

THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL OF VIRGINIA.

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THE PUBLIC FREE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

Dr. Dabney answered by Mr. Ruffner.

[The Rev. R. L. Dabney, D. D., having published an article of extraordinary virulence against the education of the negro, and the school system generally, in the *Planter and Farmer*, of April, 1876, I replied in a series of four articles in the *Richmond Dispatch* and the *Richmond Enquirer*. Dr. Dabney rejoined in a series of four long articles in the same papers, to which I responded in the *Enquirer*, in a series of seven articles. My articles are given below, with omissions of some personal and other matters of temporary interest. The first series is addressed to the editor, the second to Dr. Dabney:—W. H. R.]

FIRST SERIES.

DR. DABNEY EMOTIONAL. .

This attack on our public schools, like the most of those I have seen, is chiefly emotional. It appeals to the sentiment that education and other privileges are suited to the few and not to the many; it panders in language full of scorn and disgust to the common aversion felt for the negroes; and it strives to lash into fury all the most violent passions of the war. Whatever just ground there may be for the prejudices and passions to which he appeals, and probably I have a due share of them myself, I cannot think that it is either wise or patriotic to apply that style of treatment to the solemn questions pertaining to this period of our sorrow and perplexity.

Dr. Dabney is not ignorant of the Nicomachean Ethics, which teach that "the world is a Kosmos, an ordered and garnished whole, only so far as it is held together by the harmonizing law of the mean [moderation]; otherwise it jerks asunder, and *through violent excess bolts into chaos.*"

* * * * *

PUBLIC DEBT AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

As to raising a question between the public debt and the public schools, what could be more unwise! How could men who have any knowledge of human nature, or who have observed the fearful struggle of good men in their effort to maintain the credit of the State, fling the sword of the Brennus into the wavering scale! I reject the issue! I deny the existence of any such antagonism. We can educate, and we can pay! Each will help the other; and the more resolutely we do both, the more surely we will thrive. Does Dr. Dabney expect honor and thrift to prosper among thieves and vagabonds such as he describes? Will the body politic be preserved whilst the gangrene is eating deeper and deeper? * * *

There are many ways of relieving the State without increasing the rate of tax on property. For example: A proper assessment of property, a dog-tax, a two-dollar capitation tax, and the release of property from the State school-tax, &c. What is wanted chiefly is moral work from moral teachers. It may require effort to bring the people to tax their whiskey and dogs, but the task is nothing in comparison with the attempt to overthrow the school system; and everybody knows this except the men who "learn nothing and forget nothing."

If the position these men take in reference to public education be sound, it is as much our duty to shut up colleges, theological seminaries, private schools—yes, and mission schools—as it is to close the public schools; for the cost of all forms of education, at home and abroad, comes out of the people. This point was argued with great force by a writer in the *Enquirer* of March 30th, whose article was republished in the *EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL*. But the gentlemen who are trying to force an issue between the public schools and the public debt wish to destroy the public schools in order that private schools may be left in sole possession of the field. And what would be the result of that? A reduction of perhaps four-fifths in the number of children attending school, and at the same time such an increase in the cost *per capita* that the total amount expended for education would not fall very far short of the present expenditure. A reference to the relative cost of public and private education will show that unless we propose to abolish education wholly we must employ the public system, because we are *too poor to do without it*.

Undoubtedly it is to the interest of the creditors of the State that education should be continued, for the payment of the public debt is not a thing to be finished by this generation or the next. The productive capacity as well as the moral tone of the people must be kept up, and, if possible, increased from generation to generation. If the present generation would pay full interest, the Sinking Fund would accumulate so that our children would need to have no trouble with the debt. But if the State Government should come under the control of such illiterate masses, whether white or black, or mixed, as now control some of the Southern States, not only would the present debt remain unpaid, but probably large

additions would be made to it; and so far as taxes are concerned, the little finger of the new government would be thicker than the loins of the present government. We owe our political salvation to the wisdom of the Conservative party in maintaining the school system. * * *

With our present fifty per cent of illiterate adults, if there were no general provision for education, Virginia would be avoided like a leper; immigrants would avoid us, capital would run away, lands would still go lower and find no purchasers, minerals would lie in their beds, manufactures would die, our products, produced with rude labor and almost without machinery, could not compete with those produced by machinery and intelligent labor, pauperism and crime would constantly increase, and then, finally, the sun of Virginia's glory and honor would go down, even in the presence of old men who had seen the State in the days of her pride and renown.

