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Athenian Education.

An Address before the Educational Association of Virginia, July 9th, 1879, by
PROF. H. H. HARRIS, *Richmond College.*

[Continued from last No., p. 37, and concluded.]

We have thus far seen what was the usual school-age in ancient Athens, and how it was spent, how schools were established, equipped and conducted, what subjects were taken up and how they were studied. It remains to submit

SOME GENERAL REMARKS,

which may help to explain the strange fact that a system so deficient in organization or correlation of parts, schools so destitute of what we consider requisite appliances, could yet accomplish results so potent and so permanent. One can but pity their lack of comfortable appointments and of the innumerable aids and stimuli to study which we enjoy. Every one of us has been assisted in gaining his education by a thousand heads and ten thousand hands—engaged in contriving and making houses, seats, desks, slates, black-boards, pencils, pens, ink, paper, diagrams, maps, charts, pictures, books. Dwell a moment on the thought, and try to estimate how many in this present generation have contributed to your instruction and mental growth, then call up the long line of their predecessors in all the centuries past, and consider how many “other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.” The Athenian boys had very few indeed of these inestimable advantages.

There was another and a far worse defect in the Athenian system. It has been incidentally brought out in the preceding discussion, but

Congress and the Education of the People.

A meeting of the Department of Superintendents belonging to the National Educational Association was held in Washington city, Feb'y 18-20, 1880. A large number of the most distinguished educators in the United States were in attendance. Superintendent Ruffner, of Virginia, as chairman of the Committee on National Legislation, reported the following resolutions, which, after favorable addresses by Messrs. Ruffner, S. C. Armstrong, G. J. Orr, J. P. Wickersham and J. D. Philbrick, were unanimously adopted:

1. *Resolved*, by the meeting of School Superintendents here assembled, That there is immediate and pressing need of Federal aid to the States, and especially to the Southern States, in the work of educating the people in the primary branches of knowledge.

2. *Resolved*, That the Congress now in session be most respectfully urged to consider and act favorably upon the bill now before it, H. R. 334, entitled "A Bill to apply the proceeds of sales of public lands to the education of the people," and so forth, or some modification thereof which would recognize the principle of applying these funds wholly for the general education of the people.

SUPERINTENDENT RUFFNER'S ADDRESS.

The call upon Congress for aid in educating the people will not cease until aid be granted. A notable reinforcement has just entered the field, namely, The Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund—a body singularly dignified. As a body it is well informed as to the condition of the country, and particularly of the southern country. Its well-known General Agent, Dr. Sears, knows better than any one else what are the facts and meaning of southern affairs. Hence this movement by the Peabody Trustees is entitled to the highest consideration.

And when, in addition to this, we remember the endorsement which this cause has received from the body of school superintendents, from the National Association of Teachers, from State Legislatures, and

from numerous other influential bodies, we may feel assured that the object will be attained. But any object, however noble, having in it no war, politics, money or magnetism, must be slow-footed in the press of congressional business, and among the common-places occupying the popular mind. There are also oppositions.

When we ask for the proceeds of the public lands, although the kernel has largely been eaten out of the nut, we run against old party theories. Most men who have held these theories understand that theories are and ought to be modified in their action by circumstances, yet a full-blooded abstractionist knows nothing but to die by his theory. *But* a public man, whatever be his theory, will pay due respect to the *public will*.

Besides political and sectional jealousies, other interests antagonise this patriotic object. Private and corporate schemes are ever moving, or preparing to move, on the public domain. How little do the people of the United States generally know how largely their vast landed estate has thus been alienated. A well informed writer in the *International Review* gives us this statement of facts, which might well rouse the indignation of the public mind, if they are anywhere near the truth :

