

Citizenship

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Written for Fianna Éireann in her capacity as chief scout.

‘A good citizen is a man or a woman every action of whose life is based on the dictates of a strong Civic Conscience.’

A baby when born into the world is like any other animal, in so much as it is quite helpless and has no sense. As time passes, it begins to notice and get in touch with other people; first with its mother who cares for it, then with its little brothers and sisters, its father and other members of the household. As it gets to understand and be understood, it is forced to live in its family as part of the family, suffering when the family suffers, mourning when one of the family dies, going hungry when the breadwinner is idle, and enjoying family life happily when all goes well with the family.

Family Life The Beginning of Citizenship

Some children learn quickly to live the common family life, and to help and do their share in making the family life happy and comfortable. Other children are selfish, wanting more than their share of everything pleasant and shirking their share of work. Or perhaps, they are given to telling tales on their brothers and sisters; maybe they are untruthful or dishonest or prepared to push all their brothers and sisters aside and into the gutter as long as they get on.

This family life is the beginning of citizenship. It is citizenship on a tiny scale, and the good citizen is the man or woman who looks upon himself

or herself as part of a big family that he loves and wants to do his duty by. His big family is the whole nation.

Joining the Fianna

We begin life then as citizens of our family, but the first real step in citizenship that we take is when we join the Fianna. We can be good or bad members of the Fianna, just as we can be good or bad members of our family or of our nation. It is that our brotherhood is growing with our growth. We have already found new brethren in our schoolmates, girls as well as boys, and now we find ourselves in a still closer and deeper brotherhood within our nation. It is of deeper significance for us, because we were not born into it as we were into our family, nor were we sent there, as we were sent to school. We joined the Fianna because we chose to of our own free will. We made this choice because we wanted to work for Ireland, and we wanted to take up the task of training ourselves. I say ‘training ourselves’ because we put ourselves voluntarily under our officers, and accept their discipline and guidance.

Training the Young Citizen

In the Fianna you learn to obey laws by obeying rules. You learn how to govern and how to change laws by taking an interest in the working of the organisation. You may not agree with all the rules, but you will obey them and at the same time think over how you could change them for the better, and discuss your ideas in your slugh, and later, if you are appointed a delegate at the Convention, you can bring forward your suggestions as motions and discuss them there.

You elect delegates, too, just as later on you will be one of those who elect TDs and councillors, and you will learn in the Fianna to try and make up your mind who is the best man – that is, who is the straightest and has the

noblest ideals – and back him. If you yourself are chosen to fill a position, you will learn to look on it as a duty that you have been given, and not an empty honour. You will learn, too, to stand down if you know you are not fitted for a position, or if you feel that some other fellow is more fitted for a position than you yourself are, for you will have learnt that you are all brothers working for a glorious mother, Caitlin ni h-Uallachain, and you are proud of having a noble, clever brother, even cleverer than yourself, who will do great work, who will help you and lead you on the road to make Ireland great. Each little lad who drills beside you may have in him the making of a soul like Liam Mellows, or Colbert or Heuston, or many another of our lads whose memory is dear to us, and whose name will live as long as Ireland lives; not only for their noble deaths, but also for their noble, unselfish lives. The honour of your organisation and the welfare of your brother will become as dear to you as your own honour and welfare, and as you grow, your love will include Ireland and your fellow men.

And, after all, to be a good citizen is nothing more than to live up to the command to love your neighbour as yourself. This sounds so easy, and it is so hard. It is so hard not to grab all one can for oneself, without caring who goes without; it is so easy just to shut one's eyes and not to see how others suffer for one's selfishness, and just to go on blindly taking what one considers to be one's rights and enjoying oneself. But that is not good citizenship, and it is this spirit of bad citizenship, of competition, greed and selfishness that is at the bottom of empire-building, and of the oppression of the weak by the strong the world over. No men who loved their neighbour as themselves could conspire together to conquer in their own greedy interests a weaker neighbour and oppress them, as England conquered and oppressed Ireland for centuries.

No-one who loved his neighbour as himself could bear to see people living in squalor and misery, overworked and underfed, while others are idle and have more money than they know how to spend.

This is wrong amongst brothers and sisters, and wrong in a nation. It would not be possible in a land where people were trained to be good citizens.

The Duty of a Citizen

If you understand this, when you come to be a man you will know that your duty as a good citizen is to try and change all the tyranny and misery you see around you. There is one weapon to your hand, your vote, and it is your first duty on reaching the age of 21 to see that your name is on the register. A careless bad citizen often neglects to do this, and so cuts himself off from taking part in the government of his country. You have been trained in the Fianna, ‘mentally and physically’, to free Ireland and the people of Ireland; let no opportunity be missed, no weapon be carelessly left aside. The Fianna are the men of the future, who in their turn will have the happiness of the nation in their hands. A good Fianna boy who does his duty to his organisation and to his comrades will be a good citizen.

Questions for Fianna Boys

To conclude, I would like to ask you to set yourselves to learn everything you can that you may help to serve your country. The way to do this is to be very inquisitive. Ask yourself, before all, and anyone who will listen to you, all these questions I am setting you, and as many more as you can think of:

- What is freedom?
- Why does Ireland want freedom?
- Why did England partition her?

- Why did the English make us speak English instead of our own language?
- Why do the people who work hardest have the smallest and most miserable homes?
- Why do the idlers have big houses and own great stretches of land?
- Is a country free when foreigners own all the big factories and business houses in it?