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THE STATE AND EDUCATION.

The vexed questions regarding the true function of Government in the matter of popular culture are still *sub judice* in one form or another. Popular education, it is generally admitted, comes within the scope of intelligent legislation. The welfare of any nation, even in the primary matters of law and order, depends so much upon the instruction of the masses, that no one doubts the propriety of state intervention on the subject. Especially in a free country like ours, where the franchise is practically universal, it appears to be of paramount importance that the masses shall at all events be equipped with the necessary means of gaining sound knowledge, and, with it, the opportunity of gauging their individual responsibility. The problem of educating the people is one which is not to be shirked by statesmanship. It is not necessary to go all the way with the deceased "philosopher of Chelsea" in stating the question thus: "Given a world of knaves and fools, to make honest and intelligent communities." Evidently, however, where the constitution is eminently democratic in character, it is above all things essential that the electorate shall have the means of self-instruction within its reach. We have the poor always with us, and unless it be in contemplation to keep them in practical serfdom, or what is worse, to drive them by the spur of self-interest to the polls in herds, the state must place the facilities for self-improvement within their reach. The same fiat which has declared them constituent members of the body politic, carries with it an obligation to place within the grasp of all the chance of becoming intelligent, as well as nominal, citizens. Either the privilege of voting should have been withheld from the masses—and as it cannot now be withdrawn there is no need for discussing the alternative—or the Government, even for its own sake, was at once bound to do its part in their elevation. To most of us it appears clear that the widening of the electoral basis strengthens the entire national fabric. The state is no longer a congeries of insignificant human atoms ruled by an autocrat or an oligarchy of privileged beings, but a corporate organism in which each toiler, either with head or hand, contributes his part, lofty or lowly, to the vitality of the whole. The *laudator temporis acti* forgets that while the result of a caste system of government may pass muster in historical perspective, it will not bear inspection beneath the surface. It is unquestionably better that the people should rule, even blindly and mistakenly at times, rather than that their concerns should be attended to by even the *élite* of the cultured class without their intelligent concurrence. So far everybody is, at all events in Canada, perfectly agreed.

If, then, the franchise be conferred thus broadly, as it is in England, in Canada, and in the United States, does not the necessary corollary follow that the State is bound to "level up" its citizens by placing the means of intellectual and moral elevation within their reach? In America we had all thought the question had been definitively settled; but it would appear, from a paper read before a Nebraska Teachers' Convention, to be found in the March number of the *Popular Science Monthly*, that there is still room for debate upon it. The writer complains, perhaps with some show of plausibility, that there is a tendency in America to enlarge the sphere of government unduly. He urges that before any state enterprize can be justified, "it must be shown, first, that the thing to be done is necessary either for the maintenance of its own existence or for the protection of persons and property," and then that the state can effect the purpose better than it can be effected by voluntary effort.

Clearly, however, if the education of the people, whether elementary or special, be found essential, not so much to the bare existence but to the progress of a nation, the second inquiry is irrelevant, because so soon as the duty is admitted it becomes imperative. The argument that the municipalities need not organize a police force, since the instinct of self-protection will secure life and property by combination, even the writer of this paper would reject without consideration even for a moment. He would answer, however—in fact, he does so in advance—that it is not so much state education, in this modest form, that he objects to, as the teaching of any branches of learning which will facilitate the technical instruction of the physician and the lawyer. Now, apart from the fact that it is of supreme importance to have trustworthy doctors and lawyers, as far as education can make them so, the crucial question remains, what is the real motive for state education at all? Surely to elevate each man in his social sphere, and make him a better citizen. To secure this object, you must provide, in an ascending scale, facilities for education, for all classes. A man destined to be a day-laborer, with the prospect of rising some day to the dignity of a city alderman, would probably need little more than the three R's. With these his equipment, so far as the government can help him, is complete. In point of fact, he would not thank it for carrying him any farther. He can read and store his mind, he can make estimates, and add up columns of figures, and put on paper what he requires to put there for the purposes either of friendship or business. The whole field of English literature, in all its varied richness, lies open to him, should his inclinations lead him in that direction. The Government has surrendered to his keeping a key to the temple of knowledge with which he may enter at will, and go in and out, and find intellectual pasture.

Now why should these advantages be given to the lower classes alone? If the state gives one man the means by which he can educate himself, why should not the strata above be raised also by governmental co-operation? Nobody proposes that the state shall educate professionally; all that is asked is that what is admittedly necessary for all citizens should be conceded also to those who may rise to be leaders of men. In a new country it is not elementary but superior education which needs encouragement, more especially those branches which, at a superficial glance, seem less practical than others. It cannot be too widely proclaimed that study, whether of living or dead languages—no literature is dead—of science or philosophy, is, without invaluable practical use, not merely disciplinary but pointed and direct. The object of education is not cramming, but the formation of character and of an intellectual habit. Whether a man prefer mathematics, physics, natural science, or *litteras humaniores*, is of no special importance to the world—or whether he design ultimately to avail himself of the knowledge he has gained for professional purposes. The great point of supreme importance to society is that he has been enabled to secure a liberal education, assisted by the intelligent liberality of government. In his inaugural address at St. Andrew's University Mr. John Stuart Mill, who certainly did not imagine he was unfaithful to the principle of *laissez faire* in any degree, refers to one aspect of the educational question which once again cropped up in the Ontario Legislature the other day. "Whether we should be taught classics or the sciences," he said, "seems to me, I confess, very like a dispute whether painters should cultivate drawing or coloring, or, to use a more homely illustration, whether a tailor should make coats or trousers. I can only reply to the question,