"Instead of laying the foundations of democratic equality in the soil itself, and thus taking 'a bond of fate' for the welfare of coming generations, the goading need of money and the very abundance of American lands paved the way for great monopolies, which have *increased* and *multiplied* ever since. The purchase of vast tracts by individuals and companies was not only allowed but encouraged by the government. The policy of disposing of the public domain at low or nominal rates, to actual settlers only, and in limited quantities, was not then dreamed of; and so potent was the influence of those feudal ideas which had been transplanted from the Old World, that the enactment of the present homestead law did not become possible till seventy-five years after the establishment of the American land system. But this famous law did not emancipate the public domain. It was a sign of promise, but it did not fulfill the nation's desire. Non-resident speculators were still at liberty to purchase great tracts, and hold them indefinitely for a rise in price, which was at war with the whole spirit and policy of the homestead law, and as flagrantly unjust as it was financially stupid. The American system of land grants to railroad corporations, which originated in 1850, has already surrendered a territorial empire of over *two hundred million acres*! The Indian Treaty system, fully inaugurated by Congress in 1861, has robbed poor settlers of great bodies of choice lands, and handed them over to monopolists and sharpers. The legislation on the subject of military land bounties, while nearly profitless to the soldier has been a national disaster,

beneficial only to speculators and monopolists. The acts of Congress on the subject of swamp lands, and college and Indian scrip, have been equally vicious and indefensible. The rights of settlers under the homestead and pre-emption laws have been seriously threatened by department rulings in the interest of *railway companies*, while the growing power of land monopoly has been formidably reinforced by the State and Federal courts. Under the vicious legislation to which we have referred, only one person in fifteen, outside of the towns and cities, is the owner of a home in the land states of the South. In the state of California quite a number of men *own hundreds of thousands of acres each, and in crossing the lands of one of these you are obliged to travel seventy-five miles. These monopolists, in league with the navigation and railway companies*, and banking corporations of the state, naturally favor the Coolie traffic, since it supplies a back ground of degraded and pauperized labor on which a splendid aristocracy of wealth may fitly and securely flourish. The curse of monopoly in the states of the North-West, caused by the cruel commerce in land which the government has encouraged, has been an irreparable blight to their prosperity. Great estates are everywhere tending to swallow up the smaller ones, and to produce a constantly multiplying and crouching tenantry."

When we read such statements we understand at least in part why it is that when this matter is brought before Congress, some mysterious agency clogs its movements.

Moreover, considering the tendency of all governments to ally themselves with property, rather than with the people, owing largely to a political economy which is as fallacious as it is inhuman, we ought perhaps not to be surprised at the shameful history of our squandered possessions. But it ought to be manifest that a radical change of management is demanded, and whenever these lands are set apart for the use and benefit of *their owners*, we may expect a wiser administration of this great subject.

An impediment of a different sort consists in the want of faith in popular education which is not unknown even in the North, and is common in the South, though much less common than it was twenty years ago. The unbelief in the South is readily accounted for by its adherence to old traditions, by the influence of English literature, by the institution of slavery, and above all by the controversy in respect to slavery which by the law of moral dynamics drove the defenders of slavery into a depreciation of the claims of laboring people, and a denial of the power of common school education to improve this class. These views were applied *a fortiori* to the negro. The tremendous logic of events has made astonishing changes of sentiment, but the dregs of all these old ideas and feelings lie scattered about. And in

addition to these the early post-war history stirred up new difficulties, so that altogether we find that our cause has to wade through seas and sands, with now and then a battle.

And so we might speak of the opposition which comes from those who from theory, or private interest, or ecclesiastical influence, oppose, or at least dislike all governmental aid to education—although this form of opposition does not usually extend to the high grades of education. And to this wearisome list we might add the high-strung States Rights men who are very jealous of Federal gifts to the education of the people, but get very fearless of Federal money and Federal power when the river and harbor budget comes along.

But in dealing with public men we must bear in mind their representative character, and we must especially remember that our whole argument is based upon the fact that *the people do rule*. Representatives must therefore be persuaded that even if the people have not already formally approved, they will approve of Federal contributions to education—*Federal contribution*, not Federal control, which latter all are opposed to.

It seems to me that any thoughtful man who understands this subject, must be convinced that the people will not only approve this contribution, but will demand it—certainly to the extent of requiring the proceeds of the public lands to be set apart for this object. Put before the people for their votes, a line of railroad through the Rocky mountains on one side, and a line of school-houses at home on the other, and can any one doubt which they would prefer? Ask the great West what it thinks of schools for the people as contrasted with thirty-thousand-acre wheat fields obtained at small cost out of the people's land. Ask the people of the Atlantic sea-board, if it was with their consent that a semi-continental domain should be lavishly given to almost every body and every thing except to them, the original owners, buyers, or givers, who bought or gave for the *common use and benefit*; and so far from getting anything back, have seen their own property so used as to drain their states of population, and increase their burdens.

