EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

by

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I AM going to speak about education for democracy. Every few years there develops somehow a new keynote, and public interest tends to crystallize around some particular issue. Recently the defense of democracy has been very much in the public eye, both here and abroad. I suppose the real question before the American people with reference to the European war is whether it is a war for the defense of democracy or whether it is not—whether it represents the last stand of democracy against totalitarian dictatorship. In this country we have in dramatic form the Dies Committee with its extraordinary procession of retired major generals and unretired propagandists — occasionally significant, but more often with the flavor of Gilbert and Sullivan. Last summer we had the World Congress on Education for Democracy, which was held in New York under the leadership of Dean Russell. Indeed, one thing after another has pointed to the significance of this question about the defense of democracy.

I wish to present the thesis that it is impossible to defend democracy unless one adopts the military aphorism that the best defense is an offensive action, because democracy is a positive idea and in no sense a negative idea. Representing as it does, and as by its very nature it must, an ideal rather than a status, any description which is ever given of its current position is always disheartening. You can go back and find

men wringing their hands over the end of democracy as early as the days of Thomas Jefferson, and you can find them wringing their hands ever since. But one of the most marvelous evidences of the strength of the human frame is that so much hand-wringing could go on for a hundred years without more damage to the hand. Any time you employ someone to make a survey of democracy, the result is always very bad because the practices of democracy are never in accord with its professions; as practices improve, the ideal leaps yet further ahead. The eyes of democracy must always be fixed forward on some distant goal. If they are turned introspectively and self-consciously inward, the result is morbidity. Any idea, such as defense, therefore, which implies a fixed position, or a static program, or an immutable boundary, is always and must ever by its very definition be wholly inapplicable to democracy. Consequently, attempts to defend democracy 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 that world-shattering slogan, "a world safe for democracy", from the days of 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 has even arisen a manifest doubt as to the possibility of its survival. One of the reasons for this change has been the attempt to defend democracy. The totalitarians say that democracy is not efficient; who can answer that charge? The communists say that democracy has always

allowed differences in wealth among people; who is there who will rise and deny that charge? It is observed that the democracies are not well disciplined; who will say nay to that? Democracy is often not clear or stable in its foreign relations; it has severe domestic tensions; who would insist otherwise?

When defensive tactics move from the realm of argument into the realm of action, they take forms which limit freedom and supplant justice with safety as an ideal; once you have set safety rather than freedom as your ideal, then democracy itself is destroyed; you have taken the foundations out from under that which you seek to defend. In short, once democracy is put upon the defensive it is lost; only when it emphasizes its positive aspects, such as freedom and justice, can it possibly justify itself. That, therefore, gives us our cue to the subject which I wish to discuss. It is advance toward democracy through education.

We can *educate* for democracy. You may think that I am laying too much emphasis upon the word "educate," but the fact is that for about twenty years in the public schools of America at large men have not been talking about "education" for citizenship; they have used a different word, a word with a different meaning, with implications far different from those of the word "education." They have spoken of "training" for citizenship, and the difference between the word "education" and the word "training" is not at all accidental; it is extremely significant, because education looks to wisdom as its product, whereas training, on the other hand, looks to skill as its event.

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 mensurable, its traditional methods were discredited; so it came to be doubted whether it existed at all. The new science of psychology had come in and was struck with the success of experiments using the conditioned reflex, and psychology entertained for some years the roseate hope that this was a technique of universal validity. Under such circumstances it was natural that emphasis should be put upon skills which are readily identifiable and which are relatively easily measured, rather than upon the nebulous thing called wisdom, which one could scarcely identify and could not measure at all.

But skill has two inevitable and inescapable weaknesses as the objective of schooling. The first of these is that its acquisition offers no guarantee at all that it will ever be used, for its use depends partly upon demand, and also upon attitudes and energies within the individual which are not part of the skill. But there is another reason why skill is not an adequate objective of schooling; it is ethically neutral. It may be used for personal profit, it may be used for personal power, or it may be used for the public service, but in itself skill carries no direction. These two weaknesses, first, that we do not know whether skill will be used at all, and, second, that it carries within itself no direction, are demonstrated by the unsatisfactory outcome of the intensive study of civics, economics, and current events in the schools during the last twenty years.

Two or three years ago the Regents of the

University of the State of New York set up an inquiry to study the effects of education in New York. That great Regents' Inquiry published, among its several volumes, one on the training for citizenship, which I read with care. The distressing fact emerged that the students readily gained information—in that they did well—but as they gained information, there was a contemporaneous recession in the impulse to use the knowledge and skill at their command.

