EDUCATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY

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It seems ungracious to quarrel with a title, but I do not believe that democracy can be defended, unless one adopts the military aphorism that the best defense is a strong offense. That is not a substitution of terms, merely; it runs far beyond and becomes a substitution of ideas, and, in this instance, an absolutely vital substitution. Democracy is a positive idea, not a negative one. Representing as it does, and as by its very nature it must, an ideal rather than a status, any description of its current condition is always disheartening. Any time that you employ anyone to make a survey of democracy the results are gloomy! Its practices are never in accord with its professions, for as practices improve, the ideal leaps yet further ahead. Its eyes must always be fixed forward toward the goal. If they are turned introspectively and self-consciously inward, the result is morbidity. Any idea, such as defense, which implies a fixed position, a static program, an immutable boundary, is therefore wholly inapplicable to democracy. Attempts to defend democracy, consequently, are certain to fail.

No one who looks abroad in the world can fail to observe that faith in democracy has ebbed in the last twenty years. From the days of the slogan, "a world safe for democracy", and the first Russian revolution, which Woodrow Wilson called a "great and heartening" event, there has been not merely a marked recession in confidence in democracy as the best solvent for the world's problems; there are even manifest doubts of its survival. One of the reasons for this change has been the attempt to defend democracy. The totalitarians say it is not efficient; who can answer that charge? The communists say it still allows inequalities of wealth and opportunity; who can deny it? It is urged that the democracies are not well disciplined; a defense on that score is difficult. Democracy is often
not clear and stable in its foreign relations; it has severe domestic tensions; who would insist otherwise? When defensive tactics move from the realm of argument to action, they take forms which limit freedom, supplant justice with safety as an ideal, and so destroy the foundations of that which they seek to defend. In short, once democracy is put on the defensive it is lost; only when it emphasizes its positive aspects, such as freedom and justice, does it justify itself. That must give us our cue; the real subject of this discussion must be the advance toward democracy through education.

Having made that one criticism of the topic, I must, on the other hand, applaud the use of the word "education". For about twenty years now, that word has not been very actively used in connection with citizenship; men have spoken, instead, of "training" for citizenship. The difference between the two words is not accidental; it is very significant. Education looks to wisdom as its product; training seeks to produce skill. With the overthrow of the old formal discipline, there arose a marked skepticism as to whether there was any reality to the concept of a liberal education. Its outcomes were not measurable, its traditional methods were discredited; so it came to be doubted that it existed at all. The new science of psychology was struck with the success of experiments using the conditioned reflex, and entertained the rosy hope that it was a technique of universal validity. Under such circumstances it was natural that emphasis should be put upon skills which are readily identifiable and at least approximately measurable. But skill has two inevitable and inescapable weaknesses as a goal. Its acquisition offers no indication that it will ever be used, for its use depends upon demand, upon attitudes and energies within the individual which are no part of the skill. The second weakness of skill is that it is ethically neutral. It may be used for personal profit and power or for public service. In itself it carries no direction. These weaknesses are the precise outcome of the study of civics, economics and current events over the last twenty years. In the Regents Inquiry study regarding citizenship, the distressing fact emerged that as the students gained information, there was a contemporaneous recession in the impulse to use the knowledge and skill at their command. In contrast, wisdom, whenever attained, functions as inevitably...
as skill operates haphazardly. For wisdom is knowledge organized by oneself into meaningful patterns, controlled by disciplined emotions; it is no mere trick, like skill, but human maturity at its best. The basic technique of training, the conditioned response, has now been shown to be applicable only in limited fields, and the need for philosophical coherence among disparate skills has led to a new emphasis upon "general" education—a word substituted for the word "liberal" lest the retreat from training back toward education be too obvious.

