

Education and Citizenship

An Interesting Discussion of a Timely Topic by one of America's
Leading Educators

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OREGON spends \$85,000,000 annually on automobiles; such is the statement of the secretary of the Automobile Dealers Association, based on reliable figures.

This is a fact of the first magnitude in the painful problem of taxes in general, and of school taxes in particular. For the total tax bill of the state for all purposes, national, state and local, is \$15,000,000 less than the automobile bill; and the total cost of public schools, including the state institutions of higher learning, is much less than one fifth, perhaps less than one sixth, of the automobile bill.

Thus the great commonwealth of Oregon, consisting of you and me and all of us, in spending a five dollar bill on schools and automobiles, allots four dollars and seventeen cents to cars and eighty-three cents to education. Add to this the fact that the whole United States spends twice as much for tobacco and soft drinks as it does for all kinds of schools. What is the sense in talking about excessive cost of schools in the face of these hard and undeniable facts?

We have money enough, as a total society, to buy luxuries galore: if we really want anything we get it. The final question is found in Emerson's cogent phrase: "What wilt thou have?" quoth God; "Pay for it and take it!"

The modern state will take what it needs from its members and of its members: let us get this clear and hard in our minds, especially when we talk of laws and the constitution. Governments have always seized the very bodies and lives of their subjects when war called. The modern democratic state hesitates as little in the final pinch as the veriest autocracy: how long is it since our own government took possession of the bodies and souls of seven millions of its most dynamic members, the young males, and sent two millions of them to a far-off foreign soil to fight and if need be die? The school is the training camp of citizenship as truly as Camp Lewis or Camp Dix was a training camp for soldiership: the modern democratic state, and ours as well as any other, will do whatsoever it judges to be right and necessary with its children, and with all its children: and ultimately no constitution will bar it.

Education is the one essential industry of democracy; and democracy will either pay the full price in cash and devotion, or it will come to ruin. Would to God that we in America could get out of our heads the imbecile conceit that "we are the people" or that God has guaranteed our future; and get into our heads and hearts the relentless truth that nationally we shall reap what we

sow; that if we aspire to reap national power and beauty, freedom, humanity, peace, true prosperity,—then we must plough and harrow and sow with all diligence. Eternal vigilance is still the price of liberty. Have we already slept on post until the enemy has got within our lines?

But education for democracy must be democratic education. There is nothing in the soil or air of the region between Canada and Mexico that will cause wheat to grow from tares, or anything to thrive without intelligent and industrious tillage. During the war we had to copy from those masters of war policy, the Prussians: now let us hasten back to the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights!

To argue against the so-called, and really miss-called "Compulsory Education" measure on constitutional grounds is at best questionable, and possibly hazardous: for when a genuine emergency arises touching the education of future citizens, we can permit no impediment

to the full rights of the sovereign state. The rights of parents are sacred, indeed, in a sense more sacred than the rights of the state. Yet the state unhesitatingly seizes the persons of children out of the hands of the parents when the state judges the parents incompetent; and it lodges these children in institutions under its own hand or even under the hands of individuals and associations in whom the state has confidence. True the state cannot coerce the conscience or the will of any of its citizens: yet it will whenever it deems necessary coerce the body confiscate the property, and even take the life of any of its members.

So much for the power of the state: but what of its duties and obligations,—for these are in the long run infinitely more important than its powers. One of the first of the duties, and one of the most difficult of the tasks of the democratic state, is to safeguard the rights of minorities. Democracy is notoriously weak at this point, and every friend of democracy would fain see her wiser and stronger. Nearly a hundred years ago that shrewd French observer, DeTocqueville, pointed out in trenchant style what he called the tyranny of the majority: and it is doubtful if the America of today, grown to such vast proportions, with such immense powers and

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