching as from a false conception of the subject. To limit the scope of civic instruction to a mere catalogue of rights and obligations or a description of the structure of government to-day is to court failure. If the duties of citizenship merely consisted in going to the polling-booth once or twice a year to record a vote, then there would be no need for such teaching. Instruction for livelihood—as apart from instruction for living, for life more abundant—would suffice to enable a young citizen not to spoil a ballot paper. As Professor MacCunn pointed out in his *Ethics of Citizenship*:

That a citizen is enabled to vote, or even that he actually records his vote, this is but a beggarly result of the franchise. The very pith and substance of political citizenship would be gone, were its reality to be measured by the occasions, few and far between, upon which the vote is solicited or recorded....The suggestion is on a par with the doctrine of Rousseau that Englishmen are truly free only when they are engaged in electing members of Parliament.

To-day a citizen needs more than a mere knowledge of our

government and its workings, and some attempt must be made to encourage civic ideals and the community-spirit. Whitaker's Almanack, a year-book, a hand-book of civics no longer suffices as text-books, though they may contain all the facts that are necessary for a complete grasp of the *form* of government, and although much valuable work may be based on them as books of reference.

Before the value of history and geography was fully recognized, and before the great improvement which has been effected in the teaching of those subjects in schools had been made, there was some justification for limiting civic instruction to an outline of our constitution and its working. The scant attention and the short time given to history and geography in schools precluded any attention being given to the rise and development of our constitution or the economic aspect of geography. Therefore, as the need of civic instruction was seen in those days, it was thought best to use a "reader" and base lessons in civics upon it—treating them as part of a separate subject, with a distinct subject label¹. There is no doubt that while the lessons were sometimes dull, they served a very useful purpose. They made the best use of the meagre educational facilities which then existed. But the last decade has seen great improvement in educational methods, and nowhere has this been more marked than in the teaching of history and geography². These two subjects undoubtedly afford the

¹ "While heartily desiring to see history better taught, and to see it used to illustrate contemporary politics, I look upon civics as really an easier subject than history, and sufficiently distinct to deserve an independent place in the curriculum." Viscount Bryce, 1894.

² Those who look back and compare the teaching and equipment afforded in schools to-day with that of fifteen years ago will realize that there has been almost a new birth of teaching—a veritable educational Renaissance.