If we are to educate, rather than train, for democracy, the first essential to wisdom is perspective. Perspective is attained by broadening and lengthening experience far beyond the boundaries, either in time or space, of the life span of an individual. It must, therefore, be achieved through vicarious experience; by imaginative processes the experiences of other people who lived before our time, and people in far regions, must be assimilated into our own lives, until they possess the vividness, the completeness, the reality of our own memories—and both must be reflected upon until they are formed by the individual mind into coherent and significant patterns.

If that is the method and the objective, it follows inescapably that remoteness in time and space has no adverse effect upon the relevance of knowledge. The thinking of Plato and Aristotle regarding democracy is as real, as valid, as informing as ever it was; and mere nearness in time does not make the views of lesser minds more important. The history of tyranny is long—even longer than the history of democracy. Its transient character, the manner in which it has always nurtured the seeds of its own destruction make it desirable to follow its record whenever and wherever it has appeared in human history.

It is perspective which reveals the fallacy of the current glib cliché about "living in a new world". The most urgent problem before the world at this moment is the issue of peace or war. Listening to current discussion, one would suspect that the Treaty of Versailles was the first instance when, in Wellington's phrase, "the fruits reaped by the swords of the victors" have been "destroyed by the pens of the statesmen." We should be well advised to remember that Armageddon is a very old word indeed. The problem of peace is as old as man,
and the insistence during the last generation that students of history have been too much concerned with war and peace now bears its fruit in a generation that lacks perspective upon the exigent and terrifying crisis of today. The naive assumption that the war to end war made mankind's experience in the search for peace irrelevant brings a stern retribution.

Perspective is the cure for overexcitement about the pressure of population. We have been overwhelmed with strident arguments about the "haves" and the "have-nots"; now we are hearing about "Lebensraum". Our youth have been all of a dither about "birth control", while the totalitarians have had a reverse interest in enlarging their populations as a basis for proving they are crowded. Yet the theory and practice of birth control were the property of the Egyptians and the Greeks centuries before the Christian era. The pressure of population is as old as man.

Taxes are much in the public mind. Yet descriptions of the situation current in the third century contain most of the "new" features which concern us so deeply today. Evidences of codes based upon principles similar to those of the N.R.A. may be found centuries ago. The foreign exchange stabilization fund technique, one of the most spectacular "developments" of recent years, was practiced by the Bank of England in the eighteenth century.

It is not necessary to insist that history repeats itself; one need not take too literally the old saying, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done, is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun." Nor is one put into the position of believing that the pattern of history is "sealed" or that history reveals "laws" of universal validity. Without going that far, it is nonetheless perfectly evident that the shock and terror of incidents decline if it is realized that the same sort of thing has happened many times before, and that the world has survived. The wisdom of the remark, "This also shall pass away", is profound. On the morrow of the hurricane of last September, hysterical people asserted that "the glory of New England is destroyed", but reading the eye-witness accounts of the disasters of 1869 and 1815 shows that its glory had been impaired before; and in the smiling new spring, when so much has been done to repair the damage, the glory of New England emerges once more.
So, also, it will be helpful to perspective in these days of doubt regarding democracy to realize that democracy is not some fresh and untried invention, that it is a sturdy growth maturing through the centuries, that in Britain and America, at least, its roots have struck deep into the soil. Where there was a mere veneer of democracy, the intense heat of the World War and its aftermath has blistered it and destroyed its finish. Where democracy was grafted onto an alien stock, the graft, in some cases, has parted and the bough withered. But those events, unhappy and unfortunate as they are, do not affect the validity of its principles or the sturdiness of its growth.

If one's perspective is right, the perennial crop of Utopians, every new group of panaceas, and many catastrophic events fall each into its proper niche among transient phenomena, and not infrequently among the trivial.