EDUCATED LABOR.

It would be pertinent to the point just considered to sketch the remarkable history of Holland, Prussia and other States, which began public education at a time of great poverty, and which had to struggle with heavy debts, but which persevered until now they are in the best financial condition of any countries in Europe. Prussia, after all her wars and all her educational and other expenses, *has no public debt*, and a large balance on hand of the French indemnity. The history of these nations demonstrates the great public economy of common schools, and furnishes a sufficient answer to the reckless assertion that education destroys industry among the laboring people.

The economical argument for educating laborers when fully studied, is conclusive to every mind open to conviction. I can here only indicate its drift. Its philosophical basis is the same as that underlying all arguments for education. Not only is knowledge power, but training is power. Muscle and bones are only tools, whose value depends upon the directive power of mind, and of the mind which immediately controls the tools. There is no machine so powerful and so susceptible of improvement *as a man*. And there is no form of labor however simple which does not call for the exercise of quickened intelligence, improved skill and reliable character. The greater the incapacity and unfaithfulness of the laborer the more minute and costly must be the supervision. But let the amount of supervision be what it may, let there be an overseer to every laborer, yet no force acting from without can operate the physical machinery of a man to the same advantage that a man's own mind can work it. Overseers are notoriously bad-tempered and unsatisfactory, and it is partly because they are required to produce good results with poor tools. The overseer himself is misunderstood and thwarted by reason of the ignorance, stupidity and unfaithfulness of the class of laborers he commonly has had to deal with.

Multitudes of our laborers are too ignorant of the English language and too undeveloped intellectually to comprehend the instructions given them about the commonest things. I sometimes compare ignorance and stupidity to the fog which refracts sound so that the fog-bell struck at the light-house in order to guide the mariner, often leads him to destruction. Thus do the words of the employer fail to reach the mind of the laborer so as to convey their proper meaning. And even when untrained laborers know what is wanted, they lack that versatility, that power of concentrating and controlling their faculties, and of adapting means to an end, that earnestness and steadiness of purpose, that promptitude of action, that reliability, which are all necessary to the best results in every kind of labor.

What is it that renders unproductive our lands, that mars our domestic civilization, that wastes our substance, that overwhelms us with foreign products, that frets our housewives, and disheartens our men of enterprise, what so much as the want of sense and character, the want of *effective instruments*, in the kitchen, in the field, in the factory—everywhere that handiwork is to be done? And yet the men of Dr. Dabney's school would rather sit in the dead tree-top and croak despair than lift a finger to improve the tools by means of which must be wrought our prosperity and our civilization.

The views herein expressed have long been held by a large class of the soundest thinkers and keenest observers of all ages, and they have been so fully demonstrated by experience all over the earth and for hundreds of years that what Dr. Dabney speaks of as a "craze" has become the thoroughly settled and universally adopted doctrines of practical statesmen, rulers and political economists *the world over*, the exceptions being too few to be worthy of notice. See the world's statistics and literature *passim*. It is really the historic doctrine of Virginia, always embodied in her Code, and advocated by many of her ablest thinkers, but, owing to peculiar circumstances, never until now fully developed.

For men of this age to call public education "*agrarian*" in either origin or tendency, is simply amusing. On similar grounds one may call a public hydrant or a free bridge *agrarian*. But how funny that the public school "*agrarians*" should have rallied under such leaders as Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Bismarck, and the Czar of Russia! I had no idea they were such demagogues. I should have thought that if any man on earth would suit Dr. Dabney, it would be the Czar!

