

Teaching The Child Patriotism

by Kate Upson Clarke

(1918) Excerpt beginning at p. 43



During the last few years magazines have published many helpful series on politics and a number of these deserve special credit for their work in this area. In one of these articles the writer reminds us that though the sins of our time are the same old sins which were denounced by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, they are likely now to be enameled with fine new exteriors and called by new names.

A dazzling outside may cover a black heart. Many public men of ancient and modern times afford striking examples of inconsistency. For instance, take William M. Tweed, whose gigantic thefts almost bankrupted a great city, yet who read a chapter in his Bible every day, and who possessed many kind and even noble qualities.

A certain excellent country gentleman, who did not realize the possible deceitfulness of the outside, went down to the capital of his state to see about some bills which vitally affected his business. He had written to the Senator from his district that he was coming and had asked for an appointment to meet him. He had never met this man, but the papers had criticized him severely, and our friend was prepared to encounter a mean and churlish creature.

"Instead," he reported upon his return to his home, "I found him a perfect gentleman. He met me at the train and took me to my hotel in his

own automobile and invited me to dine with him the next day. He lives in a beautiful home. I was surprised to see what kind of a man he really is. You would think the way the papers go on about him that he had horns and hoofs, but," he repeated, "he was a perfect gentleman." Yet he knew this man was one of the most dangerous 'practical politicians' in the state—one of those who believe that the Ten Commandments have no place in politics, and who scrupled at nothing which could benefit himself and his friends.

"Unlike the old-time villain," says Mr. E. A. Reed, "the latter-day malefactor does not wear a slouch-hat and a comforter and breathe forth curses and an odor of gin. Fagin and Bill Sykes and Simon Legree are vanishing types."

Let us see that our children are taught the elementary ethics of politics—the duty of every voter to vote and do jury work, the need of looking at every question from both sides and avoiding blind partisanship. And it is upon the mother that this patriotic duty must chiefly devolve....It must be emphasized that though school discipline should be of the best, yet the real education of your child depends more upon his home than on his school. You can bring very near your boy and your girl, the responsibility of us all for good home government, by mentioning often to them the burning issues of their own hometown.

Explain to your children how the taxes are laid—how a town has to spend a good deal to keep itself up. So, to speak; and how important it is that its tax-money should be carefully spent.

Particularly should we impress it upon our children that if a town is a slipshod, ugly or unhealthy place, it is not the fault of a vague, formless thing, called "the town" or "the city" or "the state," but of each and every one of us; and especially of every separate voter who fails to be on hand at the town meetings or caucuses, and to try his best to get good men elected and good measures passed.

Children should early be taught to regard the neatness and beauty of their town. If they complain that these matters are too hard to remember and to do, give them to understand that patriotism is not easy. Few virtues are easy to practice, and perhaps unselfish patriotism is the hardest of all.

It is up to us whether our children grow to just look and seem like perfect gentlemen, or if they will actually be such. Our town, our state, our nation, will reflect our choice.

If the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made not for the public good so much as for the selfish or local purposes.

—Noah Webster

Discussion Questions

- ★ *What lessons can we take from this story about the media in our day?*
- ★ *What does this excerpt say about the responsibility of citizens and government?*
- ★ *What should our interactions with public officials look like, whether we agree or disagree with them?*
- ★ *When is a time you or someone you know has taken a teaching moment to explain to a child something important about being a citizen or engaging in civic duty?*
- ★ *What aspects of civic duty do you think can easily be taught to our children?*
- ★ *What are some challenges or fears mothers face to teaching about America and civic duty to their children? How can they be overcome?*