

Mr. Ford's Own Page



IT MAY be said once for all that there can be no objection whatever to "universal training." The sooner we recognize that fact and get down to constructive details, the better it will be for the country and the people of the country. If there is anything of which our nation shows an increasing daily need it is "universal training," and enough energy is wasted in debates upon the point to start the whole program and give it a strong push toward success.

We have a sort of "universal training" now. Our system of elementary education is that. We require that every child shall be trained in the use of figures and letters. We do this in order that the native intelligence of the people may be developed and then liberated into usefulness. Education is mostly the giving of the "know how" to minds that are capable of doing, once they know.

We are insisting on that in our industries, too. Ability to read and write is an important factor in obtaining safety in our industrial operations. Safety can be taught; much of it can be taught by print; but if the factory personnel cannot read, of what use is the print? So we establish schools in our factories in order that men may be taught to read and write, and thus be brought into contact with printed information. A mind without command over figures and letters is like a country without postal or telegraph service: communication is very slow and difficult.

We have entered upon campaigns in which we try to bring "universal training" to a city or state with regard to health. There are certain diseases, like tuberculosis and typhoid, which may be as totally exterminated as rattlesnakes have been. But it cannot be done until all the people co-operate. And in order to co-operate they must be instructed. And so we enter upon campaigns of instruction, and we can measure the results very accurately. When we mobilize public co-operation for any of these activities, we see the success of it almost immediately.

The principle of "universal training," then, is quite firmly established in our common life.

The difficulty and dissension arises when we try to determine just what form that universal training shall take.

Some men say, "We ought to train everybody to shoot," and so they make the slogan read thus: "universal military training."

Shooting is admittedly not a productive art. We don't use it in our daily business. Millions of people get along very nicely without ever firing or even owning a gun. Indeed, there have been great campaigns of education against the use of guns. We teach boys that to use guns on birds is a very destructive sport, which costs the nation dearly in loss of bird service to our crops. We have laws prohibiting the use of guns on birds whose plumage attracts the milliner. If you fire a gun in your village street, the village marshal will apprehend you and the village justice of the peace will fine you. The skilful use of firearms may be an admirable accomplishment, but the concensus of public opinion in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our cities, in our states, is that the fewer guns there are, the safer it is. Indeed, our social sense is so much against guns that if you are caught carrying one without a special permit the authorities will consider you a questionable character.

BUT without further arguing that—it has been threshed out quite fully on both sides—the way to determine what form our "universal training" should take is to ascertain in what particulars our people most need to be trained. That we all need to be trained in the use of our faculties goes without saying; and we have the schools for that. That we need to be trained in respect for law is also agreed; and we have public opinion and the laws for that.

But there are other needs for training which most people are always talking about, but which they seldom consider as proper subjects for "universal training."

We Americans are too individualistic. That is a rather smooth and inoffensive way of saying we are selfish. The selfish man is always an individualist. If the individualist isn't always personally selfish, the effect of his attitude is the same.

We need universal training in teamwork. That is one of the arguments the militarists put forth, that military training teaches teamwork. True. But any work which engages large numbers of men in a common object will train them in teamwork. Militarism is teamwork with a destructive object. Isn't it possible to get the same degree, yes, even a higher degree of teamwork with a constructive object?

It would be a splendid thing if young men could be drafted into the public service for a year, for discipline in serving the gen-

eral good—"soldiers of the common good," is a phrase someone used. Service for someone beside ourselves is the most broadening experience we can have. It surrounds our natural individualism with a wide circle of "otherism."

When a man lives only for himself, thinks only of himself, he is in danger of human dry-rot. So, then, imagine that we had a system of conscription by which young men should be drafted for a year of training and service.

Their training would consist in all the things a young man ought to know. The authorities had to do all that when they called the army in 1917, but they had not time to do it thoroughly. They were calling those young men for another purpose than to make them more valuable to their country. But under real "universal training" for constructive national service, these young fellows, taken at an age when they can either be bent for life or straightened up for life, would be trained to be fine bodies. And then they would be trained to be fine, alert, steady minds. And then they would be trained to be useful, willing servants of society at large.

The nation is suffering from a house famine. Suppose we had an army of 500,000 or a million men who could do for the homeless of the United States what small detachments of our army are doing for the homeless of France and Belgium.

Sometimes the health of the nation suffers, and thousands of deaths and measureless sorrow could be prevented if only we had an army of public servants who could go in and do the things necessary to halt the plague and abolish it from the stricken section forever. Most of the work of this kind that is being done now is dependent on the volunteers of science and the volunteers of humanitarian sympathy. Why could it not be done by conscripts of the nation whose conscription would be a noble and ennobling initiation into the greatness of public service?

WE LEAVE for greed and private interest to do many of the things which we ought to do for ourselves as a collective interest. If we did them we should not only have, as a nation, the profit of them when accomplished, but we should also have the training and experience of having performed a constructive act as a public service.

More than that, we need "universal training" in economic facts. The over-reaching ambitions of speculative capital as well as the unreasonable demands of irresponsible labor are both due to ignorance of the economic basis of business. Nobody can get more out of a business than the business can produce, and yet nearly everybody thinks he can. Speculative capital wants more; labor wants more; the source of raw material wants more and the purchasing public wants more—and the poor business that tries to satisfy them all succeeds in satisfying none, and in the end destroys itself.

The family has to be trained that it cannot live beyond its father's income, and presently even the children know that; but the public never seems to learn that it cannot have more than it produces.

If we had "universal training" in the facts of economic balances, we should keep our affairs on a more even keel most of the time. There would be none of this utterly false belief that only a state of war can keep the balance between the various parties to production. That theory is nothing but militarism without a uniform; it is introducing into economic life all the destructive fallacies which make war the colossal stupidity which it is.

There are dangerous interests in our country which are very active in trying to propagate a "universal training" in economic untruths. The world has just been treated to the spectacle of one whole nation practically ruined so far as its economic organization is concerned, because the forces of unrest and ignorance had actually succeeded in getting a real "universal training" of the people in wrong notions of things. No doubt the people were sincere, but even sincerity does not change the facts. And in this country the same danger threatens, that the people will be trained in a theory of economic life which is false, and which they may not discover to be false until they work it and suffer ruin from it—unless, of course, a better "universal training" intervenes to prevent that.

Our whole "Americanization" work ought to go deeper than proficiency in English, knowledge of our governmental structure and loyalty to the Flag; it ought to deal with the deep foundations of moral, social and economic soundness. Well-grounded in the nature-of-things-as-they-are, the American people would be so "universally trained" in the truth that they would be defended against the attractive half-truths which are current everywhere today.