In contrast, wisdom, which is the object of education as distinguished from training for skill, wherever attained, functions as inevitably as skill operates haphazardly. For wisdom is knowledge organized by one's self into meaningful patterns, and 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 by the psychologists themselves to be applicable only in limited fields, and the need for philosophical coherence among disparate skills has led throughout America, in secondary schools and in colleges as well, to a new emphasis upon what is called "general education," a phrase substituted for the words "liberal education" lest the retreat from training and its ideals back toward education and the ideals appropriate to that should be too obvious.

If, then, we are to educate rather than train for democracy, we must find out the essentials of wisdom. The first is perspective. Perspective is attained by broadening and lengthening experience far beyond the boundaries, either in time or space, of the life span of a single individual. Experience, therefore, must be gained

through vicarious adventures. By imaginative processes the experiences of other peoples who lived before our time and peoples in far countries must by assimilated into our own lives, until those vicarious experiences possess the vividness, the completeness, and the reality of our own memories. And then both must be reflected upon until they are formed by the individual mind into coherent and significant patterns.

If that is the method and that is the objective, it follows inescapably that remoteness in time or space has no adverse effect upon the relevance of knowledge. The thinking of Plato and Aristotle with regard to democracy is as real, as valid, and as informing as ever it was; and mere nearness in time or space does not make the views of later and less significant people more valuable. The history of tyranny is long; indeed, the history of tyranny is 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 wherever and whenever 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. Even the nations at war themselves long stood upon the brink and hesitated to unleash the fury of a totalitarian war. Reading the discussions which preceded the declaration of war, one might suppose that the Treaty of Versailles was the first where, in Blücher's phrase, "the fruit reaped by the swords of the army" has been "destroyed by the pens of the ministers." But if

you will go back through history you will find that has been the common experience of the human race. We would be well advised to remember that Armageddon is a very old word even though the British Government did appropriate it in the title, Lord Allenby of Megiddo.

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 today its stern retribution. In a characteristic gesture America promoted the outlawry of war, but the prohibition upon war has had the fate of a domestic prohibition, and temperance in the use of arms has not gone as far as temperance in the use of alcohol. Therefore Napoleon walks again; intense, swift campaigns in the last few years have startled Europe, and England stands once again with her back to the wall. We may be reminded that Napoleon was beaten at Waterloo; people took pains to incarcerate his body on St. Helena, but they took no pains to lay his ghost. Caesarism walks again today, though the Kaiser chops his wood at Doorn. There is significance in the fact that anybody in the United States can tell you, not only the day, but the hour of the Armistice, but probably no one in this room can tell you the moment when peace was proclaimed. It may be that precisely because we saw the end of fighting as the end of the war, it turned out to be an armistice indeed instead of the peace of which men had dreamed.

Perspective, I say, is the cure for many things. It is the cure for overexcitement about the pressure of population. We have been hearing about the "haves" and the "have nots." And who are the "haves" who give? Czechoslovakia must have been a "have," now given to a "have not." Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland must have been "haves," for were they not forced to give to a "have not"? And Denmark, Norway, Belgium and Holland—they must be rich, they must be powerful, they must have all that it means to "have," or else they would not now be overrun in order to provide "Lebensraum."

In our colleges students have been all of a dither for ten years about birth control, while the totalitarians have had a reverse interest in order that they might have more cannon fodder. Yet the theory and the practice of birth control were the property of the Egyptians and the Greeks centuries before the Christian era. The pressure of population is almost as old as man.

Taxes are much in the public mind today. 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., if you can remember back that far in our history, may be found centuries ago. Foreign exchange control, which has been proclaimed as the basis of a "new" international economic order, was skillfully practiced by the Bank of England in the eighteenth century.

It is not necessary for me to insist that history repeats itself; I do 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 am I put in 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 none the less perfectly evident that the shock and terror of incidents decline if it is realized that the same sort of thing has happened to this old world before, and that the world has survived. The wisdom of the remark, which you will find way back in the beginning of the Scriptures, "This also shall pass away," is profound. On the morrow of the 1938 hurricane, we heard that the glory of New England was gone. But in the springtime, when so much of the damage had been repaired, we realized that the same sort of thing had happened before in 1815 and 1869; the splendor and the glory of New England survive.

So, also, it will be helpful in these days of doubt regarding democracy to realize that democracy itself 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 has 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, then 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 of the schools during the last two decades. The emphasis has been put upon knowledge of today, upon knowledge immediately useful. The social studies have been crowded with data of the current scene and successive editions of textbooks have tumbled from the presses in order to keep courses up to date. Ancient history has fallen from favor, and more and more emphasis has been given to current history and particularly to the current history of the United States. Schools have stressed those events, called "social" and "economic" history, which have a direct and obvious bearing upon the problems of today. 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 happened before he was born, it is just as dead to him as one which occurred a hundred or a thousand years ago. We may remind ourselves that students today know nothing of the World War except what they are told, and I say to you that to them Caesar is no more dead, either physically or spiritually, than Woodrow Wilson. Indeed, the ideas of Caesar are right now more in fashion than those of Wilson. Good teaching can make one life as real as the other.

