

LESSONS ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

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Lessons on Practical Subjects by Sarah Forbes Hughes & Catherine W. Faucon

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SARAH FORBES HUGHES & CATHERINE W. FAUCON

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ON
Practical Subjects

BY
SARAH FORBES HUGHES
AND
CATHERINE W. FAUCON

Revised and Enlarged Edition

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CONTENTS.

	Page
INTRODUCTION	7
SUGGESTIONS TO THE TEACHER	11
Chap. I. WHAT IS BARTER?	13
II. WHAT IS MONEY?	18
III. SILVER QUESTION	31
IV. HOW DID PAPER COME TO BE USED IN PLACE OF COIN?	45
V. HOW DID PAPER COME TO BE USED IN PLACE OF COIN? (<i>continued</i>)	52
VI. WHAT ARE GREENBACKS?	58
VII. WHAT IS IRREDEEMABLE PAPER MONEY? AND WHAT ARE BLUEBACKS?	68
VIII. WHAT IS IRREDEEMABLE PAPER MONEY? (<i>continued</i>)	72
IX. WHAT ARE UNITED STATES BONDS?	77
X. WHAT IS A TAX?	85
XI. HIGH AND LOW TAXES	95
XII. HIGH AND LOW TAXES (<i>continued</i>)	100
XIII. WHAT IS A CORPORATION?—MILLS	108
XIV. WHAT IS A CORPORATION? (<i>continued</i>) —RAILROADS	112
XV. WHAT IS A STRIKE?	118
XVI. WHAT IS A STRIKE? (<i>continued</i>)	128
XVII. DEBT AND SAVING	135
XVIII. DEBT AND SAVING (<i>continued</i>)	143
XIX. WHAT ARE SAVINGS BANKS?	148
XX. WHAT ARE SAVINGS BANKS? (<i>continued</i>)	159
XXI. ENDOWMENT ORDERS, 1895	165

INTRODUCTION.

IN the elementary education which is given in our public schools, it is necessary that those studies should be chosen which will best fit the majority of children for the practical life into which they must enter. With most children that life begins when they leave the grammar schools, and whatever education they are to have (using the word education in the limited sense of school instruction) they receive while there. Therefore, the determining of the course of studies becomes of great importance.

The question is chiefly one of selection; and should we not consider whether, in our public schools, the more essential studies are not sometimes sacrificed and crowded out for the less useful ones? Will the ability to name the vegetable and mineral products of Uruguay and Turkey be as useful to a boy throughout his life as a knowledge of some of the more important laws of health? or help to

make him as good a citizen as a few sound ideas on government and economic laws?

In watching some of the phenomena of American politics, it is plainly seen that a great body of our voters — and often of our legislators, too! — are lamentably ignorant of even the simpler laws underlying the social and financial questions of our age. One well known example of such ignorance is the Greenback delusion of 1873 and 1874. There would also seem to be in the minds of many people a very vague idea as to the sources of government revenues; and, resulting from this, an apparent belief that the United States government has absolutely unlimited supplies of money at its command, and that no harm can come to the country at large from a lavish expenditure of this public money. Other misapprehensions of this nature are not far to seek.

It is impossible to suggest a panacea for such evils, and of course long years of experience are the most efficacious teachers on these subjects. But though political economy is a science all the data of which are by no means as yet known, some few of its laws appear to have been sufficiently well established to act as guides in every-day life.

In view of this fact, it has occurred to us, that, if a few of the more practical questions dependent on these laws could be treated in a way simple enough for a child to comprehend, it might be possible to give our school children right ideas at the outset. If this could be done, the graduates of our schools, when called upon in after years to vote on social or financial subjects, might not be so wholly unprepared as they often are now.

As a first step to this kind of instruction, we have tried to put the following lessons on money, banks, etc., in a form available for grammar schools, where, as we have said, the school life of the majority of the children ends. It is easily seen that children find it difficult to grasp an abstract idea; we have, therefore, tried to make the whole work as little complicated as possible, emphasizing principles rather than details, and making use of simple language and frequent repetition. For the same reason, we have avoided the complicated history of money by using sometimes purely mythical cases, and have tried to deal only with those principles which seem, as we have said, to have been well established, leaving out disputed points as far as possible. We have pur-

posely left untouched the intricate workings of moneyed corporations, and exchange, — assuming that the United States government always sells its bonds at par, and greatly simplifying the process of paying off the bonds, and also assuming that our corporation sells its stocks and bonds at par, — because we felt that extensive explanations would hopelessly confuse a child's mind, and prevent its retaining any clear ideas whatever on these subjects. A few facts we have tried to emphasize especially; such as, that money follows fixed laws, which cannot be broken with impunity by any government; that harm is done to all — and most of all to the poor — by extravagance in the use of public money; and that actual evils often attend the contracting of debts.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE TEACHER.

THE following lessons on matters concerning everyday life are designed for the teacher's use among the older children of our grammar schools. Not wishing to burden them with another separate study, we have tried to combine our work with that of composition writing (which already forms a part of school instruction), intending that the different topics shall be taken as subjects for that exercise. As a rule, the lessons will probably not be intelligible to children under twelve, and, in any case, it will be necessary to proceed very slowly and carefully in giving them to the advanced classes.

Our plan is as follows:—Let the first chapter be read to the children slowly, and with any additional explanation, or illustration, of the subject that may occur to the teacher. The teacher may then ask the questions¹ given at the end of the chapter, or may test the children's understanding of what has been read in any way that commends itself.

It is suggested that on the following composition day the children shall hand in abstracts of the lesson. The

¹ The questions are all numbered, and in the text the corresponding number is affixed to the paragraph containing the answer.