But it just occurs to me how Dr. D. came to be so opposed to public schools. He thinks they were invented by "*the Yankees*." Now in fact he knew better, for he is not ignorant of history, either ancient or modern, and he never "*pretends*;" but I have long feared that he has just a *leelle* touch of that type of mental constitution, which when once bitten by a rabid prejudice, falls into a sort of dotage like that of an old lady I once knew who had lived in old Revolutionary times, and to the day of her death laid all the troubles of the country on "*the British*." The Yankees

"have sought out many inventions," but they didn't invent public schools. There is no telling but that they might have invented them if they had had a chance, but New England wasn't born soon enough. It is true that the Yankees had some hand in bringing the present system here, and that is a very disagreeable reminiscence. I would have greatly preferred to wait, and let our people do what they certainly would have done, viz: adopted the system, moved only by an enlightened sense of its value and necessity. And so I wish we did not have to accept and use a great many things from the same quarter, such as endowments for our colleges and our theological seminaries. But the rational course for us is to look at *the thing itself*, just as we would at the machinery for a cotton factory, and use or reject it according to its value.

But we are told that if we teach men to read they will *quit work*. I wish Dr. Dabney would go to Accomac county, as I did a year ago, and see if the men who with unsurpassed industry and skill are raising strawberries and sweet potatoes for market, are a set of ignorant boors. Let us hear from Mr. Neely and General Bagwell on that point. And when Dr. Dabney lived among the independent, hard-working farmers of Rockbridge and Augusta did he find that the men who walked between the plough-handles were unable to read? Or if they can read the Bible and the newspaper, does he think they ought to stop that tax on their "nervous energies?"

Here is Dr. Dabney's view of working people. Says he—

"Laborers if taught the art of letters in their youth, disuse them in their manhood. The brain which is taxed to supply the nervous energy for a day of manual labor, will have none left for literary pursuits. If our civilization is to continue, there must be at the bottom of the social fabric *a class who must work and not read.*"

He was thinking of Cuffee then, forgetting, or not caring, that his whole strain of reasoning applies as well to white people as to black. If a day's work will stupefy one man, so it will another, "without regard to race, color, or previous condition of servitude." How cheering is this to our brave young men and women, who, instead of hanging around railroad stations, or sponging on their relations, have laid hold of the tools of industry! How complimentary to our working farmers and mechanics to be told that reading is not for "the likes o' them"—the very class which is the stay, and ought to be the pride, of every country! How considerate toward our impoverished soldiers for them to be told that their children and children's children must, for the convenience of society, belong to an abandoned class, because their poverty compels them to labor!

I deny this whole doctrine and assign it to the dead past. I would not consign three-fourths of the human race to mental darkness even if our material interests were out of the question. I could not do it as a believer in the doctrine that the Bible is meant for the people. But apart from humane considerations, I maintain that these very workers may be made a source of inexhaustible intellectual as well as physical power, and that in this day no civilization can hold its own without a union of working and

reading, and that the reading workers are the triumphant workers. The best educated laboring people in the world are those of Scotland, Holland, Switzerland, and the numerous Germanic States. Are they idle, lazy, thriftless people? England has a different idea of them, since her pauper-made products went down before the results of the educated labor of those States. And these pestilent "Yankees"—how do they make out to get victuals and clothes? The rascals will read, and Dr. Dabney's logic will not admit the idea that men can both read and work; and therefore they *must be* an idle, unproductive set, no matter about the facts.

Would that I had space to tell of that wonderful inquisition made a few years ago by the English Parliamentary Commission, which examined this whole matter of educated labor with a thoroughness never done before, and made a report which promptly brought the English free school system into life and set the Czar to teaching his serfs. Oh, Mr. Editor, there is a world of such facts that ought to be scattered over Virginia like the leaves of the trees—facts that show as plainly as though proclaimed by an angel that "*this is the way—walk ye in it!*"

THE NEGRO.

