

**A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE
CONSTITUTION OF THE
UNITED STATES FOR THE USE
OF COMMON SCHOOLS**

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A Brief Exposition of the Constitution of the United States for the Use of Common Schools by
John S. Hart

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OF THE
CONSTITUTION
OF
THE UNITED STATES

FOR THE USE OF
COMMON SCHOOLS.

BY JOHN S. HART, LL.D.,
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Chamber of the Controllers of Public Schools,
First School District of Pennsylvania.

PHILADELPHIA, December 12, 1849.

At a meeting of the Controllers of Public Schools, First District of Pennsylvania, held at the Controllers' Chamber, on Tuesday, December 11 1849, the following Resolution was adopted:—

Resolved, That Hart's Constitution of the United States be introduced as a Class-Book, into the Grammar Schools of the District.

R. J. HEMPHILL. *Secretary.*

Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1845, by
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PREFACE.

EVERY man in this country who holds office, whether Executive, Judicial or Legislative, whether under the National Government or any of the State Governments, is bound by oath to support the Constitution of the United States. Every one of the more than two millions who are now entitled to vote, is called upon to decide questions of Constitutional law, as really and truly as is the Supreme Court of the United States. But how many of all that number have ever read the Constitution? In what proportion of our Colleges, Academies, or Common Schools is it studied? In what system of education, whether public or private, in any part of the country, is a knowledge of the Constitution of the country made a requisite for graduation, or for admission from a lower school to a higher one? Ask a number of boys at school almost any reasonable question in Geography or History, and you will see dozens ready to reply without a moment's hesitation. But ask them what will be necessary, when they grow up, to entitle them to vote, what constitutes citizenship, what rights a citizen of one State has in another State, or any other simple and obvious question in regard to the Constitution of their country, and you will be met with a profound silence. And is not a knowledge of his immediate personal rights and duties quite as important to the young American, as to be acquainted with a long catalogue of dead kings or distant cities?

The main reason why the study of the Constitution has never yet been made a branch of Common School education is believed

to be an entire misapprehension in regard to the nature and difficulty of the study. There are, it is true, not a few passages in the Constitution, the proper construction of which has given rise to much discussion; and there are many nice points arising out of its more obvious provisions, requiring for their solution great natural abilities and profound legal erudition. But it is still true, that the great majority of its clauses are as intelligible, and as easily remembered as most of the studies which now make an essential part in every system of education. What difficulty is there in a boy's learning that a Representative is chosen for two years, while a Senator is chosen for six, that a Representative must be twenty-five years old, while a Senator must be thirty, to know what body has the power to impeach, and what the power to try impeachments, in short to understand and recollect nine out of ten of all the provisions of the Constitution? Is it one whit more difficult than to comprehend and recollect the various details of Geography and History, to give off-hand the position of Timbuctoo or the Tagus, or to know in what year Rome was founded or Cæsar slain?

The plan pursued in this little book is in accordance with the views here suggested. There has been no attempt to discuss knotty political questions, or to speculate upon abstract theories of government, but simply to present the Constitution itself, with such questions and answers, as might direct the attention of the learner to its plain and obvious meaning. The Constitution provides for the duties and rights of every day life, and is written in simple language almost entirely free from technical and professional expressions. Is there any reason why children capable of learning, and teachers capable of teaching History and Geography, might not intelligently study and teach all its material facts and provisions, as they are here presented?

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