It is perfectly clear, however, that perspective has not been the objective during the last two decades. The emphasis has been upon knowledge of today, something immediately useful. The social studies have been crowded with the data of the current scene and successive editions of textbooks have tumbled over each other in hot pursuit of events. Ancient history has fallen from favor, and more and more emphasis has been put upon current history, especially American history. Schools have stressed those events in "social" and "economic" history with a direct and obvious bearing upon the issues now before the public. But the material is out of focus. The simple fact is that the distant past is no more dead to youth than the recent past. If an event occurred before his memory began, distance in time need not affect reality. Caesar is no more dead than Woodrow Wilson; good teaching can make one life as real as the other. But there is one vital difference; the teacher can indicate the ultimate outcomes of the policies of Caesar, but no one yet can fully assess the fruits of Wilson's activities. From the teaching standpoint, in the effort to contribute perspective as one of the constituent elements of wisdom, the events which are long past and the ultimate effects of which can fairly be evaluated are much more useful than those recent happenings, the meanings of which belong in the realm of opinion rather than knowledge.
Distance in space has been treated much like distance in time. At the very moment when "artificial ties" with Europe against which Washington warned in the Farewell Address have been bound tightly with steam and motor vessels, airships and airplanes, telephone and radio, and on the morrow of a World War in which America's intervention is held to have been decisive, we are told that foreign languages are unnecessary. So at the moment when every school boy can hear the Pope or Hitler or Mussolini, when foreign language is heard by the citizen to an extent unique not only in our history but any history, the languages, with all their contributions to perspective, have been grossly caricatured as merely "traditional" studies, and as having no "magic"; in short, they have been treated with ridicule. The patent fact is that the voice of Hitler is as near and intimate as that of Rudy Vallee or Jack Benny. With television the dramatic events in the world's affairs will make a yet more direct impact upon daily life, and the need for perspective will become even more acute. In the artificially swift current produced by modern communication, a sense of time and change, a sense of patience and evolution, the absence of finality in any given event become essential resources of the reasoning mind.

The second constituent of wisdom, as a basis for education for democracy, is disciplined emotion—which can be described as a response to values. That ideal is as far as possible from the conditioned reflex; it is as distant as the two poles from the theory that "facts will lead to a conclusion." We may well remind ourselves once more that the Regents Inquiry found no evidence of high correlation between the acquisition of facts and the attainment of citizenlike attitudes. The students who knew what seemed terrifyingly little about community facts, such as the number of churches and newspapers, showed, many of them, a high degree of liberal response, so that the correlation between possession of data and sound response was statistically negligible. No one in his right mind would contend that the man who knows more facts is more likely to vote than the ignorant person. The power of the great political machines has not been built or destroyed by the possession or the absence of "facts" among the voters, but by their gratitude, their personal loyalty to the "boss", and their eager expectation of
benefits to come on the one hand, or their sense of duty on
the other. The Regents Inquiry, to turn again for a moment
to our most recent exhibit, showed, so far as it could be
measured by the instruments available, an actual decline in the
sense of social responsibility as the students progressed through
the grades. It revealed a maturing liberal point of view com-
bined with a falling-off in willingness to do anything to make
that point of view effective in the world about them.

If we want to develop a warm but controlled emotional
response, it seems obvious that we would do well to study
matters into which family and environmental prejudices do not
intrude, making for undisciplined emotional response. If the
matter in hand is wholly detached from current interests and
fixed prejudices, discipline of the emotion is facilitated. If,
for example, a student reads Euripides' *Trojan Women*, he can
feel the poignant situation as Hecuba looked upon the burning
city she loved. The beauty of the language, its appropriateness
to the thought, the depth of feeling are all as real, as moving
as a news dispatch of the fall of Barcelona which I happened to
read on the same day. But the fall of Troy is not encumbered
with the passion and propaganda which color one's view of
the fall of Barcelona. It is the most obvious teaching tech
nique to use materials as little confused with other issues as
possible. Things of the past, properly presented, are as "dis-
coverable", as new, as fresh as speculations upon what Hitler
will do next, or why the American fleet was sent back to the
Pacific. The student can approach them upon an intellectual
plane, make his emotional response, and then test, in the
event, the validity of his judgments of value. Even in the
classics, now so heartily scorned as "remote" and "dead",
students may find, in high relief, the whole gamut of human
passions, the whole range of human feelings. They may find
men grappling with the same urgent problems the world faces
today. They may find ideas as clear and thoughts as noble
as those for which we are longing.