But there is this one vital difference, namely, that the teacher can indicate the ultimate outcome of the policies of Caesar, but no man, however wise, can yet evaluate the outcome of the policies of Woodrow Wilson. 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 be well assessed and fairly evaluated, are often much more useful than those more recent happenings, the meanings of which belong in the realm of speculation rather than of knowledge.

In recent educational emphasis, 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—at the very time when those things have linked us more closely with the old world than ever before, it is held that the teaching of foreign languages is unnecessary. At the very moment when every school boy can hear the voices of the Pope or Mussolini or Hitler or Reynaud, we are told that foreign language is an alien thing which we do not need to know, and yet the voice of Hitler is as near, if not as dear, as the voice of Rudy Vallee or Jack Benny. We must also consider television. The time is coming, and apparently not so far distant, when we will see events in Europe by television, and see them first-hand.

Today there are ten million Americans in daily contact with foreign languages; there are twenty million listeners to foreign language broadcasts; indeed, the American people are the only ones who turn on the radio with the bath and turn it out with the cat. And yet languages, with all their contributions to perspective, have been grossly caricatured as merely "traditional" studies and as having no "magic;" in fact they are treated with ridicule. I shall not argue

further that foreign language gives a perspective upon events abroad that nothing else can give.

There is another important constituent of wisdom as a basis for education for democracy, and that is disciplined emotion. Perspective comes first, then disciplined emotion. I would describe disciplined emotion as a response to values. Such an ideal is as far as possible from the ideal of the conditioned reflex. It is as distant as the two poles from the theory that "facts will lead you to a conclusion." We may well remind ourselves that the great Regents' Inquiry in New York found no evidence of high correlation between the acquisition of facts and the attainment of citizen-like attitudes. The students who knew what seemed to the authors of that inquiry terrifyingly little about the government of their towns or the number of the newspapers published or the number of churches or all the other community facts that they were asked about, were found to have, in marked degree, a liberal response; however, as they acquired facts there was an actual decline in their readiness to do anything about their community problems.

Well, no one in his right mind would contend, if he thought about it for two minutes, that facts would lead a man to vote. We had a very vital election in the city of Providence not long ago in which about one-fifth of the registered voters came out to declare what form of government they wanted for that city. Facts! The papers had piled facts on them, but political parties not being involved, nobody carried them to the polls. The power of the great political machines has not been built or destroyed by the possession of facts or the absence of facts among

the voters, but by those voters' gratitude, by their personal loyalty to the "boss," by their eager expectation of benefits to come, or by their sense of duty.

The Regents' Inquiry, to turn again for a moment to our most recent exhibit—and I want to underline this as much as I can—showed, so far as it could be measured by the instruments available, an actual decline in the sense of social responsibility as the students passed through the grades of the schools of the State of New York. It revealed a maturingly liberal point of view, but a consistently increasing unwillingness to put that point of view into action.

If we want to develop a warm but controlled emotional response, we would do well to study matters into which family and environmental prejudices do not intrude, because those things make for undisciplined emotions. If the matter in hand is wholly detached from current interests and fixed prejudices, then disciplined 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.

> Ah, me! and is it come, the end of all,
> The very crest and summit of my days?
> I go forth from my land, and all its ways
> Are filled with fire! Bear me, O aged feet,
> A little nearer: I must gaze, and greet
> My poor town ere she fall.
> Farewell, farewell!
> O thou whose breath was mighty on the swell
> Of orient winds, my Troy! Even thy name
> Shall soon be taken from thee. Lo, the flame
> Hath thee, and we, thy children pass away
> To slavery . . . God! O God of mercy! . . . Nay

Why call I on the Gods? They know, they know,
My prayers, and would not hear them long ago.
Quick, to the flames! O, in thine agony,
My Troy, mine own, take me to die with thee!

You will not find human passion, you will not find human loyalty any more keen than that. It might have been written about Warsaw or Viipuri or Namsos or Rotterdam in our own time, but it is not distorted by other influences that make those recent tragedies so difficult to evaluate.

Things of the past, in other words, are as "discoverable," they are as new to students, as guessing what Hitler is going to do next, and the student can approach them upon an intellectual plane, he can make his emotional response, and then test, in the event, the validity of his judgment of the values. Thus 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 hunger at the present moment.