You need not ask what the Southern people think, or will think when they come to understand, that in one end of the scales is their salvation, and the other a cage filled with corporation kings, land operators, and abstractionists of the old school! I shall only hint at the sentiment of Virginia when the story of the North-West Territory is told once more.

The people *all*—West and East, South and North—will assuredly

understand this whole matter, and when they do understand it, there will be no more need for argument.

Ideas, like seeds, cannot take root until the conditions are right. The moon must be in the right sign. Hitherto the conditions have not been right for this idea, but the conditions are now right, and we may confidently expect it to grow and spread—the only danger being that it will spread too wildly. The era of the oak is giving way to the era of the pine: God forbid that we should pass on to the era of broom sedge and prairie fires. By which I mean that the social and political era of the past is different from that of the present, and the present is possibly different from that of the future. The people are claiming more for themselves through the government, and if this has to be accomplished by revolution it will run into a terrible socialism. My firm belief is that socialism cannot long prevail in a government like ours. But we are on the line which points in that direction. The people, as distinguished from leaders, parties, and social belongings of all sorts, are coming to the front, and henceforth property, party, and government itself must become secondary and directly subservient to the interests of the people. The Massachusetts of to-day is not the Massachusetts of fifty years ago. The railroad riots of two or three years ago in Pennsylvania are something very different from the Whiskey Insurrection. The Sand-Lot multitudes of California have a very different meaning from the nullifiers of the days of Andrew Jackson, or the church burners of Philadelphia. The whole country wears a different aspect from what it wore forty years ago. The same may be said of Europe. And at the bottom of all is the same idea, and the impending dangers are the same in all. And out of all this may come something grandly good, or horribly bad, according to the wisdom or folly of those who have the management of the crisis. This is no time for the reign of pessimism. True, we want eyes of honest discernment to see that there are real evils in social affairs, and to see just what they are, but we also want wise heads and brave hearts to devise and execute that which is best. This is not the occasion for discussing this subject fully, but the true line of action is indicated when I say, that the safety of society lies not in T. R. Malthus, not in courts, policemen or gunpowder, although temporarily all these might be needed. Where then must we look? To the people,—to these threatening masses who wrong will rend society to pieces, but who right will be her grandest muniment.

In our Southern country extreme conservatism has been the controlling spirit during most of our history, and it had much to recom-

mend it. In its older aspects it was social feudalism, refined and knightly; and its typical representative was an honest gentleman. But no oligarchical form of society could be permanent in this country, and this had begun to relax before 1861. And the events of the war opened the eyes of the privileged class to the value of the common people. And after the war no man would have ventured to talk about the "mud-sills" of society.

But in the post-war period society was thrown into chaos by the sudden rise and speedy departure of an opposite condition of affairs. This was the carpet bag period, whose lessons ought never to be forgotten, because it gave an ocular demonstration in most states of how suddenly and how surely death strikes to the heart of society when ignorance under the lead of rascality rules the land. And this period will go into history as the darkest of all. After it, came a reaction in favor of conservatism. But the crystallizations of the past had been broken, and the scattered fragments could not be reunited. Society is still unsettled, and no man can forecast the future. Many good men are gloomy and despairing. Some would only croak and groan; others would curse and fight. But all this is foolish and unavailing. The panacea for the ills of society is not malevolence, but *sympathy*; and this sympathy must not be a sentimental vapor, or a smiling hypocrisy, but be of that substantial sort which provokes an honest study of each other's wants. To put your arm around a shabby voter when leading him to the polls is one thing, to study how you may permanently better the man and improve his lot in life, is quite another thing.

Nearly thirty years ago Stephen Colwell brought a heavy indictment against the whole existing science of Political Economy, because it regarded the products of men as the chief concern of government, instead of the men themselves. And it has been pleasant to observe how students of social and governmental science are gradually reaching the conclusion that the main concern of governments ought to be, not railroads, tariffs, money and such like, but the personal character and well being of the people. Property does not make men, but men make property. Shall we be forever worshipping the thing made, and care not for the maker?

And when we are trying to move Congress in this matter of help to educate the people we may claim that we are doing a great service in exalting the sphere of legislation. Could we only establish *man* as the central figure in this wearisome wilderness of legislation, we would perform a public service far beyond the value of the landed domain.

