

THE JUNIOR REPUBLIC

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

I RECENTLY visited the Junior Republic, or, as it is usually spoken of because of the man who founded it and is chiefly responsible for its success, the George Junior Republic, at Freeville, New York. I had expected to be pleased and interested, but my interest and pleasure far outran even my expectations.

The Junior Republic is just exactly what one of its chief backers, the President of its Supreme Court or Court of Appeals, Thomas Mott Osborne, has called it. It is a laboratory experiment in democracy. Incidentally, it is in the real and deep sense of the word a reformatory. There are now about 170 citizens, 100 of them boys and 70 girls. Any one is admitted provided he or she has sufficient strength of character.

A boy who has gone wrong because he has too much steam in his boiler, so to speak, is admitted on a full equality with the boy who has never gone wrong at all; and the most extraordinary thing is that he is about as apt to turn out a first-class citizen, not merely of the Junior Republic, but of the larger republic, the republic of the American Nation, when he graduates into it. The only persons excluded are those who go wrong through infirmity or feebleness of will, and this exclusion is in itself significant.

Mr. George's theory is that any boy or girl, man or woman, of sufficient strength of character can by practical experience as a responsible and independent citizen be taught, or, to speak more accurately, teach himself or herself, that good citizenship is the only kind of citizenship worth having, even from the individual's own standpoint. The place is a manufactory of citizens, men and women, and I do not know any place better worth visiting, nor any place better calculated to produce in the mind of the visitor a healthy modesty about drawing conclusions too rapidly from any one set of observations.

The Republic is an educational institution of the most valuable kind, and it develops in those who attend it a really passionate loyalty, a loyalty which I think on the average surpasses that felt by the undergraduates or graduates of any college with which I am acquainted; for the average graduate of the George Junior Republic feels, as he has a right to feel, that he possesses a diploma better than any he could possibly have gotten from any other institution in the world; and he feels a corresponding sense of pride, and of obligation so to carry himself that the Republic will in its turn have reason to feel pride because of his after career.

But, in addition to being an educational institution in the ordinary sense of a school of applied industry, it is also a school which gives the most invaluable training in the fundamental duties of citizenship. I had been told before I went there that the boys and girls literally governed themselves, that there was practically no government whatever from outside; but I had not been able to realize that the statement was to be taken as exactly true. The boys and girls live in cottages, or boarding-houses, and in each cottage or boarding-house (those for the boys as well as those for the girls) there is a matron, who exercises a certain supervision over the cooking and the care of the rooms; in the case of the girls this matron is called the house-mother, and there is a rule that the girls do not leave the house after nightfall. But, as far as I could find, this was literally the only rule imposed from outside, and its observance and the observance of cleanliness and good conduct in the cottages or boarding-houses depended entirely upon the action of the boys and girls themselves. They make the laws and execute them through their own elective officers. Neither any of the matrons, nor Mr. George, nor Mr. Osborne—save as one of the judges, when an appeal is carried

before him—nor any one else except the boys and girls, has any power whatever. The boys and girls all vote (woman suffrage is accepted as a matter of course in the real democracy of the Junior Republic), and they are responsible for every law and rule and for the carrying out of every law and rule.

The effect has been astounding. Every one is busy, every one seems happy, every one is courteous and self-respecting, and, moreover, after a very short period in the Republic almost every boy and girl accepts it all as a matter of course. An offense committed by one of their number is thought to be an offense, not against some outsider or outside body with whom or with which they have no special connection, but against themselves.

The punishments are very real and very severe. In the prison the cells are iron cages, the work is hard, the supervision is severe and continuous, and the guards have no sentimental hesitation in chastising recalcitrant prisoners. Only the boys are kept in this prison; the girls, who of course are more easily handled, have a prison of their own. The offenders are apprehended by the Junior Republic's own officers, tried and acquitted or sentenced by the Junior Republic's own courts, and punished under the direct superintendence of the authorities of the Republic—who, by the way, I found, to my intense interest, have themselves not infrequently spent months in the jail, to which they were condemned before having learned better ways. The inmates of the prisons while I was there were being worked hard at useful employments; they were fed with an abundance of healthy but not dainty food; when not at work they were confined in steel cages. It was real imprisonment, real punishment.

But when they were once out of prison the punishment was through. The atonement was accepted as complete, and the boy took a fresh start on his own merits; and if he made good, the fact that he had been in the prison was not held in the slightest degree against him.

No boy is forced to work; but if he does not choose to work, then he does not eat! It occasionally takes him some days to realize that this is a fact and not an abstract theory with which he is confronted; but he is taught the fact by actual hunger, and then he goes to work. There are ample opportunities for him to earn his own living, but the work is real and hard, and is paid for

in proportion to its value, each worker standing on his individual merits as shown by his skill and industry; the boys themselves insist on a course which develops and rewards individual efficiency. Drones and idlers are not tolerated; they are allowed to quit work if they wish, and if they work badly they are discharged; and then they find that starvation is not very far distant.

