

Thesis
Education for Citizenship
1897.

J. M. Robertson.
Manhattan, Kan.

Education for Citizenship.

With each succeeding re-occurrence of a Presidential Campaign arises the question of qualification for voters. Especially since the last campaign, has the general movement toward securing a more intelligent ballot, assumed a definite shape; as seen in the wide-spread organization of the Good Citizenship Leagues. In our free democratic form of Government, which has shown itself in advance of all other forms; where each individual vote counts, or should count, equal; any advancement or improvement in the methods of the Governmental policy, must of necessity be brought about by a process of education of the individual voters.

The question arises, how is this object to be secured? One method is; to begin with the Public schools. The Public school is established, and maintained at public expense, with the purpose, and

expectation in view, that the student will, in time, repay the Government, in part, for the expense of the education, by making a better class of citizens.

In former centuries, especially the fifteenth, government was only maintained by force of a superior power; The strongest fighter became the dictator; but now "ink" and freedom of thought has supplanted the weapons of war; and we have entered a period of Government by mental powers. It is said that the "moral quality" which distinguishes the man of today from the savage, is the "absence of violence of character". The savage had few wants but when he wanted anything he wanted it "bad," and his animal nature was aroused to deeds of violence in satisfying his desires.

The gradual educational evolution has brought about, to a certain extent, the control of violence and passions, and has made possible a voluntary government "of the people, and by the people, and for the people."

The framers of the "Ordinance of 1787," evidently had the idea of good citizenship

in view, when they said "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good Government and the happiness of mankind; schools, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged;"

As the general moral character of the people, and the conditions they are subject to, tends to dictate what kind of a Government they will be satisfied with, it is very important that the training for citizenship begin early. In our representative form of Government, or, as is too often the case, "misrepresentative form", where each has the privilege of a voice on all questions, it is very essential that each individual have a general knowledge of the principles underlying all government.

He must be possessed with that unselfish aim and intelligent determination, of working for the greatest good to the greatest numbers. In order to accomplish this end, he must possess a knowledge of the extent, power, and national significance of his own Government, together with that of other countries. This broad conception of the

politics of government must have for a basis, General history. And its application to the future citizen should begin with homeopathic doses in the first reader lessons; and should increase, and expand during the Grammar, Highschool, and College courses; into the study of Civil Government, Political Economy, Constitutional Law, Politics, and subjects of Sociology. As is the case at present, but a very small percent of the voters receive a college education, hence "that knowledge which is necessary to a full comprehension of our rights and duties as free citizens," must begin earlier in the school course.

This idea is rapidly materializing, in the last few years, in the adoption of the Patriotic Citizenship text-book series, in many of the common schools, which contain "less-red-tape," and fewer dates; but gives more attention to the causes of historical events, and motives for action; which, in the early training, will tend to create a strong desire and love, for law and order. It is not so important

for us to know, that on a particularly bright, warm sunny Friday afternoon, in 1492, when old Sol had about completed his circle, and was making full preparation to dip himself in the refreshing billows, that a particular man, discovered a particular piece of new land; or, that George Washington, on a certain occasion, refrained from departing from the paths of veracity. But it is important, that we do know, and appreciate the results and the outgrowth of the discovery of this Continent, and that we should know what Washington really did do, and the motives which moved him to perform those acts.

In order for the student to become a useful Citizen, or cast an intelligent ballot on any question of Government, it is necessary that he be acquainted with the workings of the Governmental machinery and know some of the needs of the Country. This can be accomplished only by careful study and forethought.

The General Government is beginning to realize the need of intelligence in its

service, in the wide extension of the Civil Service, until now, only a few thousand Fourth-rate Post Offices, and Consularships remain to gratify the longing desire of the partisan office seeker.

The true citizen should be free from prejudice, either of Country or of Party. He must see both sides of a disputed subject, and make allowance for each. He must recognize in a Nation, an aggregate of individuals, possessing rights and privileges similar to the citizen.

