

The Public

A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy &
A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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Vol. XII.

CHICAGO, FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 1909.

No. 573

Published by LOUIS F. POST

Ellsworth Building, 357 Dearborn Street, Chicago

Single Copy, Five Cents

Yearly Subscription, One Dollar

Entered as Second-Class Matter April 16, 1898 at the Post Office at
Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879

EDITORIAL

Public School Education.

Tendencies with reference to public school education, which we have frequently indicated as national (p. 220), are now clearly seen to be so. When they have seemed to be local, it was only the particular manifestation that was local, the tendency itself being nevertheless universal. Our references have been especially to the tendency toward plutocratizing the schools. But this is only one phase of the confused and confusing controversy—the dominant and more dreadful one, no doubt, but only one in a distinctive sense. Among the other phases are such as were alluded to by David Felmley, president of the Illinois State Normal School, at the State Teachers' Association last week, when he described the high school as having "lost much of the democracy of its original functions" and become a preparatory college—"a wet nurse for other colleges." Still others are indicated rather comprehensively by Samuel P. Orth in the Atlantic Monthly for March. No enumeration would be complete, of course, unless it recognized the demand for the three R's, which often seems to be an insistence upon limiting public school education to those rudiments. In one way or another, however, the whole controversy oscillates about the subject of industrial education, and this in turn presents a general issue of industrial knowledge versus industrial skill.

He would be brave, and doubtless somewhat

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foolish, who should oppose industrial education. But no one ought to advocate it without knowing what kind of industrial education is meant. If it is industrial knowledge, apprehension of the elements of industrial activity in general, and the general skill which this would necessitate and produce, then industrial education is the most important function of the public schools. Whether the pupil is to be a lawyer or a doctor, a clergyman or a teacher, a mechanic, a merchant, a farmer, a journalist, or what not in the activities of life, he should have as broad an elementary industrial education, in the abstract and in the concrete, as it is possible for him to get. But what if industrial education means specialization and specialized skill?

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To that question the plutocratic manufacturer is ready with his answer. Industrial specialization in the schools—for the “lower classes,” for “we can’t all be scholars, you know”—is to his lop-sided mind something greatly to be desired. It would afford a livelihood for the children of the poor, and furnish emergency “scabs” for the factories of the rich. Possibly our plutocrat might be disappointed in both respects. On the one hand, the livelihood for the poor might not last long, for wages do not depend upon the productiveness of the wage earner. They depend upon the supply of labor of the necessary skill. Consequently, other things being equal, wages would be as low with a highly skilled “over-supply” of labor as with an unskilled “over-supply.” On the other hand, a skilled and educated proletariat might be unexpectedly baffling to employers in the conflicts of the labor market. But however this should prove to be, there is one objection to industrial education of the specialization type, which challenges the most careful consideration. We allude to its tendency to stratify American society in classes.

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Advocates of the specialization type of industrial education conceive of children as making their choice of vocation at 9 or 10 years of age, and as being devoted from that time forward to preparation for the vocation of their choice. This means of course that as a rule parents would choose vocations for their children; for children of 9 or 10 are not often any more capable of choosing a vocation for life than they are of choosing their future husbands and wives. It means also that the parent would seldom choose with reference to the child’s probable usefulness, but rather with reference either to their own vocations or to their

own blighted aspirations. Worse yet, it means that poor parents would choose vocations with reference to immediate money returns from the work of their children. Worst of all, it means that mistakes of choice could seldom be corrected. The boy of 9 or 10, who has been devoted to an industrial specialty until really old enough to choose his vocation, is without the necessary preparation for it and must begin his industrial education anew—almost or quite as far back as to the time of his childhood’s choice. This species of industrial education would tend, we repeat, to stratify the pupils of public schools into social classes; and not according to their tastes, capacities or aspirations, but according to the prescience, the ambitions or the economic necessities of their parents. It may serve a country in which social classes are already stratified; but for this country it is an educational policy to be shunned. The American ambition should be to educate not for class servitude in industry, but for the intelligent citizenship that will demand equal opportunities.

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The Democratic Treachery in Congress.

Suspicious regarding the Fitzgerald contingent on the Democratic side in Congress (p. 265) are fully verified. The insurgent Republicans and the democratic Democrats were defeated on the rules question by a counter combination of Cannon Republicans and corporation Democrats. The corporation Democrats were drafted from the South and from New York City, where the corporations work through the Democratic party and Republicans have to play that they are Democrats in order to get elected. There are many notable exceptions from the South; but every member from New York followed Fitzgerald’s treacherous lead except two—an independent Brooklyn Congressman and William Sulzer. Sulzer’s case is especially noteworthy. Although he comes from the heart of the Tammany sphere of influence, he defied the commands of Tammany, and stood with his party and his principles instead of yielding to the corporations. It is only due him to add that his Democracy has always been of the democratic variety.

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Champ Clark’s leadership in this Democratic emergency gives great promise for the future. Nothing could be more encouraging, for instance, than the virtual reading out of the party of the members who at this juncture have taken orders from the corporations against the principles and declarations of their party and the action of its