The High School Teacher and Indiana History*

By James Albert Woodburn

There are two parts to my brief homily, the past and the present. First, I wish to pay a tribute to the high school teacher. In my youth, I spent some years in that field of educational work. From that experience, but more from observation since, I have learned what an important part the high school teacher plays in the education of our youth. He comes in contact with our boys and girls in the formative and most important years of their lives.

From long experience in university teaching, I learned how much the high school puts its impress on boys and girls who enter college. Their success in college depends very largely on their high school training. In fact, next to the influence of their homes, personal contact with good teachers in their high school days is the determining factor in their success in life.

The high school teacher is not only a teacher, a guide, and a friend to his pupils, but he is expected to be, and usually is, a leader in his community. Civic life calls upon him for service. The public welfare, in various directions, requires from him some attention and energy. The church of his choice expects some help among young and old. Social life has its requirements and opportunities for service as well as its pleasures. He is expected to join one of the "luncheon clubs" to "boost" and to help build up and serve the local interests.

The high school teacher thus finds plenty of opportunity for the exercise of his public spirit. While molding young lives in school he is also helping to mold public opinion in his community. He is loaded to the guards with his daily work, his school activities, and his outside calls. Should we do any-

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thing or say anything to add to his manifold duties? If he is a teacher of history, can he interest his pupils in local history? If there is a county historical society can he give it a helping hand? Can he make an investigation and a contribution to the society's program? Is there a local museum? Can he help to add to its collection? And if there is no museum, can he help to start one? Are there notable historic places in his county? Can the high school teacher help to have suitable markers erected to make these places known to the tourist, or to his unknowing fellow citizens? Are there celebrations of past events, or of men of note in the life of the state to be undertaken? Who better than the high-school teacher can lead in such events? Such are some of the opportunities and calls that come to the teacher of history in our high schools. He has heard these calls and it makes him restless and dissatisfied if he feels compelled to deny or neglect them.

This leads me to speak of Indiana history merely to recall our opportunity and our obligation. We are a part of Indiana. We are the result of her past. We owe her loyalty and devotion. As Indiana teachers of history, we are bound to care for what Indiana has been, to share her trials and troubles, her struggles, her achievements, her victories, her failures, and her defeats. We ought to know, and lead our students to know, about the pioneer life of the state, about the men and women who founded the commonwealth and led in the development of her institutions. We should know the constitution of the state, its merits and defects, and the processes of government under it, state and local.

We have a history of one hundred sixteen years of statehood. It is a worthy history and we cannot afford to neglect it. We have an Indiana Historical Society one hundred two years of age. This Society for more than a century has had the services of many of our leading citizens—of some of the best men and women Indiana has known. Out of the more than three millions of citizens, this Society has about a thousand members. There ought to be more, but that is a goodly number, and these members have had, and are now having, a great influence in the life of the state. The Society has a series of valuable historical publications contributed by its members from time to time during the century of its existence. It offers to high school teachers cooperation and association with
an honorable body. It holds an annual Conference of those interested in studying and preserving the history of the state, the proceedings of which are printed and distributed. The Society has an organ of expression, its *Indiana Magazine of History*, published quarterly, in which writers on Indiana history find a reading public and a permanent record for their contributions on the past of the state. This *Magazine* comes free to every member of the Indiana Historical Society who has paid his annual dues of two dollars. It ought to be in every public library in the state. It ought to be in every high school library and on the desk of every high-school teacher of history. This means that every high school teacher of history ought to join the Society and pay his two dollars in support of these valuable activities. Is that too much to expect from these over-burdened teachers? I hope it does not seem like an ungracious suggestion in these days of salary cuts and diminishing returns, while the teachers are facing extra demands and difficulties.

Let us look for a moment to the present. Those who care the most for the past are likely to care the most for the present. No intelligent citizen can harbor any doubt about one vital fact—that Indiana is now passing through an important crisis in her educational history. Upon how we come through will depend the fate or welfare of the next generation. If there are those who are willing to ruin the rising generation, there is one certain way. Let them mislead the people into refusing adequate funds for public education. Two generations ago the people of Indiana determined that tax-supported education was vital and necessary to the public welfare. The people must not abandon that cause today.

This brings us face to face with the problem of taxation. Every generation faces that problem, but we are facing it today in a very unusual way. The whole hue and cry seems to be that the cost of government and all public expenses must be reduced. The tax-savers seem to think that when they have reduced expenses sufficiently, when public agencies have stopped spending and have saved enough, then the tax problem will be solved. From all we hear it would seem that such were the *alpha* and *omega* of the problem.

It is a false premise. It is not ever half the truth. Doubtless there have been excesses, extravagance, and waste in the
public service. These are always to be condemned and avoided, perhaps now more than ever. I, for one, am heartily willing to curtail expenses, public and private, in times like these. There can be proper savings, but there is no sense in cutting ourselves off from things we deserve and ought to have. That is not the beginning of thrift, or frugality, or good government. We are still a rich state, worth five billions or more. We can afford to pay for the things we ought to have. Let us reduce the costs of government where they ought to be reduced, but let us not be so foolish as to think that reducing the expense of government will solve the tax problem. We must face that problem at the other end.