Newcomers often fail to understand just what is ahead of them; but it takes them only a very few days to learn. The education is of the most practical kind for boys and girls alike; each, when he or she leaves the Republic, can begin a wage-earning career without the smallest break. In addition, the ones with special aptitudes can train themselves for all kinds of special careers; and all alike are turned out with special training in the applied principles of democratic citizenship of the most healthy type.

Of course this Republic is not only of very great interest in itself, but it is of very great interest as illustrating a principle. It is extraordinary to see how successful the boys and girls have been in absolutely managing their own affairs. With the trifling exceptions that I have above noted, their self-government is absolute. On two or three occasions they have steered close to very serious danger, but have always come out right in the end.

One of the most amusing and interesting of these experiences occurred a number of months ago, when a concerted effort was made to take possession of the government by certain of the boys who were actuated by corrupt motives, and who used the less strong-minded or clear-sighted of their associates as tools. By a bit of rather adroit trickery, in taking advantage of the absence of some of the citizens at a snap election, they got control of the machinery of government. They proceeded to use this control for the corrupt pecuniary advantage of some of their own number who had been foremost in the movement; the corruption being of a kind not such as one would find in an ordinary school or college, but such as one would find in the worst governed of our cities. The temptation for Mr. George to interfere was great; but he steadfastly refused all appeals from the decent citizens, and told them that they would have to work out their salvation for themselves. The decent did work out their own salvation, developing the leaders demanded by the crisis in the persons of

three of their number, who showed the nerve, intelligence, initiative, and entire bodily fearlessness which in their sum go to make up the highest type of good citizenship everywhere. By what was a kind of *coup d'état* they regained possession of the government and at once undid the evil that had been done. They threw the wrong-doers into jail (where later, by due process of law, they received heavy punishment) and restored the government of the Republic to a standard even higher than that which it had previously possessed. The three leaders in this counter-revolution for righteousness were among the half-dozen citizens of whom I saw most during my visit to the Republic; and I can only say of those half-dozen citizens that I can imagine no work, in war or peace, in which I would not count myself fortunate if I had them under me or associated with me.

I saw the courts in actual operation. One case was appealed to the Supreme Court, of which Mr. Osborne is Chief Justice; the others were settled by the citizen who was acting as judge. There was an evident and efficient purpose to get at the real facts; and I believe that there are very few outside courts in which miscarriages of justice are so infrequent. The sentences were severe, and, moreover, they began at once; the boy who was sentenced walked out of the court-room into the prison and instantly began to put on his prison clothes. Every detail of the business, from the hunt for the criminal, through the arrest, the trial, and the punishment, was managed solely and exclusively by the citizens themselves; and the offender was deemed an offender, not against some outside body, but against each citizen personally—just as the idler was made to feel the disapproval of the whole community, in addition to paying the penalty of his idleness by not being able to get enough to eat. The mischief-maker, the gang-leader, the boy whose attitude has been a lawless defiance of society, and who hitherto has been fed by the admiration of his followers and his associates, as soon as he reaches the Republic finds himself cowed by popular disapproval, and by the prompt readiness of his associates to restrain him from what they regard as action taken against themselves, individually and collectively. It is not the outsider, Mr. George, Mr. Osborne, or any one else, who forces them to take this tone; it is the citizens themselves, the boys and girls, on their own initiative.

On Sunday there is always Sunday-school, and always, or almost always, church—conducted now by Protestant clergymen, now by Catholic priests, even by Jewish rabbis, sometimes all three officiating on the same day—for whoever cares to attend. Nobody is obliged to attend, and the boys certainly do not come from a class much given to church-going; but, apparently just because it is a matter of choice and not of duress, the great majority of them attend the Protestant or Catholic services, according to the church to which they belong.

Mr. George deserves very great credit, not only for having established an institution of singular use in itself, but for having established a principle which is of widespread applicability. I am not prepared to say whether in its entirety and everywhere this principle can be applied to the degree which Mr. George believes. I believe emphatically that machinery is necessary; but at all times and in all places I trust machinery less than I trust the individual—the power, the will, the good sense, and the initiative—that lies behind the machinery. Mr. George and his associates—such as Mr. Osborne, and Mr. Derrick, and the charming gentlewomen who live in the "House in the Woods," just outside the bounds of the Republic—exercise a most profitable influence for good therein. So do the various persons I met—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—who take an intense personal interest in the work. This influence is all the stronger because neither those who exercise it nor the boys and the girls themselves are more than dimly conscious of its existence. I believe this Junior Republic has done an immensely valuable work; I believe that the principle it exemplifies can be widely applied; but I believe also that in order to make other similar institutions work as well as this has worked there will be need for just such self-sacrifice, such zealous and intelligent interest and guidance in each case, as, for its great good fortune, this particular Junior Republic has found among certain men and women of a not too common type.

It will be well if we apply widely the principles in accordance with which the Junior Republic is managed; but it is just as necessary for us as individuals to apply in practice the qualities which have enabled the men and women in question to be so useful to the Junior Republic.