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The Practical Value of The Higher Education of the Negro

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THE progress of the Negro race consists in improvement of the personal worth and social efficiency of its individual members. The value of any type of education must be appraised in terms of these standards. Any proposed scheme of social uplift which hopes to gain popular approval and support must be subjected to the concrete test of rendering the recipient more worthy in his individual qualities and of making him a more efficient instrument of service to his fellowman.

In this practical age there is little tolerance for abstract doctrine or fruitless theory that does not translate itself into the actualities of life. The whole educational world has been profoundly affected by the influence of this tendency. The stress of educational emphasis has been shifted from the passive to the active aspect of culture. To be somebody was the ideal of the old school education; to do something is the aim of the new. The one placed the stress of emphasis on being; the other on doing.

This tendency towards the practical end of education is greatly emphasized when the application is limited to the colored race. The Negro's presence in this country, in the first place, was due to the belief that he was intended by the Creator to be an instrument of crude service. His traditional function was mainly mechanical, and scarcely more human than that of the ox which pulls the plow. His personality was at first denied, and afterwards ignored. Men spoke of the Negro as a "good hand" just as they spoke of a good ax or a good ox. The imputed virtue had exclusive reference to his utility as a tool. The traditional bias concerning the Negro's ordained place in the social scheme influences present opinion concerning the kind of education which should be imparted to him. As a consequence of this attitude,

that type of education which fits him for his accustomed sphere and place has found ready appreciation and favor; he is to be educated for his work, rather than for himself.

As a matter of fact, the great bulk of this race must devote its chief energies to the cruder and coarser grades of service which fall to its lot as far in the future as our present vision can penetrate. The industrial education of the masses, therefore, becomes a matter of the highest concern to the practical statesman and philanthropist. Dr. Booker T. Washington, in his moments of greatest enthusiasm, has never over stated the importance of industrial training as an essential agency of the general social uplift. But at the same time, it should never be forgotten that the Negro is a human being as well as a utensil of service. A wise educational economy will seek to make him a *man* working, rather than a *working* man.

The universities and colleges for the Negroes were founded on the wave of moral enthusiasm which marked the highest point that christian philanthropy has ever attained. Upon the crest of this wave of enthusiasm for quickening the manhood of the Negro, educational facilities were provided for the race which, up to that time, had been forbidden the use of letters, on the basis of the higher standards adapted to the requirements of the most favored European youth. If the practical phase was ignored, it was merely because industrial training was not at that time considered a vital part of the education of the white race. Indeed, it was reserved for General S. C. Armstrong to add a new chapter to American education. Industrial training has gained and will forever retain its important place in the educational program of the American people. Hampton and Tuskegee typify national, rather than racial educational ideals. General Armstrong and Booker T. Washington, his chief apostle, have become the schoolmasters, not merely to the Negro, but to the nation. Educational methods suggested by the needs of the Negro have been applied to the requirements of the white race. One is reminded of the lines of Kipling: "The things that you learn from the yellow and brown will help you a heap with the white."

As the heat of feeling engendered by the anti-slavery agitation cooled down, it was inevitable that there would be a reaction in public sentiment against the higher education of the race. Sen-

timent at the time when the general educational policy of the nation was being re-written in terms of new demand, was such that it was to be expected that the so-called higher education of the Negro would be discredited and belittled. Under the partisan propaganda of the industrial advocates, the fountain of philanthropy was frozen to the appeal for higher education.

Fortunately, however, the saner sense of the people is now reasserting itself. The two types of education are no longer contrasted as antagonistic and inconsistent, but compared as common factors of a joint product. Their relative claims should never have been made a matter of essential controversy, but merely a question of ratio and proportion. Negro colleges, following the lead of their white prototypes, are adjusting their curricula to the demands of the age. Economics, social science, and history, are sharing with the traditional ingredients. The advocates of industrial training are now willing graciously to concede the value of the higher education if sensibly adapted and wisely applied.

There are ten million Negroes in the United States with the status of American citizenship, each of whom needs to improve his personal qualities and social efficiency. This improvement must be brought about through philanthropic assistance and by self-reclamation. The agency that will most effectively conduce to this end is the chief concern of wise philanthropy and statesmanship. Industrial and the higher education are both applied to the same task of uplifting and sustaining these millions of human beings and rendering them competent and willing coworkers for the common good of the nation. Industrial education is pushing up from the bottom, while the higher education is pulling from the top. Both elements are efficient; neither is sufficient.

The chief aim of the higher education is to produce an efficient leadership. According to the last available data from the Federal census, there are fifteen thousand Negro clergymen, about two thousand Negro physicians and dentists, twenty-one thousand Negro teachers, seven hundred Negro lawyers, and several thousand workers along the other lines of the higher callings and pursuits. These constitute about one-half of one per cent of the race; but it is to this class that the ninety-nine and one-half per cent must look for leadership. The foreigners who flock to our shores are up-

lifted and sustained largely because they have intelligent and sympathetic leadership among their own race. The Catholic priesthood with its high standard of intelligence and practical statesmanship, saves the foreigner from becoming a national menace. The Negro must have a leadership within his own race to save him from a like fate. It is only through the higher training that such influence can be developed; this task is a practical one. It is of no more immediate practical advantage to the Negro, that the hungry should be fed, the naked clothed, and the houseless sheltered, than that the sick should be healed, the ignorant enlightened, and that the simple should be guided and the wayward reclaimed.

