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THE EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO.

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THE most obvious hindrance in the way of the education of the negro has so often been presented and discussed—his origin, history, environments—that it seems superfluous to treat it anew. His political status, sudden and unparalleled, complicated by antecedent condition, excited false hopes and encouraged the notion of reaching *per saltum*, without the use of the agencies of time, labor, industry, discipline, and what the dominant race had attained after centuries of toil and trial and sacrifice. Education, property, habits of thrift and self-control, higher achievements of civilization, are not extemporized or created by magic or legislation. Behind the Caucasian lie centuries of the educating, uplifting influence of civilization, of the institutions of family, society, the churches, the state, and the salutary effects of heredity. Behind the negro are centuries of ignorance, barbarism, slavery, superstition, idolatry, fetichism, and the transmissible consequences of heredity.

Nothing valuable or permanent in human life has been secured without the substratum of moral character, of religious motive, in the individual, the family, the community. In this matter the negro should be judged charitably, for his aboriginal people were not far removed from the savage state, where they knew neither house nor home and had not enjoyed any religious training. Their condition as slaves debarred them the advantage of regular, continuous, systematic instruction. The negro began his life of freedom and citizenship with natural weakness uncorrected, with loose notions of piety and morality, and with strong racial peculiarities and proclivities, and has not outgrown the feebleness of the moral sense which is common to all primitive races. The *Plantation Missionary* of this year, a journal edited and published for the improvement of the "black belt" of

object of Christian civilization is to relieve human need and suffering. Prevention is better than cure. It is nobler to hinder need and suffering than to relieve them.

As to legislating away human passions, it is now a common subject of our penal code. While the punishment for rape, sodomy, and kindred crimes is severe, these acts are scarcely more heinous and no more baneful to society than the propagation of idiots, consumptives, or drunkards. Who would think it a harsh law that prevented a leper from marrying! More people die annually in the United States from tuberculosis than from all the so-called contagious diseases combined. It is self-evident that whether we call tuberculosis "contagious" or "prevalent" it has a stronger tendency than these diseases to spread. A family history that would debar a person from life insurance should also debar him from marriage.

Residence is a condition of marriage in nearly every country of Europe and a few states of the American Union make marriage registration compulsory. While residence, as a condition of marriage, would often be an inconvenience to one of the parties, in every instance it would be easy to establish thoroughly their identity. This would do away with fictitious unions, localize the parties, and put the question of marriage beyond dispute. Registration is of no value unless the identity of the parties is established. Thus the legal status of the parties, their property, the legitimacy of the children, become a matter of record and stable.

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Alabama, says, "five millions of negroes are still illiterate, and multitudes of them idle, bestial, and degraded, with slight ideas of purity or thrift." The discipline of virtue, the incorporation of creed into personal life, is largely wanting, and hence physical and hysterical demonstrations, excited sensibilities, uncontrolled emotions, transient outbursts of ardor, have been confounded with the graces of the Spirit and of faith based on knowledge. Contradiction, negation, paradox, and eccentricity are characteristics of the ignorant and superstitious, especially when they concern themselves with religion.

The economic condition is a most serious drawback to mental and moral progress. Want of thrift, of frugality, of foresight, of skill, of right notions of consumption, and of proper habits of acquiring and holding property, has made the race the victim and prey of usurers and extortioners. The negro rarely accumulates, for he does not keep his savings, or put them in permanent and secure investments. He seems to be under little stimulus toward social improvement, or any ambition except that of being able to live from day to day. "As to poverty, eighty per cent of the wealth of the nation is in the North and only twenty per cent in the South. Of this twenty per cent a very small share indeed falls to the seven millions of negroes who constitute by far the poorest element of our American people."* "While it is true that a limited number of the colored people are becoming well-to-do, it is also equally true that the masses of them have made but little advance in acquiring property during their thirty years of freedom. Millions of them are yet in real poverty and can do little more than simply maintain physical existence."† No trustworthy statement of the property held by negroes is possible, because but few states, in assessing property, discriminate between the races. In *Occasional Papers*,‡ No. 4, Mr. Gannett, in discussing the tendency of population toward cities, concludes that "the negro is not fitted either by nature or education for those vocations for the pursuit of which men collect in cities," and that as the

* *American Missionary*, November, 1894, page 390.

† *Home Missionary Monthly*, August, 1894, page 318.