The negro is the enigma of ages. The ethnologist cannot tell whence he came or whither he goeth. When the sword cut the Gordian knot of slavery in America, pre-announced theories as to the negro's future were slaughtered "heaps upon heaps." But, nothing discouraged, the prophets are at work again. One announces amalgamation, another deportation, another subjugation, another extermination, whilst uninspired people are content to say, "God only knows." Dr. Dabney's theory is extermination arrested by General Sheridan: which is a mixed result not pleasant to contemplate, for instead of being negro pure and simple, it is the negro, and the Yankee soldier into the bargain. But what after that? The destruction of the whole United States by the eating on of this Southern "gangrene" is the ultimate result. But what is there for us in Virginia between the arrival of General Sheridan and the end of all things? I will take up the prophecy where he dropped it. He leaves the picture in Virginia—white people down, negroes up, Federal satraps in every village, and bayonets fringing every courthouse. To this will assuredly be added Yankee schoolmistresses to teach the negroes, and Federal tax-gatherers to raise the money for their support out of this prostrated white people. With such a lovely prospect, why doesn't everybody run to Virginia?

This solution offered to us by our worthy divine, is far richer than that offered to England by the Rev. T. R. Malthus when considering what should be done with the paupers. The reverend gentleman simply said, *let them starve to death!* But our more humane divine expects a shorter

method; he thinks that many of them will be "put out of their misery" with the butcher-knife, and then he will have the "grim satisfaction" of saying to the Yankees, "You did it!" He would prefer the starvation system of Malthus, which "*Civis*" anticipates, but he will accept extermination in any form. Here are some of his words: "Good, patriotic, philanthropic, Christian [!] men, here see the evil fruits of that crime looming up so fearfully as actually to find a grain of private consolation in the *hope* [!] that a race of human beings among us are advancing to the miseries of extermination. *I do not find fault with the hope.* It is natural. I shall naturally and *justifiably* hope that my wilful destroyer may perish before he murders me. *I condemn the oppression,** which has left good and wise men *no solace* except in that hope."

At the bottom of the next page he announces his expectation—namely, butchery begun by the Virginia people and terminated by Federal bayonets, followed by the reign of the provost-marshal.

It is important to consider how Dr. Dabney proposes to manage the case until it is ripe for the final catastrophe. First, all Christian means of dealing with the colored people are to be wholly ignored. He does not say this, but I have searched in vain for one Christian thought or act in the programme. We may, therefore, conclude that from either hatred or despair, the Church is to go her way, like the priest and the Levite, and leave the victim to his fate. He is to have no teaching in schools, not simply because it is expensive, but because the negro's business is to "work and not read;" teaching will do him harm and no good. Dr. Dabney is sure that he will not work, for he says distinctly that the time will come when "the blacks are determined to live and not to work," and hence, he says, while awaiting the final catastrophe, the negro should be managed by the civil magistrate by means "harsher than domestic slavery." Without expressing it fully, his language clearly points to the chain-gang and the public whipping-post as the chief means for managing the negro race until the end comes.

Just at the conclusion of his long article he draws back, and suddenly gives up all the points he had contended for by proposing a return to the old system of education, with the addition of a direct school-tax for the education of the poor, the taxes derived from the white and colored people respectively to be collected and applied separately. This he offers as a mere compromise to which he might be driven; but his expectations, and apparently his preferences, are with the first programme.

Now, if Dr. Dabney and company were inspired of God, or had power enough of their own, of course every man who has any regard for his own future or that of his family, should move out of Virginia at any sacrifice of property which might be necessary, and any man who would come into the State would be simply "a fool," (as some people would say). But there is a hopeful view at once suggested by Dr. Dabney's programme, and it is

* *Foregoing italics mine.*

this: If we do not like the picture which he sets before us, we had better adopt some other preliminary treatment of the case than the one he proposes. If ignorance and depravity on the part of the negroes, treated with neglect, hatred and rough usage on the part of the whites, will be followed by increasing worthlessness of the negro and increasing violence on the part of the whites, until the end is blood and subjugation, then, *perhaps*, education and christianity *might possibly* give us better results. At any rate, men might be allowed to prefer the school to the jail and the provost-marshal as a system of public economy without being set upon as if they were public enemies.