But that is not the course that the schools have followed. It is infinitely significant that we impress upon every coin, down to the last penny, "In God we trust." We used to make an exception to that; we left the buffalo nickel without it, but when we placed a "free thinker" on the nickel, right across the bridge of his nose we put "In God we trust"—a kind of emotional compensation for having Jefferson there. Though we impress it on our money, I have looked in vain to find "In God we trust" carved over the door

of any public school in the United States. We have felt it necessary to withdraw the Scriptures from the public schools because they are partisan, while we lay emphasis upon "the facts of everyday life." Attention is no longer given to the eternal verities. Indeed, in this "new" world, in this "modern" flux, anything as stable as an eternal verity is statistically impossible! Why anyone should expect a healthy emotional response to democracy to develop in that atmosphere is difficult for me to imagine.

I spent some of last summer in Denmark, and visited one of the Folk High Schools founded by Bishop Grundtvig. 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 which had led to the defeat of that state; they did not dwell upon the rape of Schleswig-Holstein; they did not dwell upon the loss of two-fifths of the land; they did not dwell upon economic doctrine; and they did not dwell upon social amelioration. They said nothing about how the people were clothed or fed or whether a third of them had too much or a third of them had too little. 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 those beaten youth, they sought to reawaken courage and the spirit of piety. Christian Kold exclaimed on one occasion, "When I am inspired I can speak so that my hearers will remember what I say even beyond this world!" Their aim, in other words, was not to bring the facts of everyday life to the youth of beaten Denmark; it was a disci-

plined emotion which they had as their goal, and they said: if ever you can awaken courage and a judgment of values, then knowledge will take care of itself. If minds are stimulated and hearts are warmed, then the formulation of policy will also take care of itself. The event has proved they were abundantly right. Even though the tide of terror has now rolled over that quiet country, what those schools have accomplished will survive unless they are submerged for more than two generations.

The process in America has been the precise reverse. We have become afraid of emotion; we regard it as "sentimental." Even art has to have a message; if it is beautiful, we damn it as "prettified;" if it does not show the garbage can or structural and human dilapidation, we say it is not "honest." The accent is on the triumph of ugliness, and art is too often 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 by 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 in American life to its shortcomings and its failures. We hear little now of the rise from the cabin to the presidency; we hear in-

stead of the "lost generation" and the "tragedy of youth." We hear less and less of the gifts of the industrial revolution, which has brought the slaves of the lamp and many other slaves to do our bidding, and more and more of technological unemployment, until fear rather than courage is the emotion which we inspire. 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 as a profound emotional insight into eternal verities. Determinedly, the story of the race, on the social and the 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. In fact, the only "success story" currently popular in the public schools is in the field of science, which is non-ethical or ethically neutral, and serves with even hand the will bent upon constructive effort or destructive purpose.

Democracy, itself, has been criticized as not giving "security." If one seeks to discipline emotional response for life in a democracy, I say to you that security is the worst possible ideal. When Woodrow Wilson asked for a world safe for democracy, Gilbert Chesterton came back with the retort, "Impossible; democracy is a dangerous trade." So indeed it is, for if democracy does not live dangerously, giving its enemies the greatest freedom, then democracy does not live at all. Are we not amazed at what goes on in England? Talk, talk, talk, by Lloyd George! Talk, talk, talk, by Bernard Shaw! All in a world of action! It is dangerous to guar-

youth of today, but we are in far more danger of killing them by mistaken kindness than by overwork. These children have largely been freed from economic effort; indeed, many avenues for experience in economic self-reliance are closed to them by law. One time I counted the number of things that I did before I got out of high school to make money; sixteen different occupations lined (rather thinly!) my pockets with money. Of those, twelve are completely closed now by law in order to protect our youth from exploitation. Of course I am not in favor of child labor, but it is fair to point out that when you close the doors of economic experience by law, you must find some substitute.

Students do not walk any longer, even to college; they take a car from the fraternity house to chapel. They are furnished with books and materials in the public schools that once were hard to acquire. All these things, mistake it not, 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 of course can be done by modern devices to facilitate instruction. But when the last movie reel is put back in its tin box, when Walter Damrosch's voice fades from the radio, and all the sugar coating has disappeared, the process of learning will still be difficult. Whoever pretends that it is easy is attempting to cheat our youth. Any procedure which miscalls failure by the name of success does not advance, but prevents, education. Any refusal to make a boy face ideas, because ideas are more difficult 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 and then quail before a book. But books must be faced; and even worse awaits. What is in books must be remembered and reflected upon until it is no longer a piece of a book stuck into the mind, until the ideas are digested and become an integral part of the mind, just as food well digested becomes part of the body. Admittedly there are some people 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, it is the most dangerous form of government. It achieves progress in the hardest possible way, in the belief that the process is as important as the result. That process is the realization of the fullest potentiality of each individual 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 that ancient ideal: "The multitude of the wise is the welfare of the world." That ideal can never be attained by training for skills alone; it may be attained by education for wisdom—through perspective, response to values, and industry.