‡ Issued by the Trustees of the Slater Fund.

inclinations of the race "tend to keep it wedded to the soil, the probabilities are that the great body of the negroes will continue to remain aloof from the cities and cultivate the soil as heretofore" (page 16). The black farm-laborers hire to white proprietors, work for wages or on shares, give a lien on future earnings for food, clothing, shelter, and the means for cultivation of the crops. The meager remainder, if it exist at all, is squandered in neighboring stores for whiskey, tobacco, and worthless "goods." Thus the negro in his industrial progress is hindered by his rude and primitive methods of farming, his wastefulness and improvidence. The manner of living almost necessarily begets immorality and degradation. Mr. Washington, in his useful annual conferences, has emphasized the need of improved rural abodes and the fatal consequences of crowding a whole family into one room. The report already quoted from *Home Monthly*, page 22, says: "On the great plantations (and the statement might be much further extended) there has been but little progress in thirty years. The majority live in one-room cabins, tabernacling in them as tenants at will." The poverty, wretchedness, hopelessness of the present life are sometimes in pitiable contrast to the freedom from care and anxiety, the cheerfulness and frolicsomeness, of the ante-bellum days.

The average status of the negro is much misunderstood by some persons. The incurable tendency of opinion seems to be exaggerated optimism or pessimism, to eager expectancy of impossible results or distrust or incredulity as to future progress. It is not easy to form an accurate judgment of a country, or of its population, or to generalize logically, from a Pullman car window, or from snatches of conversation with a porter or waiter, or from the testimony of one race only, or from exceptional cases like Bruce, Price, Douglas, Washington, Revels, Payne, Simmons, etc. Individual cases do not demonstrate a general or permanent widening of range of mental possibilities. Thirty years may test and develop instances of personal success, of individual manhood, but are too short a time to bring a servile race, as a whole, up to equality with a race which is the heir of centuries of civilization, with its uplifting results and

accessories. It should be cheerfully conceded that some negroes have displayed abilities of a higher order and have succeeded in official and professional life, in pulpit and literature. The fewness gives conspicuousness, but does not justify an *a priori* assumption adverse to future capability of the race.

Practically, no negro born since 1860 was ever a slave. More than a generation has passed since slavery ceased in the United States. Despite some formidable obstacles, the negroes have been favored beyond any other race known in the history of mankind. Freedom, citizenship, suffrage, civil and political rights, educational opportunities, and religious privileges, every method and function of civilization, have been secured and fostered by federal and state governments, ecclesiastical organizations, munificent individual benefactions, and yet the results have not been, on the whole, such as to inspire most sanguine expectations, or justify conclusions of rapid development or of racial equality. In some localities there has been degeneracy rather than ascent in the scale of manhood, relapse instead of progress. The unusual environments should have evolved a higher and more rapid degree of advancement. Professor Mayo-Smith, who has made an ethnological and sociological study of the diverse elements of our population, says, "No one can as yet predict what position the black race will ultimately take in the population of this country." He would be a bold speculator who ventured, from existing facts, to predict what would be the outcome of our experiment with African citizenship and African development. Mr. Bryce, the most philosophical and painstaking of all foreign students of our institutions, in the last edition of his great work, says :

There is no ground for despondency to any one who remembers how hopeless the extinction of slavery seemed sixty or even forty years ago, and who marks the progress which the negroes have made since their sudden liberation. Still less is there reason for impatience, for questions like this have in some countries of the Old World required ages for their solution. The problem which confronts the South is one of the great secular problems of the world, presented here under a form of peculiar difficulty. And as the present differences between the African and the European are the product of thousands of years, during which one race was advancing in the temperate, and the other remaining sta-

tionary in the torrid zone, so centuries may pass before their relations as neighbors and fellow-citizens have been duly adjusted.

It would be unjust and illogical to push too far the comparison and deduce inferences unfair to the negro, but it is an interesting coincidence that Japan began her entrance into the family of civilized nations almost contemporaneously with emancipation in the United States. In 1858 I witnessed the unique reception by President Buchanan, in the East Room of the White House, of the commissioners from Japan. With a rapidity without a precedent, she has taken her place as an equal and independent nation, and her rulers demand acknowledgment at the highest courts, and her ministers are officially the equals of their colleagues in every diplomatic corps. By internal development, without extraneous assistance, Japan has reached a degree of self-reliance, of self-control, of social organization, of respectable civilization, far beyond what our African citizens have attained under physical, civic, and religious conditions by no means unfavorable. It is true that Japan for a long time had a separate nationality, while the freedmen have been dependent wards, but the oriental nation, without the great ethical and pervasive and ennobling and energizing influence of Christianity (for the propagandism of the daring Jesuit missionaries of the sixteenth century has been effaced) has recorded her ascents by monuments of social life and dramatic events in history. Her mental culture and habits and marvelous military success are witnesses of her progress and power. We have been accustomed to think of the whole Orient, that "fifty years of Europe were better than a cycle of Cathay," but within a quarter of a century Japan has transformed social usages and manners, arts and manufactures, and in 1889, when we were celebrating the centennial of our Constitution, she adopted a constitution, with a limited monarchy and parliamentary institutions.