That is not the course we have followed. It is infinitely
significant that we impress upon every coin, down to the penny,
"In God we trust", but I have never seen it carved over the
doorway of a public school. We have thought it necessary to
increase instruction in economics concurrently with banishing
the scriptures from the schoolroom. We have felt it necessary
to pound home "the facts of everyday life", while withdrawing attention from the eternal verities. Indeed, under the dominance of economic determinism, it has been firmly denied that there are any eternal verities. In this "new" world, in this "modern" flux, anything as stable as an eternal verity becomes statistically impossible! Why anyone would expect a healthy emotional response to citizenship in a democracy to develop in that atmosphere is difficult to imagine.

When Bishop Grundtvig and his disciples sought to reawaken Denmark and set it upon a new course, they did not attempt it by showing all the weaknesses and shortcomings of the policy that led to defeat; they did not dwell upon the rape of Schleswig-Holstein, or the loss of two fifths of the land, or economic doctrine, or even social amelioration. Instead, they carried the peasants back to the folk songs, the old legends, the stories of ancient days, to the wisdom of the ages. They sought to inspire these beaten youth, to reawaken courage and the spirit of piety. Christian Kold exclaimed once, "When I am inspired I can speak so that my hearers will remember what I say even beyond this world"! Their aim was much more the discipline of the emotions than "facts" or "information" or knowledge interpreted in such terms. With sure insight they saw that if minds were stimulated, if hearts were warmed, the acquisition of knowledge and the formulation of policy could take care of themselves. The event proved them abundantly right.

The process in America has been the precise reverse. We became afraid of emotion, regarding it all as "sentimental". Even art had to have a "message"; if it was beautiful, it was damned as "prettified"; if it did not show the garbage can, or structural and human dilapidation, it was not "honest". The accent was heavily upon the triumph of ugliness—muckraking on canvas. We have passed through an era of hero smashing. Biographers have tapped youth's idols to show their feet of clay. Some years ago two biographies of Washington appeared almost simultaneously, both devoted to "debunking" the first president. The Constitution was interpreted as the result of an effort of speculators in government bonds to make good their gamble. From Gladstone's magniloquence about that instrument to the modern version of its
provenance, the descent has been from the loftiest ideal to the level of a sordid transaction. How that may win devotion has not yet been shown. The emphasis has been shifted from the triumphs and advances to shortcomings and failures. We hear no more of the rise from the cabin to the presidency, but of the "lost generation", the "tragedy of youth". We hear less and less of the gifts the industrial revolution has brought and more and more of technological unemployment, until fear rather than courage is the emotion aroused. Because of alleged fear of a "sentimental" view of the past, we have interpreted spiritual achievements in materialistic terms. Poetry has been interpreted merely as "response to environment" rather than a profound emotional insight into truth. Determinedly the story of the race, on its social and political side, has been robbed of the sense of victory and achievement; it is all too often interpreted as a record of exploitation and frustration. The only "success story" presently popular in the schools is in the non-ethical or ethically neutral field of science, which with even hand serves the will bent upon constructive effort or destructive purpose.

Democracy, indeed, has been criticized for not giving "security". If one seeks to discipline emotional response for life in a democracy, security is the worst possible ideal. When Wilson asked for a world safe for democracy, Gilbert Chesterton retorted, "Impossible; democracy is a dangerous trade." So it is; if it does not live dangerously—giving its enemies great freedom—it does not live at all. Talk in a world of action is dangerous; to guarantee freedom of expression to thoughts we hate is dangerous. To permit vigorous opposition in a world of blood purges, political assassinations and concentration camps is dangerous. But that course of action, with all its dangers, is the price of democracy. Safety first is an idea corrosive of democracy. Safety is not the goal, but the realization of the dignity of mankind. That requires the pursuit of many ideals; their pursuit is always and inherently hazardous; to set safety above them ends the pursuit before it is fairly started. It is therefore no accident that an age which has made "social security" a fetish, an age which seeks to escape the hazards of life, has not been effective educationally in forwarding the democratic ideal. Democracy is a great
human adventure, and only the adventurous spirit makes it possible. The sense of adventure is an emotional matter, and education must deal constructively with the emotions as well as the intellect.