Dr. Dabney's conclusions follow naturally from his premises. If the freedmen are treated as he proposes to treat them, then we may expect a future of ever-deepening gloom and misery. He has probably read the history of emancipation in the past, but without drawing the lessons they ought to have taught him. In my Official Report of 1871 I sketch briefly the history of sudden emancipation in the Roman Empire, with special reference to the case of England, as an argument why we should avoid that neglect of the freedmen which brought upon Europe a mass of pauperism and crime never before known, the effect of which was to aid powerfully in the destruction of some of the older civilizations, and to inflict burdens upon even the most prosperous nations, such as France and England, which have scourged and oppressed them even to this day. [See Cassagnac's History of the Working Classes; also histories of the French Commune and English Pauperism].

Our only escape from these evils is that which England, after 1,000 years of suffering with her paupers, has at length resorted to—namely, the intellectual and moral improvement of those whom she had hitherto treated with poor-rates, the pillory, and the work-house; or, in other words, with Dr. Dabney's system, with a little of the "milk of human kindness" added in the form of free soup. And there is now no point on which Church and State seem to be more generally agreed than the doctrine that the enlightenment of the mind is an indispensable element in human improvement. Wherever the Church goes the School goes along, and the lower the grade of mind and character on which the Church has to operate the more vigorously the *secular school* is employed to prepare the seed-bed for gospel teaching, and to establish the converts in faith and good works. And so with the State in promoting her interests.

The negroes have no special claim on us because of slavery. They had the best end of that bargain. They have the strongest claim that ever any people had upon the General Government of the country, that turned them out upon the world in their poverty and ignorance to compete with the white man, and I would like to have that claim dinged in the ear of Congress until it would be listened to, and at least until some of our public lands be turned over to help the old mother who in the period now to be celebrated with so much *eclat* once saved the American Government from

bankruptcy by giving up a territory of vast extent and unequalled fertility to maintain public credit.

But our emergency is too pressing for us to delay action. When the small-pox is upon us we must go to vaccinating, leaving incidental questions for future consideration. We should not be insensible to the *moral* claims these people have as human beings upon their fellow-men. They are an amiable, docile people, whom we have no right to thrust outside the pale of our Christian sympathies. They are in our houses, our fields, our shops, and they have long been associated with our business and family life. Their moral condition is deplorable. We are supporting school-teachers among the Indians, among the Chinese, among the Brazilians of the Lusitanian stock. Why not do something for "the Greeks" at our doors? The State cannot assume missionary work from missionary motives; but one would think that Christian people would take pleasure in that aspect of the work of education.

The State educates partly for the same reason that she punishes—viz: to promote order and honest industry; but principally for the development of her citizens in all the elements of power, and thus providing for her own aggrandizement. Were this a fitting opportunity, I would gladly argue the whole subject in all its economical, moral and political aspects; but having spoken in my last on the advantage of educating laborers generally, I here only can say that so far at least as elementary education is concerned, there are the same reasons for educating the blacks that there are for educating the whites. The negro, like every other organism, higher and lower, is improvable under culture. He may be made more intelligent, more moral, more industrious and more skilful. He may be taught much of his civil and social duty. And just in proportion as he is really improved, in that proportion is he a more orderly and productive member of society.

Sociologists who have made a large induction of facts in relation to the effect of education on common laborers incline to add twenty-five per cent. to the value of a laborer who has had an elementary education. The public value of an uneducated male laborer has been fixed at about \$1,000. If we suppose that the 125,000 negro men set free in Virginia possessed a public value of \$800 apiece, they were worth in the aggregate \$100,000,000. If they have depreciated as laborers, then the State has been losing capital on that amount of wealth. If they work only half as well as formerly, as Dr. D. says is the fact, then the State has lost \$50,000,000 in ten years on her man power. And if it be true that the training of a common school adds twenty-five per cent., then if that training could have been given to our negro men we would have had an investment now of \$125,000,000 in negro man-power, instead of the \$50,000,000, or less, which we now have. This amount of education on the public system can be given for \$30 a head, and if it adds \$200 to the value of a man as a laborer, in addition to what it adds as a member of the community, then the State in educating her laborers is making an enormous profit.