In the present temper of the American mind the Negro is confined to a separate social area which makes it necessary that his needs should be met by the professional class of his own race. Thus, the Negro teacher, minister, physician, lawyer, and editor become a social necessity; hence, the importance of the Negro college and university to train men and women of this blood for the higher offices to which their destiny calls them. Just in proportion as the spirit of racial segregation increases, the demand for internal leadership becomes intensified. No race, even through its most self-sacrificing members, can furnish intimate direction for a despised people, where general regulations compel them to ride in separate coaches, and to walk the streets apart, and to move in separate social spheres. It will be generally conceded that professional workers should have about the same degree of education regardless of the social advantages of the people among whom they will be called upon to labor. The Negro teacher certainly meets with the most difficult problems in pedagogy and psychology; the Negro physician must treat every form of disease that human flesh is heir to; the Negro minister has to deal with the gravest moral and spiritual problems growing out of original and acquired sin. There devolves upon the leadership of this race the handling of issues which are as far reaching in their relations and as intricate in their entanglement as any that ever taxed the human understanding. Surely, they need that kind and degree of preparation for their calling which have been found to be necessary by the experience of the ages. The function of the Negro college is to prepare the choice men of this race to stand in the high place

of moral and spiritual authority as guides, philosophers, and friends to their less fortunate brethren. For want of vision people perish, as well as for want of provision. The blind cannot lead the blind lest both fall into the ditch.

The graduates of Negro colleges and universities are some times derided in all the moods and tenses of irony and ridicule. We have all laughed ourselves to weariness over the account of the barefoot boy reading Plato between the plow handles, the kitchen scullion discanting upon Kant, and the hotel waiter revelling in the glories of the Renaissance. The Negro collegian is depicted as an impractical doctrinaire, who spends his time in impotent frenzy, screaming against the existing evils of society which he has neither the deep discernment to understand nor the practical wisdom to alleviate.

In the rapid rise of this class from the lower to the higher levels of life instances of mal-adaptations and grotesque misfits might naturally be expected. But a wide acquaintance with the graduates of Negro colleges and universities in all parts of the land, convinces me that such instances are exceptional, and do not, in the least, characterize them as a class. They are almost universally employed along lines of useful endeavor for the general betterment of the community and command the respect and good will of the people of both races among whom they live and work.

As a concrete illustration of this principle, I cite the case of Howard University which is the largest university of European type for Negro youth to be found anywhere in the world. This institution has a student body of fifteen hundred young men and women pursuing the various branches of collegiate and professional studies, and has sent into the world about three thousand graduates, and several times as many sometime pupils who have shared the partial benefit of its courses. These three thousand graduates, and sometime pupils are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the land, in almost every county and city with considerable Negro population, and are working along the lines of their callings as ministers, physicians, lawyers, teachers, and in the general activities for the welfare of the people. What is true of graduates of this university is equally true of other Negro colleges and of the men of the higher education as a class.

A few individual examples of Howard Alumni must suffice to justify this statement. Rev. Wm. H. Brooks, Pastor of St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church, New York City, has gone in and out among a congregation of nearly two thousand members for seventeen years, as their moral and spiritual example and guide. He is universally beloved and esteemed for his good works, and might well be described as the Good Shepherd of the colored people of New York City. Rev. George Frazier Miller, of the City of Brooklyn, a man of clean life and clear thought, high ideals and lofty endeavor, has endeared himself to the entire community as an exemplary moral and spiritual leader of men. Wm. E. Benson, founder of Kowaliga, Alabama, has established a self-supporting community involving ten thousand acres of land within the very heart of the black belt of the South. Hon. J. C. Napier, Ex-Registrar of the U. S. Treasury, is a lawyer of substance and standing in the City of Nashville, and is universally respected and esteemed by the white and black alike for his manly life and wholesome influence. Prof. Hugh M. Brown, the re-organizer of the Colored Institute at Cheney, Pa., is perhaps the best expert of the country upon the application of industrial education to the teaching needs of the masses. Dr. W. A. Warfield is surgeon-in-chief of Freedmen's Hospital, Washington, D. C., an institution with two hundred and fifty beds, and perhaps the largest and best equipped hospital between Baltimore and New Orleans. Mr. J. E. Moorland, International Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association, has been instrumental largely through the beneficence of Mr. Rosenwald, of Chicago, in promoting the erection of Y. M. C. A. buildings costing upward of $100,000 each, in large cities of the country; such buildings are already in full operation in Chicago, Washington, Indianapolis, and Philadelphia, and plans are under way for erection of like plants in a half dozen other cities. Under the leadership and direction of Mr. Moorland, the Young Men's Christian Association has become the most active field of social endeavor among the colored race within the last few years; the work already accomplished and under way involves more than a million of dollars. These are but samples of the effective work which graduates of this university are doing along all lines of endeavor for the general betterment of the people.

In the final analysis it will be found that there is no reasonable ground for conflict or misunderstanding between the two types of education. The late Dr. Booker T. Washington was a trustee of Hampton Institute and also of Harvard University, and effectively served his race through the instrumentality of both institutions. Both types of school make the joint appeal to the philanthropy, statesmanship, and conscience of the American people: "This, ye ought to have done and not to have left the other undone."