What we need is a different distribution of the taxes. The state should get the money it needs for its legitimate ends. But it is a high time to realize—it should have been realized a generation ago—that we cannot get the money from such an antiquated and iniquitous system of taxation as we now have. The general property tax, as the chief source of revenue, has been preposterous. If we continue to rely on it for our revenue we shall be unable to meet the requirements of our times. Here is a citizen who does not own any real estate, but he has an excellent income. He makes no contribution whatever to the taxes for the support of schools and government. Here, on the other hand, is a farmer who owns real estate, but he has no income at all, or not enough to meet the expenses of raising his crops, yet he sees his farm sold for taxes that a contribution shall be made for schools and government.

No one ventures to defend such a system of taxation. So long as it lasts, we may expect to hear the cry for relief. Are we surprised to find a rebellion against such a system? This tax-rebellion is one of the most justifiable in human history. It should have occurred a generation ago. But it is folly to suppose that we can solve the tax problem by merely reducing the cost of public services. We may cripple our schools, or waste money by local administration of our roads, or deprive ourselves of many things we ought to have, yet, however much we may save, if our money-raising goes on in the same old way, we shall hardly have done more than to cut off the nose to spite the face. Such a blind policy will do great harm and very little good.
Those who are urging reduction of expenses might better direct their attention to devising a better system of taxes. The old system is exploded. Its evils and its injustices have been set forth time and time again. The income tax, which is about as fair as any, since all taxes have to be paid out of income; the retention of the gasoline tax, and the addition of limited sales taxes on luxuries; the taxation of sites of high rental values—these and other forms like license taxes may raise the needed revenue and at the same time make possible large tax exemptions on farms and homes.

Lately we have sought to secure an income tax amendment to our state constitution. I voted for it, though I knew full well that there was not one chance in a thousand of its adoption. I have thought for twenty years, and still think, that our best hope is in a constitutional convention. That body would be sovereign, within the limits of the Federal Constitution, and it could lift all restrictions from the Legislature in devising a system of taxation. The Legislature could then classify property for taxes and provide for just taxation constitutionally. If such a convention had been held in this state twenty years ago, as some of us urged, the people of Indiana could have been saved millions of dollars, and the tax burden could long since have been distributed to sources where it more properly belongs.

Over the door of our old Seminary Room at the Johns Hopkins University were printed these words from the historian Freeman: "History is Past Politics; Politics is Present History." This maxim has a weighty meaning, though it is not intended as a definition. It does not indicate the whole significance of historical study. Sir John Seeley's dictum is like unto it: "Politics without History has no root; History without Politics has no fruit."

These sayings would lead us to think that the chief interest in the events of the past lies in the light they throw upon the problems of the present. It is a weighty judgment. That is the feeling of many teachers and writers of history. It was the feeling of the great Thomas Arnold, teacher and historian, who said that he cared to know the past only as it served as a guide to the present. How can we meet the issues of the present unless we know what the past has to teach us? That is, unless we are ready to learn from the lamp of experience.
Judging by Indiana's past in her struggle for education, for free schools, for high schools, for research and higher learning, we are not ready to retreat and give up the standards of education which our people have made such sacrifices to attain.

We are making history now. We are facing an issue whose significance will be better understood by those who come after us or by those who know what has gone before. It is not so important that we study the methodology and machinery of teaching as that we come to know the living present and how it came out of the past; to know the subjects that are alive today and the subjects that make the past live gain.

This brings us back to our original theme, the teaching of history, the teaching of our own history, of the place where we live, of Indiana history, stressing the relations to our nation and the world. A great task is laid out for you as you meet our youth in our high schools. We are told from various sources and from time to time that the teacher of history is expected to develop a taste for historical reading; to lead his pupils to distinguish between truth and error in the occurrences of the past; to develop patriotism and to make good citizens (to do which it is necessary to know what patriotism is); to awaken historical curiosity; to arouse a desire to promote the public welfare; to develop a judicial attitude of fairness. There might be added a long list of other worthy objectives, which might sound as if they were a set of grievances imposed by some tyranny like that of George III upon the courses and teaching of history.

We may strive for all these objectives and succeed in attaining some of them. It is certain that if we become more and more interested in our subject and keep striving to know more and more about it, we shall be able to make it an instrument for good in the life of the school and the community. We may depend upon it, as Doctor Coleman well says, that if "the history teachers of Indiana become really interested in history and associate actively with others of their craft, the oncoming generation will become historically minded." That is an end worthy of our effort. Then the children of Indiana will wish to know more about their Indiana home, its past as well as its present. Let us, therefore, join with others in promoting a study and knowledge of Indiana history.