Much of the aid lavished upon the negro has been misapplied charity, and, like much other alms-giving, hurtful to the recipient. Northern philanthropy, "disastrously kind," has often responded with liberality to appeals worse than worthless. Vagabond mendicants have been pampered; schools which were

established without any serious need of them have been helped ; public school systems, upon which the great mass of children, white and colored, must rely for their education, have been underrated and injured, and schools, of real merit and doing good work, which deserve confidence and contributions, have had assistance, legitimately their due, diverted into improper channels. Reluctantly and by constraint of conscience, this matter is mentioned and this voice of protest and warning raised. Dr. A. D. Mayo, of Boston, an astute and thoughtful observer, a tried friend of the black man, an eloquent advocate of his elevation, who for fifteen years has traversed the South in the interests of universal education, than whom no one has a better acquaintance with the schools of that section, bears cogent and trustworthy testimony, to which I give my emphatic indorsement :

It is high time that our heedless, indiscriminating, all-out-doors habit of giving money and supplies to the great invading army of southern solicitors should come to an end. Whatever of good has come from it is of the same nature as the habit of miscellaneous alms-giving, which our system of associated charities is everywhere working to break up. It is high time that we understood that the one agency on which the negroes and nine tenths of the white people in the South must rely for elementary instruction and training is the American common school. The attempt to educate 2,000,000 of colored and 3,000,000 of white American children in the South by passing around the hat in the North ; sending dribblets of money and barrels of supplies to encourage anybody and everybody to open a little useless private school ; to draw on our Protestant Sunday-schools in the North to build up among these people the church parochial system of elementary schools, which the clergy of these churches are denouncing ; all this, and a great deal more that is still going on among us, with of course the usual exceptions, has had its day and done its work. The only reliable method of directly helping the elementary department of southern education is that our churches and benevolent people put themselves in touch with the common school authorities in all the dark places, urging even their poorer people to do more, as they can do more, than at present. The thousand dollars from Boston that keeps alive a little private or denominational school in a southern neighborhood, if properly applied would give two additional months, better teaching, and better housing to all the children, and unite their people as in no other way. Let the great northern schools in the South established for the negroes be reasonably endowed and worked in coöperation with the public school system of the state, with the idea that in due time they

will all pass into the hands of the southern people, each dependent on its own constituency for its permanent support. I believe, in many instances, it would be the best policy to endow or aid southern schools that have grown up at home and have established themselves in the confidence of the people. While more money should every year be given in the North for southern education, it should not be scattered abroad, but concentrated on strategic points for the uplifting of both races.

After the facts, hard, stubborn, unimpeachable, regrettable, which have been given, we may well inquire whether much hasty action has not prevailed in assigning to the negro an educational position which ancient and modern history does not warrant. The partition of the continent of Africa by and among European nations can hardly be ascribed solely to a lust for territorial aggrandizement. The energetic races of the North begin to realize that the tropical countries—the food and the material producing regions of the earth—cannot, for all time to come, be left to the unprogressive, uncivilized colored race, deficient in the qualities necessary to the development of the rich resources of the lands they possess. The strong powers seem unwilling to tolerate the wasting of the resources of the most fertile regions through the apparent impossibility, by the race in possession, of acquiring the qualities of efficiency which exist elsewhere. The experiment of the Congo Free State, one of the richest and most valuable tracts in Africa, established and fostered under propitious circumstances by the king of Belgium, seems likely to be a barren failure and to prove that African colonization is not a practicable scheme, without state subvention, or the strong, overmastering hand of some superior race. It requires no superior insight to discover that human evolution has come from the energy, thrift, discipline, social and political efficiency of peoples whose power is not the result of varying circumstances, “of the cosmic order of things which we have no power to control.”*

* Since this paper was prepared, Bishop Turner, of Georgia, a colored preacher of intelligence and respectability, in a letter from Liberia, May 11, 1895, advises the re-opening of the African slave-trade and says that, as a result of such enslavement for a term of years by a civilized race, “millions and millions of Africans, who are now running around in a state of nudity, fighting, necromancing, masquerading, and doing everything that God disapproves of, would be working and benefitting the world.” Equally curious and absurd is the conclusion of the editor of the *Globe Quarterly Review* (July, 1895, New York), a northern man, that “nothing but some sort of re-enslavement can make the negro work, therefore he must be re-enslaved or driven from the land.” Could anything be more surprising than these utterances by a former slave and by an abolitionist, or show more clearly “the difficulties, complications, and limitations” which environ the task and the duty of “uplifting the lately emancipated race”?

