

CIVIL GOVERNMENT.
by L. H. Chicquette.

Anyone calling himself an American citizen and not being thoroughly conversant with the form and aim of our government, is lacking in one of the fundamental principles of patriotism.

In the ignorance of the mass of the people of the structure and aim of our Government lies the only danger to the power which they exercise and the welfare of our free institutions.

Of course there is no one here who will deny that the study of the principles of political science is a necessary part of a liberal education. But here in the U. S. it is more than that; it is a very necessary part of a common school education.

The danger of entrusting the power of electing their own lawmakers and even determining the fundamental principles of Government to the ignorant is plain and does not fail of illustration in history. So having universal suffrage—for good or evil—there is but one resource for us and that is to educate the masses to govern themselves.

A knowledge of the principles of legal science is more necessary to us than the authorship of some book, the position of the desert of Sahara, the settlement at Jamestown or the Greatest Common Divisor of two or more numbers because the laws of man know as little of mercy as the laws of Nature and ignorance of the law excuses no one. Every day gives us some proof that ignorance of this branch is always dangerous.

There is no need of attempting to make lawyers of our pupils; but a study of the broad and equitable principles of our system of government in the common schools cannot fail to be of evident practical use to all. The fact that so many pass safely through life relying merely on their own sense of what should be is only a proof of the essential justice of our system of jurisprudence and not an argument in favor of slighting the study of civil government at an early age and in a thorough manner.

No one questions the policy of teaching history in school—yet the same, and more and better reasons, can be given for teaching civil government. Politics make history and the constitution is the foundation of our politics. The wonderful prosperity of our country up to 1890 and the severe shock it withstood as well from '61 to '65 proves the stability of our constitution and the value it is to us all personally.

These facts are all self-evident and yet this study has been strangely neglected in the common schools of our country. The reason for this lies mainly in not having a suitable text book in our schools and the teacher's indisposition to teach anything not actually prescribed. All honor to those states that prescribe the study of civil government and to those superintendents of public instruction who insist on its being taught in their schools.

The manner of teaching civil government as suggested by the state manual of Oregon can hardly be improved upon, except that it reserves the study of it for too late a period. If we wait to teach civil government until advanced history is taken up, we will miss the opportunity of helping numbers of pupils, who do not finish their common school education, to a better understanding of something that is of vital interest to them.

Love of country is the result of appreciation, and appreciation is the result of information. Much will depend on the judgment and spirit of the teacher, but the subjects studied also have a very important bearing.

True patriotism, from the American point of view, does not consist in a flourish of trumpets, in shouts of acclaim, in profession of loyalty, nor in national boasting; it is rather the result of a just appreciation of what our country is in its spirit of freedom, its institutions, its laws, its customs, its guarantees, its form of government, its splendid domain, its natural scenery, its status among the nations and its triumphant onward march. The Republic educates primarily for self-preservation. The business of the common schools is first of all to make good citizens. Whether they make great scientists or profound mathematicians or expert linguists is a secondary consideration.

Civil government should be taught as supplementary work in history as soon as that branch is taken up. Commencing by teaching the government of the school district first, as that is the simplest form of government and comes within the lower grade pupil's personal knowledge. The idea of government is also well illustrated by general talks on the subject of family government.

In states where the township is the unit of civil government, the study of that would come next but, in this state, should receive merely incidental notice. The county organization is the next to be taken up. The different offices of, and the manner of administration of affairs of the county should be taught thoroughly and systematically, not as technical facts but as of personal interest to the class in their own county. The state comes now as one of the integral parts of the nation. And at this period of instruction in this branch, the pupil should have advanced to the study of the complete History of the U. S. The principles laid down by the Declaration of Independence, that, "all men are created free and equal, and that taxation without a fair representation is unjust," can be explained in studying the Revolutionary War.

The courts should be thoroughly studied as I believe the judicial branch of our Government is the least understood of all. The common law of England should be given some attention at this period, and a study of the Articles of Confederation is also necessary before the Revolutionary War is finished and the Constitution can be taken up. The study of the Constitution as suggested by the state manual is the best possible plan in teaching this branch and it is well to give civics its much needed place on the program.

If civil government is taught in such a way as to force the student to make inquiries at home, or wherever he can get information, it will cause discussions at home and thus interest parents and spread the much needed knowledge farther than if taught as a mere statement of facts to be crammed.

In the higher grades of the grammar school the teaching should develop patriotic sentiment into patriotic principle. My plan of teaching civics in the grammar grade is this: The class resolves itself into a parliamentary body and discusses, regularly, the points for and against the different governments now existing. Then having decided (as they certainly will) that the Republican form of government is the best. Then the State and U. S. Constitutions are discussed. In these discussions no partisan political discussions should be allowed, as it is certain to cause trouble and as it is at this time a knowledge of the aim and scope of our Government should be understood before making any political affiliations.

I alternate my civics and history classes thus giving more time for preparation in each branch. The fact that Political Government has to do with civics should not be overlooked in the study of this branch.

In my ideal school the pupils, with a high sense of honor, govern themselves, and the teacher is a fellow student, not an arbitrary ruler. This school would be a model of civil government and its pupils would go to their world's work, knowing their own, and acknowledging their fellow citizens' rights. And so would peace and harmony prevail. And in no better place, than school, can self as well as civil government be taught.

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