

THE AMERICAN CITIZEN.

by

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For many years the conviction has been forcing itself upon the mind of the writer, that the prime essential to a safe and healthful development of self-government in the United States, is a general and systematic study of citizenship, based upon a comprehensive and carefully considered treatise on the function of the Citizen in the American Republic, his obligations, rights, privileges, duty and responsibility. Year after year he has waited for some one else to undertake the work he shrunk from the labor of preparing--a labor for which a busy life left little opportunity. He has endeavored by every means in his power to interest newspapers, universities, sociological societies, parties and reformatory associations of various kinds, in such a work. The failure to do so has been significant and to a degree amusing. Each one to whom it was presented has listened at-

tentively, and in most cases, has seemed to regard the matter favorably, but each one has sought to make it tributary to some other idea--to hitch it in the shafts of some particular cart in which some other interest might ride. The party leader has asked, "How will this affect parties and party organization?" The newspaper has asked, "Is there any general interest in this question by which our circulation will be increased?" The college president has said, "We already have Political Economy, International Law, Constitutional law and -- 'Civics' (whatever that may mean;) what need have we for anything more?" The reformer has said, "That is all well enough, but what is the use of stopping to study citizenship when all that we need to set us right is Single Tax, Free Trade, Protection, unlimited Silver coinage, a single Gold standard, Prohibition, Woman Suffrage-- or--or--or some other sole specific for all the ills that affect

the present and all the woes that threaten tomorrow.

The writer finds no fault with any of these. The newspaper-- that is the news-gatherer and news-seller must follow public appetite--the general demand rather than seek to create or develop it. This is quite correct. The business of a dealer in news is altogether separate and distinct from that of a propagator of earnest principles. The college president sees the theoretical side--the scientific phase of government and does not imagine that education should concern itself with the practical things of life. The Reformer quite forgets that an instrument as well as a theory, is essential to the accomplishment of a specific result--a gun as well as powder--a man to shoot as well as a wild beast to be killed. The party leader is naturally apprehensive of anything which promises to affect the efficiency of party-organization, by which personal aims are promoted

under cover and excuse of public interest and necessity.

The study of citizenship means better journalism, better education, better parties, better leaders, better politics, needed reforms, — and it is essential to all these because the Citizen is the only means by which progress or reform is possible.

Parties are only instruments by which he may effect his purpose. Universities are valuable only to shape and polish his powers. Journals, ^{the} only field of battle where the conflict is fought out. Reformers social and political are only the discoverers and promoters of methods for effecting general conditions. All these elements of progress rest on the ultimate basis of all betterment — good citizen ship.

Citizenship in the abstract, is the most comprehensive, complex, difficult and important of human relations, and American citizenship is especially complex in its character and relations. Politically, the citizen is an element for weal or woe, of the town, the country, the city, the state, the nation. All these he rules either for good or ill, either actively or passively, either intelligently or blindly, either by ~~experience~~ the expression of his own will or the will of another.

But this is only a part, and hardly the most important part of his function--he is also the instrument by which the law is executed. From the ranks of the citizenship comes the juror, the judge, the officers of the law, the agents by which society protects the lives, the rights, the privileges of all.

More important still, the citizen is a constituent element of

that most potent of all human forces,--the public thought--the public thought--the public will--the public conscience. Whether he so ~~wishes~~ wills or not, every man helps to shape this lever by which the world is moved. His view of what is right and proper to be done or left undone, colors, whether expressed or not the popular verdict. If he approves corruption, counts society a mere aggregation on which it is proper for every man to prey, so long as he keeps himself beyond the clutches of the law, if he regards politics as merely a game which men play for individual advantage; if he regards vote-buying and vote-selling, lobbying and corruption as merely unavoidable ills to be ignored, condoned or used for individual or party-advantage, he is merely a blind watcher on the walls of the republic, a recreant guard under whose very nose the enemy enters, despoils his fellow citizens and takes away the heritage of liberty and justice which the past has heaped up for today.

But it matters not how keen the conscience of the citizen may be unless he knows his duty, realizes his power and responsibility and apprehends the rights, privileges and the means of promoting the welfare of his fellows, individually and collectively.

Fully impressed with these views, the writer long since decided to undertake a comprehensive work upon American citizenship and had made no little progress in its preparation, when a strange combination of circumstances made The Basis a fact and placed him at its head. He at once decided to publish this work first in the columns of THE BASIS and to discuss with its readers the points arising as the work progresses. Once or twice a month as circumstances may dictate a chapter of the work will be published, beginning with the first issue in June. As the inter-

mediate weeks, space will be given to the consideration of questions that may be asked upon this subject. The purpose is to make plain the fundamental character of this most important function and its relation to individual duty and obligation, --to enlighten those who are uninformed and to ~~quicken~~ quicken those who forgetful or apathetic. The subject of the first chapter will be,

•The Evolution of Citizenship. •