The negro occupies an incongruous position in our country. Under military necessity slaves were emancipated, and all true Americans accept the jubilant eulogium of the poet, when he declares our country

"A later Eden planted in the wilds,
With not an inch of earth within its bounds
But if a slave's foot press, it sets him free."

Partisanship and an altruistic sentiment led to favoritism, to civic equality, and to bringing the negroes, for the first time in their history, and without any previous preparation, "into the rivalry of life on an equal footing of opportunity." The whole country has suffered in its material development from the hazardous experiment. The South, as a constituent portion of the Union, is a diseased limb on the body, is largely uncultivated, neglected, unproductive. Farming, with the low prices of products, yields little remunerative return on labor or on money invested, and, except in narrow localities and where "trucking" obtains, is not improving agriculturally, or, if so, too slowly and locally to awaken any hopes of early or great recovery.* Crippled, disheartened by the presence of a people not much inferior in numbers, of equal civil rights, and slowly capable of equal mental development or of taking on the habits of advanced civilization, the white people of the South are deprived of any considerable increase of numbers from immigration and any large demand for small freeholds, and are largely dependent on ignorant, undisciplined, uninventive, inefficient, unambitious labor. Intercourse between the Slavs and the tribes of the Ural-Altaic stock, fusion of ethnic elements, has not resulted in deterioration, but has produced an apparently homogeneous people, possessing a common consciousness. That the two diverse races now in the South can ever perfectly harmonize, while occupying the same territory, no one competent to form an opinion believes. Mr. Bryce concludes that the negro will stay socially distinct, as an alien element, unabsorbed and unabsorbable. That the presence, in the same country, of two dis-

* The last assessment of property in Virginia, 1895, shows a decrease of \$8,133,374 from last year's valuation.

tinctly marked races, having the same rights and privileges, of unequal capacities of development—one long habituated to servitude, deprived of all power of initiative, of all high ideal, without patriotism beyond a mere weak attachment—is a blessing, is too absurd a proposition for serious consideration. Whether the great resources of the South are not destined, under existing conditions, to remain only partially developed, and whether agriculture is not doomed to barrenness of results, are economic and political questions alien to this discussion.

“The great work of educating the negroes is carried on mainly by the public schools of the Southern States, supported by funds raised by public taxation, and managed and controlled by public school officers. The work is too great to be attempted by any other agency, unless by the national government; the field is too extensive, the officers too numerous, the cost too burdensome.”* The American Congress deliberately and repeatedly refused aid for the prevention or removal of illiteracy, and upon the impoverished South the burden and the duty were devolved. Bravely and with heroic self-sacrifice have they sought to fulfil the obligation.

In the distribution of public revenues, in the building of asylums, in provision for public education, no discrimination has been made against the colored people. The law of Georgia, October, 1870, establishing a public school system, expressly states that both races shall have equal privileges. The school system of Texas, begun under its present form in 1876, provides “absolutely equal privileges to both white and colored children.” In Florida, under the constitution of 1868 and the law of 1877, both races share equally in the school benefits. Several laws of Arkansas provide for a school system of equal privileges to both races. Under the school system of North Carolina there is no discrimination for or against either race. The school system of Louisiana was fairly started only after the adoption of the constitution of 1879, and equal privileges are granted to white and colored children. Since 1883 equal privileges are granted in Kentucky. The school system of West Virginia grants equal

* *Bureau of Education Report*, 1891-92, page 867.

rights to the two races. The system in Mississippi was put in operation in 1871 and grants to both races "equal privileges and school facilities." The same exact and liberal justice obtains in Virginia, Alabama, and Tennessee.