It may be said that calculations made for white men will not hold good for the negro. I suppose that they will not, to the full extent; but they will at least to a partial extent. The negro children show an ordinary aptitude in acquiring the elements of knowledge, and improve rapidly in mind and character under school discipline, as has been fully proved by experiment. I am satisfied also that the schooling they get makes them more industrious, as well as more capable, more honest and more virtuous; whilst socially they are not brought any nearer to the whites than they were before. Indeed, after a great deal of study and observation, I am strongly of the opinion that a great moral work is now going on among the blacks which will be highly beneficial to society. This antagonism of race, acting in connection with separate education, will foster among the negroes the pride of race which will have a purifying and stimulating power, and will gradually overcome that contemptible ambition to associate with white people, which has been instilled into their minds by the blundering policy of the Northern people and the Federal Government.

Dr. Dabney has so little confidence in his own race as to suppose that white people will go to marrying negroes if the latter learn anything at the schools. I am far from thinking so; and I hope that the reverend gentleman will cultivate more respect for his own blood. But if under the ordinary associations of life there would be any tendencies in the direction of amalgamation, the school system would oppose a powerful barrier to such tendency. In fact, of all the public arrangements of Southern society, the school system alone renders a bold, emphatic testimony to the immiscibility of the races. We find negroes in our churches, our theatres, our courthouses, our rail-cars, our halls of legislation; but there is one place where no negro enters, and that is a *white public school house*. The law separates the races in education, and in nothing else. The effect of this separation enters into the educational thought and training of the young, and establishes the habits and the etiquette of society with a firmness that nothing else is doing, or could do. And yet Dr. Dabney has the boldness to use these words: "They (the public schools) only prepare the way for that abhorred fate, *amalgamation*. If the School Board are working for anything, they are working for this; here is the goal of their plans."

The political value of education ought to be obvious to the reflecting mind. Good government is, of course, essential to prosperity—almost to existence. And what sort of government would we drift into with one-half of our voters unable to read their ballots, and those who cannot be bought for a dollar or two liable to be defrauded in many ways? Now, what remedy have such men as Dr. Dabney for this state of things? None whatever; and nothing to suggest except some desperate dream of violence. Virginia wants other advisers than these.

Were there space I would say something as to the character and extent of the education which, in my judgment, is suited to the grade of civilization reached by the colored people; but I will have other opportunities for doing this. There was just one intimation in Dr. Dabney's article which I

will here endorse—namely, that the old-fashioned system of apprenticeship might be usefully employed to a much greater extent than it is.

If we could only clear the field of dead issues, and study our public interests in the light of the world's experience, our State would soon outgrow and throw off the diseases of the body politic. Is nothing to be learned from the experience of such countries as England and France, Holland and Russia, even if we refuse to learn anything from our Northern States, forgetting the sound Roman maxim that it is wise to learn from an enemy. Austria was wiser than this, for when defeated by Prussia, almost her first act was to adopt the Prussian school system. England was wiser, for when defeated on the field of industry at Paris, in 1867, she adopted the educational ideas of the nations which defeated her. Holland is educating the Malays in her island of Java. Do the Dutch waste their money? The Khedive is educating the mixed denizens of the Nile. Victor Emmanuel is educating the lazzaroni of Italy. The Czar is educating his emancipated serfs. Are these Governments controlled by spendthrifts and fanatics? Shall we refuse even to examine into the political economy which underlies this faith in education?

No, no; Virginia has a future to be provided for, as well as a great past to be remembered. She must not be confined to the testimony of men who construct universal doctrines on the few cases in their own secluded neighborhoods, but must look over the earth and search diligently for the hidden fountains of public prosperity. She must inquire why it is that the earth is becoming a garden, that cities are growing with amazing rapidity, and that erudition is scattering abroad the treasures once hoarded. And she will not be slow to observe that all over the earth long-brooding darkness is rolling away from the toiling masses of humanity, and that the wonderful results of human skill and industry are no longer produced by a stupid implement swinging a dead implement, but by machinery guided by quickened intelligence and trained fingers, and will learn also the practical lesson that every State not wishing to be left far behind in the march of civilization *must go and do likewise!*