Wisdom is not easily acquired. "For at the first she will walk with him in crooked ways, and will bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline. . . . If he go astray, she will forsake him, and give him over to his fall." Patience is necessary, but industry even more so. That is the third constituent of wisdom, of which I would speak. Yet the virtue of hard work is selling at a serious discount in the schools. So meanly do we regard our children that one of the commonest assertions is that the disciplines which have long charmed the mind of man are "too hard". They may be made, by uninspired teaching, to seem irrelevant; they may be made distasteful, but they are not too hard. Schools, doubtful of their own programs, schools crowded with students "kept" in school by legal compulsions, schools under political pressure to "pass" students, schools suddenly supersensitive to the psychological injury involved in failure have tended to substitute less arduous and infinitely less significant materials of instruction. It is a self-defeating program if wisdom is the goal. Failure is one of the common, one of the inescapable experiences of life. Learning by industry and forethought to escape it is one of life's great lessons. To short-circuit that lesson by abolishing failure by edict, as has been done in many public school systems in the United States, is to give a false definition of success and to lend an illusion of achievement where none exists. Such a course of action, whatever the motives, must put industry at a discount, just as blaming things on "society" relieves the individual of a sense of personal responsibility. The substitution of data-laden courses for the disciplines, of the motive of gain for the motive of service, of materialism as an explanation of reality for idealism, the desire to be supported by the state instead of supporting the state, all these rot away the incentives to industry.

No one in his right mind wants to abuse the youth of today, but we are in more danger of killing them by mistaken kindness than by overwork. They have been largely freed from economic effort; indeed many avenues for experience in economic
self-reliance are closed to them by law. They are transported to the school house if distances are involved. They are furnished with books and materials that once were hard to acquire. All those things are desirable, but only if, in compensation, it is recognized that they have released time and energy for the use of education. If those gains are frittered away, there is no real gain at all, and kindness becomes betrayal.

Much can be done by the use of modern devices to facilitate instruction. But when the last movie reel is back in its tin box, when the radio is turned off, and all the sugar coating has disappeared, the process of learning remains difficult. Whoever pretends it is easy attempts to cheat. Any procedure which miscalls failure success prevents education. Any refusal to make the boy face ideas because they are harder to grasp than facts results in simply stuffing him instead of educating him. Any pretense that the material can really be "correlated" outside his own mind misleads him.

Learning, the use of the mind, is hard work. It requires industry of a courageous kind. I have seen many a boy who would sweat all summer building roads quail before a book. But books must be faced; and even worse awaits. What is there must be remembered and reflected upon until it is no longer a piece of a book stuck in the mind, but until the ideas have been digested and are an integral part of the mind, just as food well digested becomes part of the body. Admittedly there are some of such feeble mentality that they cannot learn. But there is more danger of mistaking laziness for stupidity than of overworking the feeble mind.

Democracy is the most difficult, the most dangerous form of government. It achieves progress the hardest way, in the belief that the process is as important as the result. That process is the realization of the fullest potentiality of each citizen—not merely his most convenient use by the state but his richest self-realization. To that end the state, in normal times, waits upon his voluntary activity for the solution of its hardest problems. Democracy seeks to fulfill an ancient ideal: "The multitude of the wise is the welfare of the world." That ideal cannot be achieved by training for skills alone, but it may be attained by education for wisdom—through perspective, response to values, and industry.