

## Organization and Representation.\*

By Miss L. L. Dock.

If the safety of popular government depends on the education of the people, certainly its beauty lies in the opportunities for education that the people have: opportunities to discuss, to compare, and, best and most practical of all, to try experiments which, if imperfect, give at least something definite and tangible to go on in the way of improvement.

Probably no admirer of popular government can always say that definite pieces of work, as such, are better done under democracy than they would be under, say, a benevolent despotism or an autocracy of experts; but this one point all philosophical observers of human institutions do agree on, viz.: that the development of character which is made possible is sufficient reason for self-government and justifies all temporary crudities.

These general remarks (in no way original) may be applied equally to small groups of persons struggling within the body politic toward an ideal. It seems as if every association ever formed had to learn most of its lessons by experience. Few can go far on the lessons of others. One only truly realizes what one lives through.

The process of growth seems to be a painful one with collections of human beings, and this struggle toward development probably accounts for the fact that the history of every association on earth contains a certain amount of strife, clashings, differences, or positive splits. These are growing pains, nothing more serious or alarming. To imagine a society entirely free from them is to imagine a society of vegetables (if, indeed, we can feel sure that the beans make no unkind aspersions on the cabbages as they climb up their poles). Nothing is more hopeful or encouraging than to see that nurses, individually and generally, are entering upon their wider education, by taking up this question of self-government, how to attain it, and what to do with it when they have it. It can only be attained by a series of efforts, failures, and repeated experiments; but when there are really enough nurses who wish for it sufficiently to work for it, it will come, and not before. That we are beginning to move in this direction is beyond a doubt, and the first question that arises is, as in any such movement, how to organize.

It is most interesting to see how, in a group of women having nothing to do with politics and paying little attention to them, the same problems and theories arise as confronted our forefathers in their constitution making; just as the boys of

the George Junior Republic meet and work out for themselves all the social and economical difficulties of adult society, even to the question of woman suffrage. The two standards of pure democracy and of representative government again divide the camp into two sides. The democracy of the old town meeting of New England,—who can doubt that it is the ideal condition? Each citizen stood for one, and each voice could be raised with equal force against any other. The town was not so large but that every man might attend meetings and himself give his vote. But this ideal, while it can and should be strictly adhered to in local organizations, cannot be followed out in a State association. The State is too big; every man cannot go, and he must invent some way of having a share in State affairs, though unable to be present at meetings.

As we are not men, let us drop illustration, and imagine simply a State association of nurses composed entirely of individuals. If every woman could go to the annual meeting, held, let us say, in Albany, each woman's voice and vote would be equal to any other, and the agreement of all together for common action would have all the weight and authority of the popular will. But suppose that none of the nurses from the north, west, or south of the State can go to the annual meeting. It is impossible for them to get off. The nurses in Albany, being on the spot, will go, and their voices and votes will carry the house, those who are absent being, to all practical purposes, disfranchised and having no more share in the State association than if they did not belong to it. The incongruity of the situation will immediately press upon them, and if they had never heard of representative government they would now invent it, and say, We will unite ourselves together and send one to Albany to tell what the rest of us think.

This is the republic, the representative idea, the practical and convenient thing for large communities of people, as the pure democracy is the possible thing for small ones.

The sensible and practical arrangement for associations of widely scattered people having common interests is: the local association on the plan of the old town meeting, with officers appointed for executive work, and democracy as nearly pure as may be attained in its councils; then the State association, in imitation of our own republican States, representative government, and national association in which all meet together for larger affairs,—to promote national and international acquaintance and mutual respect, to abolish provincialism and narrowness, and to make possible the wider life which can only be attained by knowing and working with our fraternities all over the world.

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