Parties, considered as a union of men of one opinion, are a necessity in a republican form of government. Organization is an American characteristic. It has been said by an English lecturer, that three Americans never meet for the purpose of discussing some subject without, without first electing a President, Vice-President, and Secretary.

As one writer says the principles of Citizenship are few and simple—Common sense, and common honesty—and should be applied to the affairs of

the Nation as well as to the individual. The voter must see that it is the same principle involved, for a Nation, or municipality, to wink at an obligation, or repudiate a debt, the same as for the individual. He must have a clear conscience and the moral ability and backbone to fulfill his convictions.

Americans take the lead among people of all other nations, in the interest and enthusiasm they show for subjects of government. This is probably due to the fact that we have better opportunities, by reason of our greater freedom of thought and speech, to express our approval or disapproval of existing methods. We have not been slow in grasping every new advantage to carry out a more ideal system. With the introduction of the Australian System of secret ballot, a correct count of the ballot is assured, and the selling of votes has consequently become an uncertain transaction. Now, that he has the privilege of knowing

that his vote counts, it only remains to see that the individual has sufficient intelligence to cast his ballot for the best interests of the country and himself.

To this end, the Newspaper, the Secular, teacher, and the Pulpit, must contribute their share.

We must not be content to take the Athenian's advice, "Politics are corrupt my son, therefore enter not into politics;" How long would a representative form of government survive, if all true lovers of liberty would follow this advice? Although we have no doubt of the corruptness of the politics in many cases, that, should be all the more reason for the citizens who realize their duty, and obligation, to enter and take an active hand in righting the wrongs of misrule.

As, "Public Opinion" is the power which makes our laws and carries them out, or, "throws them out," as the case may be; to make better laws, or to have those already on the statutes more fully enforced,

We must make "Public Opinion". What can frame public opinion better, or more quickly, than the wide reaching columns of our Daily and weekly newspapers? In our present age, where we are subject to the climate and influence of "Printer's ink," where the current events, and prominent opinions are whirled broadcast to all parts of the country, within twenty-four hours after their occurrence; there is little need for the citizen to be ignorant of the questions before the people involving principles of government. To vote intelligently, the voter must read the current events, keep posted on the happenings, investigate the causes for himself, and then make his decision according to the evidence brought forth. Our last Presidential Campaign was especially characterized by the enthusiasm created by the wide-spread circulation of campaign literature. Men read and found reasons to sustain their vote. Even the Ladies Sewing Societies found time to discuss the question at issue. It was rightly

named a "Campaign of Education." As Richard T. Olney says, "A college education will not accomplish the end. None of our institutions of learning have a school of politics; none undertake to graduate experts in the art of Governing, or instruct in the science of Statesmanship."

There are too many of our influential men, prominent in business, and social circles, who for fear of running the gauntlet of public sentiment, refrain from taking any part in the Government and, like Pilot, wash their hands, and throw the blame of a neglected opportunity upon some one else; not even taking time to register their desire to vote, let alone being present at the primaries and conventions for the purpose of selecting the proper candidates. But they leave the whole matter of politics to be run by the professional demagogue and political street loafer. As a democratic form of government cannot exist without parties, so a party cannot exist without its politicians. The question for

the devotee of "Good Government" to decide is, will he allow "any old thing" to do, or will he take an active part in securing proper men to represent the people. It is said that "Martin Luther's Reformation was a toy," compared to what might be accomplished if those who are in favor of a code of better morals and citizenship would cooperate for a reform. The prime object should be, "to train citizens, as in training athletes, for a special work. Richard T. Olney says, "treat politics as the honorable vocation that it is, and aim to prepare men for its pursuits, as they do for any other life work, and you can do no greater service, to this, or future generations.

With educational restrictions to undesirable foreigners, and educational qualifications for suffrage, the citizen will more fully understand the privilege and duty devolving upon him in the use of his ballot:-

"A weapon that comes down as still
As snow flakes fall upon the sod;
But executes a freeman's will,
As lightning does the will of God."

T. M. Robertson,

Manhattan, Kan.