We would put a splendid policy of insurance on all the great interests of society. If one-tenth part of the legislation and the money now spent on material interests were spent directly on the people, the material interests would largely take care of themselves.

The world has never yet fully tested the power of education in forming a free society, unless ancient Athens be an exception. Though education in the true sense is not compatible with arbitrary government, and must produce turbulence, education is life and health to a free government. We do not boast of our popular education; it might be, it ought to be a great deal better. Even in the states which have longest had school systems, children on an average do not get much over five months schooling annually. And what are the school teachers of America compared with what they might be; and how many subjects ought to be taught to the people, that are wholly omitted—moral, social and governmental subjects of the greatest moment. Some people ridiculed Gen. Burnside's bill to teach the virtues in the public schools, but this is not a suggestion to be whistled down the wind. What are all the things about which there is so much legislation, compared with a virtuous, enlightened, orderly, industrious people! And this sort of people *are made*, not born; and considered in mass they must be made by their governments, or they will not be made at all.

I know not what is true of Northern and Western States, but I can say for my State and for most of the Southern States, we are not able to educate our people in any tolerable sense; we are too poor to do it. A few years ago I showed this conclusively by statistics, and many of these statements you will find embodied in a printed document prepared by Hon. A. H. H. Stuart of Virginia, and presented to the meeting of the Peabody Trustees held on yesterday; and I still have a few copies of my original argument. There has not been much increase in financial ability in these States since that time—no increase on an average in my own State, so far as I can judge. And every well informed man knows that whatever be the wants of a State, her power of taxation has a limit beyond which it must not go. By which is meant, not simply that there is a point beyond which the people *will not* go, but a point beyond which they *ought not* to go. It is, I think, a settled principle that taxation must keep within the average annual profits of the tax-payers; when it begins to eat into the capital of the country, it is like consumption of the lungs in the human constitution; decline sets in from that point. And there is no form of obligation which imposes upon a state the act of *felo de se*.

A state may press nearer to the extreme verge of ability in levying taxes for education than for almost any other object; because education is a re-productive force. But inasmuch as this force is gradual and somewhat slow in producing its effects the cost of education might in some cases reduce the vitality of a state to so low a point that a fatal decline would set in before the point of re-action could be reached.

No doubt bold assertions have been made without much reference to the facts in regard to the ability or want of ability of some States to increase taxes, men being tempted to take one side or the other according to their sentiments on other questions; but I fear that in a number of Southern States the extreme limit of taxation has been reached. Although the ratio of taxes to the amount of property is less than in some prosperous States, the ratio of taxes to annual profits is exceedingly large. A low rate of taxation on a people not improving is more oppressive than a high rate on a prosperous people.

And in the South public education is a more costly affair than it is in the North, because of the necessity for having separate schools for white and colored children. If there are forty school children in a neighborhood, and one half of them are white and the other half colored, there must be two school houses and two teachers, where otherwise one would be sufficient. It is idle for any one to suggest a mixture of the races. It can't be done. We must educate in separate schools, or not at all. When the ratio of the school tax is considered it will be seen that most of the Southern States are making liberal appropriations for education. But these appropriations must be greatly increased before the people can receive the training demanded by the public safety. And we must educate, or surrender, and accept the destiny of Spain, and Turkey, and Mexico. We can become the Bœotia, the Ireland, the Poland of the American government. We can die as to civilization, as many states have died before; we can hang as a body of death on the back of the Great Republic. But does the nation desire this? If not, why is it that a measure which has more medicine in it for the healing of the nation than all else put together, has been so slow of recognition in quarters where prompt sympathy might justly have been anticipated.

On what principle of humanity or self-interest could the nation justify indifference to a group of states which have in them even now so much that is admirable, so many men and women of the highest type, so many young men in whose blood courses the culture of centuries, so many warm hearts that could be made enthusiastic for their

country. These are the elements which give dignity and moral power to a nation; and that government is blind or jaundiced which will allow such glories to perish.

And to these add the material outcome of these Southern States in their mineral wealth, in their tobacco, cotton, rice, sugar, tropical fruits; and in the future, tea certainly, and perhaps coffee, cinchona, and many other valuable productions not yet introduced. By the fiat of God the nation must look south for these things or do without them.