In 1893-94 there were 2,702,410 negro children of school age—from five to eighteen years—of whom 52.72 per cent, or 1,424,710, were enrolled as pupils. Excluding Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, the receipts from state and local taxation for schools in the South were \$14,397,569. It should be borne in mind that there are fewer taxpayers in the South, in proportion to population generally and to school population especially, than in any other part of the United States. In the South Central States there are only 65.9 adult males to 100 children, while in the Western Division there are 156.7. In South Carolina 37 out of every 100 are of school age; in Montana, only 18 out of 100. Consider, also, that in the South a large proportion of the comparatively few adults are negroes with a minimum of property. Consider, further, that the number of adult males to each 100 children in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut is twice as great as in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In view of such and other equally surprising facts, it is a matter of national satisfaction that free education has made such progress in the South.*

It is lamentable, after all the provision which has been made, that the schools are kept open for such a short period, that so many teachers are incompetent, and that such a small proportion of persons of school age attend the schools. This does not apply solely to the colored children or to the Southern States. For the whole country the average number of days attended is only 89 for each pupil, when the proper school year should count about 200. While the enrollment and average attendance have increased, "what the people get on an average is about one half an elementary education, and no state is now giving an education in all its schools that is equal to seven years per inhabitant for the rising generation. Some states are giving less than three

* *Bureau of Education Report, 1890-91, pages 5, 19, 21, 24.*

years of 200 days each."* It is an obligation of patriotism to support and improve these state-managed schools, because they are among the best teachers of the duties of citizenship and the most potent agency for molding and unifying and binding heterogeneous elements of nationality into compactness, unity, and homogeneity. We must keep them efficient if we wish them to retain public confidence.

Different religious denominations have schools of higher grades in name and general purpose and instruction than the public schools, but unfortunately most of them are handicapped by high-sounding and deceptive names and impossible courses of study. There are twenty-five nominal "universities" and "colleges," which embrace primary, secondary, normal, and professional grades of instruction. These report, as engaged in "collegiate" studies, about 1,000 students. The work done is in some instances excellent; in other cases, it is as defective as one could well imagine it to be. This misfortune is not confined to colored schools. The last accessible report from the Bureau of Education gives twenty-two schools of theology and five each of schools of law and of medicine, and in the study of law and medicine there has, in the last few years, been a rapid increase of students.

A noticeable feature of the schools organized by religious associations is the provision made for industrial education. In the special colored schools established or aided by the state, of higher order than the public schools, such as those in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas, manual training is required for both sexes. As few white schools of the South are provided with this necessary adjunct of education, it would be unjust to criticise too severely what is being done, along industrial lines, in colored schools. It is rather a matter for rejoicing that the schools have even been started in this most hopeful direction, and especially as the long-wished-for industrial development seems to be dawning on the South. Whatever may be our speculative opinions as to the progress and development of which the negro may be ultimately capable, there can hardly be

* *Annual Statement of Commission of Education for 1894*, page 18.

a well-grounded opposition to the opinion that the hope for the race, in the South, is to be found, not so much in the high courses of university instruction, or in schools of technology, as in handicraft instruction. This instruction, by whatever name called, encourages us, in its results, to continued and liberal effort. What such schools as Hampton, the Spelman, Claflin, Tuskegee, Tougaloo, and others have done is the demonstration of the feasibility and the value of industrial and mechanical training.* The general instruction heretofore given in the schools, it is feared, has been too exclusively intellectual, too little of that kind which produces intelligent and skilled workmen, and therefore not thoroughly adapted to racial development, nor to fitting for the practical duties of life. Perhaps it has not been philosophical or practical, but too empirical and illusory in fitting a man for "the conditions in which he will be compelled to earn his livelihood and unfold his possibilities." The effort has been to fit an adult's clothing to a child, to take the highest courses of instruction and apply them to untutored minds. Misguided statesmanship and philanthropy have opened "high schools and universities and offered courses in Greek and Latin and Hebrew, in theology and philosophy, to those who need the rudiments of education and instruction in hand-craft." This industrial training is a helpful accompaniment to mental training, and both should be based on strong moral character. It has been charged that the negroes have had too strong an inclination to become preachers or teachers, but this may be in part due to the fact that their education has been ill adjusted to their needs and surroundings, and that when the pupils leave school they do so without having been prepared for the competition which awaits them in the struggle for a higher life.

Whatever may be the discouragements and difficulties, and however insufficient may be the school attendance, it is a cheer-

* Principal Washington, of Tuskegee Institute, as the representative of his race, made an address at the opening of the great Atlanta Exposition, which elicited high commendation from President Cleveland and the press of the country for its practical wisdom and its broad, catholic, and patriotic sentiments. The Negro Building with its interesting exhibits shows what progress has been made by the race in thirty years and excites strong hopes for the future. The special work displayed by the schools of Hampton and Tuskegee received honorable recognition from the jury of awards.

ing fact that the schools for the negroes do not encounter the prejudices which were too common a few years ago. In fact, there may almost be said to be coming a time when soon there will be a sustaining public opinion. The struggle of man to throw off fetters and rise into true manhood and save souls from bondage is a most instructive and thrilling spectacle, awakening sympathetic enthusiasm on the part of all who love what is noble.

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