

Civics in Public Schools Is Most Alluring Project

Mr. R. B. Wallace of this City Makes a Fine Presentation of the Views of Those who Believe that the Rights and Duties of Citizenship Should be Taught in the Public Schools--A Text Book Already Prescribed for Teachers but not yet Placed in the Hands of the Pupils--Canada Needs the Best Type of Manly Men to Take Charge of the Affairs of the Country, and the School is the Place Where the First Principles Should be Inculcated.

Moncton, N. B., Oct. 15.—One of the most interesting addresses at the Union of Municipalities convention was that by Mr. W. B. Wallace, of Fredericton, on Civics in Public Schools. He said:

While the subject of this discussion is limited to the teaching of Civics in the public schools, it may be found necessary to make it somewhat general in its application.

In prehistoric days, when man led a nomadic life, there was no such thing as a regularly constituted form of government and consequently no such study as Civics was known or needed.

Now, when people are gathered in communities with permanent habitations, established representative governments are the rule. Stable governmental institutions can be secured only when built upon an intelligent understanding and appreciation of their merits by the people.

It may be asked "What is meant by the term Civics? What does it include and wherein lies its importance as a subject of instruction in the schools?"

Science of Civil Government.

The dictionary defines it as "The science of civil government; that department of political science which deals with the rights and duties of citizenship."

This definition is comprehensive. It involves the whole system of Municipal, Provincial and Dominion politics; it has to do with the relations of citizens to each other in the community as individuals, and their relations individually and collectively to the State; it aims to make good citizens by inculcating in the minds of the rising generation a knowledge of the different forms of government and of the correct principles and motives which should govern them in their dealings with each other and with the State. If we are to have morality and integrity in these different spheres of political activity the underlying principles of morality and political integrity must be taught and thoroughly understood by the young people of the present day. The teaching of Civics should have for its object the making of good citizens.

The question may be asked, "What constitutes a good citizen?" Negatively speaking and in a general way we could scarcely classify liars, thieves, perjurers, dissolute persons, perverters of social or political morals, law breakers, slanderers, false witnesses, election personators, grafters, hoodlums and white slaves as good citizens.

Good Type of Citizen.

We may fairly, however, claim that one who promotes peace and good will among his fellows, is honest and honorable in his business and social relations with men and women, whose

aim and endeavor is to make it easy for people to do right and hard to do wrong, who tries to make the world a better and safer place in which to live, who is law abiding and in a general way lives up to the principles of the Golden Rule, is a pretty good type of citizen.

Now we do not mean to say that Civics is the only subject the teaching of which contributes to good citizenship. The teaching of any and all of the subjects in the school course have for their aim the development of the mind and thus laying the foundations of good citizenship.

Civics is not by any means a new school subject. It has been taught to a limited extent—very limited in most instances—in the past chiefly incidentally in connection with other subjects of the school course, as history, geography, etc.

Scientists, linguists, mathematicians, historians and other specialists have championed their specialties and have succeeded in obtaining the recognition of the state in the school system which their importance demands. The teaching of each of these subjects involves indirectly the knowledge of Civics.

Failure to give Civics greater attention in the past was probably owing to lack of knowledge concerning it on the part of teachers, due, no doubt, to there being no prescribed text on the subject; also because teachers, desirous of having their pupils make a good standing in the various competitive departmental examinations, felt that their time was more profitably occupied in preparing them in the subjects exclusively required in those tests.

Text Book on Civics.

More prominence has been given to the teaching of Civics by the recent action of the Board of Education in prescribing a text-book on it for the use and guidance of teachers, and in making it a requirement in the examinations of teachers. While the text is prescribed for teachers only, much better results will be obtained from the teaching of the subject with the text in the hands of the pupils. Teachers, however, are not yet allowed by the school regulations to insist that pupils provide themselves with the text.

This Canada, of which we form a part has never had more need of a robust citizenship, of men of rugged, moral and political integrity than she has at the present time. We are growing at a marvelous rate, and our country is already feeling the responsibilities of nationhood. Immigrants to the number of 400,000 a year are pouring in upon us, many of them from countries where might is right and where argument is emphasized by the dictum and the gun. We surely need the best type of a manly man to have charge of the affairs of the country in these important stages of development.

The struggles for religious and political freedom and equality in the early days of the history of Canada should be made much of and the character of the men who fought and won these inestimable privileges should be held up for emulation. Constitutions and forms of government may be the most perfect in principle that can be devised, but they are not worth the paper on which they are written unless their administration is in the hands of men of honor, honesty and ability.

Teach Submission to Authority.

One of the first things to be learned by the school boy or girl is the recognition of and submission to properly constituted authority, as well as of the rights and privileges of the members of the school. Their relation to each other. It is here probably the first lesson that the selfish desires of the individual must be subordinated to the good of the school as a whole, and that in life, in the initial stages, there must be give and take. The boy or girl who does not learn these primary lessons will find sooner or later in life that they have to be learned at a much greater sacrifice of personal feeling.

The contents of the text book should be pretty thoroughly mastered before the eighth grade is completed. The text treats in an elementary way of Municipal, Provincial and Dominion government, the sources of revenue, election to these bodies, law, education, the various branches of the public service, kinds of government, tariffs, sources of revenue, banks, and many other things.