Now ought a proposition to give a very little help to a very great cause like this—ought such a proposition be compelled to watch and scheme and fight for even a half hour's consideration on the floor of Congress? And may not Congress with all propriety do what we ask? One of the chief functions of every government is to avert dangers and cure evils which are beyond the ability of the members affected. Indeed there is no definition of the object of government which will bear examination except this, that its object is the good of the people. I do not forget the complex nature of our American government. I was brought up on the controversy as to States Rights and Federal Rights, but without rearguing dead issues, it might be enough for us to say that this is not like ordinary petitions for aid; it is simply asking for a return to the owners, of property which Congress is holding as fiduciary, and which the suffering owners need for necessary current expenses. There need not be any constitutional qualms on the subject. And even if any body would wish to honor the ashes of a defunct controversy, he would get his fingers dreadfully burned if he would act upon it. For here is Congress now actively engaged in the work of improving harbors, deepening rivers, establishing light-houses, granting subsidies to railroads, geologizing the Rocky mountains, surveying the country in order to have accurate maps and charts, maintaining life-saving stations along the coast, and engaging in other wise and beneficent enterprises. If Congress may do these things, there can be no question as to its power to make appropriations in aid of the most important of all causes, the formation of national character, and the rescue of the people from degradation and misery.

THE NEGRO.

Coming as I do from a Southern State, Mr. President and brother Superintendents, you will expect me to say something specially about the negro, whose fate is to be determined largely by what the Federal government does for him, or leaves undone.

It is just ten years since I entered upon my present work; and I have studied nothing so much as the negro, because he is an enigma, and yet a part of my work. I have seen him in all sections of my own State. I have read everything I could find in regard to him everywhere. I have listened to everything *pro* and *con* that anybody had to say about him. And my impression in regard to his spirit and capacity is just this:

1. He wants to do right, and he is the most amiable of the races. He is also the most religious of human beings, and the character of his religion is improving. It controls his daily life more than formerly. Among these people there are many centres of great moral power.

2. The negro craves education, and I believe that this desire has increased. It certainly has not diminished. He makes fully as great sacrifices to send his children to school as the laboring classes of whites.

3. The civilization of the race is progressing—and even faster than his thoughtful friends anticipated.

4. The negro is fond of politics, and he has just one principle of political action, and that is to go with those who will do most, or lead him to think they will do most, to advance his interest. He has an eye to the past, but a much sharper eye to the future. He has no strong faith in men or parties—and he will go hither and thither according as his confidence is gained at the moment. He is most suspicious of those who have heretofore formed the controlling element in Southern society and politics. There are occasional divisions of political sentiment among the negroes, but the great body of them move in mass—thus giving an illustration of “the unanimity of ignorance.”

5. But finally, as a class, they are in character weak and ignorant—and hence to that extent a dangerous element in society. We cannot expect that the mass of them, any more than the mass of ignorant white people, will be controlled by high and broad views, whilst in their present condition; and there is no way of making them safe members of society but by educating them. The negroes are a

highly improvable race. A surprising proportion of enlightened, right-thinking men have already risen from their ranks—men who have taken a respectable position—some in the learned professions—some in editing and printing newspapers, and some in the management of business—and what is not less commendable, great numbers are living worthy lives in the humble occupations. The colored children learn well at school, and show good effects promptly. But the kind and amount of education they are receiving, or can receive with our present means, is wholly inadequate to the great work of fitting them as a race for duties laid upon them by the Federal Government. And the race generally is far below the demands made upon it. No stronger claim to education ever existed than the claim of the negro race in these Southern States upon the government which set them free, and made them citizens; and this claim will be rung in the ear of Congress until it is responded to. It forms one of those great pleas which has so much force in itself, and is supported by collateral reasons of such tremendous weight, that it must prevail.

SUMMARY.

In conclusion the points made or assumed in the remarks now made are: 1. That there is an enormous and most dangerous mass of ignorance existing in the whole United States, and that this is particularly true of the Southern States, where the poor circumstances of the people forbid an effective system of common school education. 2. That these ignorant classes, white and colored, improve readily under right influences. 3. That we have entered upon a peculiarly critical period in which there is an ominous disposition on the part of the masses of the people, to discard old leadership, and to lay hold of the controlling forces of society. 4. That safety and justice alike demand that the people shall be educated in right views and habits, and thus be made the unconquerable defenders of order and property. 5. That the subject demands the immediate attention of the Congress of the United States.