Civics taught as an abstract subject would probably be found to be dry and uninteresting. It may be made attractive and interesting by taking up the various topics in connection with local events. Annual and special school meetings are held in the rural districts each year. There is much lack of knowledge on the part of ratepayers in many districts as to the methods of properly conducting the business of these meetings. The teacher who is supposed to have some knowledge of these things might qualify the future ratepayers of the district for such duties by holding once or twice a year a mimic school meeting, the pupils acting for the time being as the voters. They would thus learn by actually doing. Incidentally the boys would learn how to preside when necessary at a public meeting. There

are known instances of communities where it would be difficult and in some cases impossible to find a man who could preside with any degree of efficiency at such a meeting.

Hold Elections in Schools.

Again, municipal elections are held usually annually in the cities and towns, and semi-annually in rural districts. An election might be held in the school, the teacher directing proceedings as to filling nomination papers and conducting the election. A similar course could be taken in the matter of provincial and Dominion elections, although considerable discretion would have to be used by the teacher in dealing with these matters in a non-partisan way. This means would not fail to interest and instruct the pupils in the duties of citizens, and would also be of great value to the teacher.

Such things as the maintenance of schools, the paving of streets, laying of water and sewerage services, the fire brigade, the uniformed patrolman on the streets in cities and towns, the building of roads and bridges in country districts suggest lessons on taxation, how taxes are levied and assessed, and the necessity for and benefits derived therefrom. It may be shown the pupils that taxes paid for legitimate purposes such as the above and many other necessary things, confer a benefit not only on the community at large, but that they bring a direct benefit to the individual taxpayer. The money spent on education contributes to the development of the intelligence of the people and makes a community a better and a safer place in which to live. The money expended for fire and police protection and other public services contribute largely to the protection of life and property and to the comfort of the people in general. The pupils may be led to see the beneficence of our systems of taxation by observing that the burdens of the poorer are being borne by the richer, and that taxes are in principle levied entirely according to the amount of benefit by the individual taxpayer, but to a certain extent according to the ability to pay. Thus the strong are made to help to bear the burdens of the weak, which is as it should be, better understanding of the needs and advantages of our system of taxation would in all probability lessen the burdens of the poor and the rich, and known as the tax collector, who should be perhaps regarded more in the light of a benefactor than a criminal whose duty it is to extort money unjustly.

Introduce Matters Relating to Commercial Life.

Incidentally, matters relating to commercial life would be introduced. Perhaps even many adults may not know that a cheque often is endorsed and presented to the bank for payment is marked "paid" by the bank and then returned to the maker or issuer. If they did it would prevent many attempts to raise cheques, or to obtain payment a second time for services that have already been paid for by cheque. A case is known of a teacher who "raised" the cheque for provincial grant, two cents. It passed through the bank without detection but was later discovered at the office from which it was issued. It was apparently so small a matter that her attention was not called to it. Her next effort in that direction was to "raise" her cheque ten dollars, which mistake also passed through several banks without detection. It also was discovered on being returned to the issuing office, and the result was that teacher did not longer continue in the profession. I merely mention this as a concrete case. I have no doubt there are thousands of such cases in all the parts of the country.

There are known instances of application having been made for the payment of claims which had already been paid by cheque, the applicants claiming that they had not received their cheques. On being reminded that their cheques are on file in the office bearing their endorsement, nothing more is heard of their claims. These crimes and attempt at crime might be prevented did the would-be criminals know of the almost certainty of detection of their frauds. "Prevention is better than cure." There is no doubt that many people who are supposed to be honest are so only on account of the fear of being caught. The motive is not a high one, but anything which prevents crime is worth while.

Much stress should be placed on the benefits accruing from responsible representative government. The history of the struggle for this could be used to show the value of political freedom which many times we value too lightly, was obtained at a great sacrifice on the part of those who wrested this concession from the aristocracy. The sterling qualities which made the men great who have been instrumental in obtaining for us this boon should be held up for emulation.

The Sanctity of the Ballot.

The sanctity and secrecy of the ballot ought to be thoroughly instilled into the minds of the young and rising generation. They should be taught to regard the franchise as a priceless thing not to be used for selfish or mercenary purposes. They should grow up with the idea firmly imbedded in their minds that no man has any right to use improper influences to obtain their votes, either by coercion or

by the offer of pecuniary rewards. The briber and the grafter should be regarded as criminals, as indeed they are by laws of the land, and they should be treated as such. The political healer should be held up to the contempt of all right thinking people.

There is no lacking the evidences that many of the laws of the land relating to criminals, moral reforms, electoral corruption, etc., are not held in that respect which would seem to be necessary for their proper enforcement. Easily within the men-

ory of those here today, persons charged with the gravest of crimes have, it is believed, through sympathy, personal or political or other influence, escaped the penalty of their misdeeds.

There are instances of communities and of individual properties being destroyed by fire where the people from the surrounding country have driven to the scene of the fire with their teams, and have deliberately stolen and hauled away the goods which a

(Continued on Page 3.)

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