

The Progressive Farmer.

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SHALL WE HAVE RACE DIVISION OF SCHOOL TAXES?

We are hearing a great deal in North Carolina just now about the proposition to divide the school taxes between white and black schools in proportion to the amount of taxes paid by each race. And the more we think of it, the more danger we see in the idea. In this matter we stand squarely with Governor Aycock. It may not be popular or politic to say this; it probably is not. But in our heart we feel that it ought to be said. We believe that this Vardaman plan would be no less harmful to the white than to the black race. Of course, in standing out against it, one is likely to have to face certain cheap and slanderous charges from peanut politicians who care more for the spoils of office than for the peace and prosperity of the State. The calm judgment of the people, however, will prevail in the end, and to that calm judgment all argument should be addressed. Laying aside all fear of factional catchwords, it is for the people of North Carolina to consider this weighty problem in the spirit which old Marcus Aurelius so well sets forth in his Meditations: "If any man is able to show me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek only the truth by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in his error and ignorance." In this spirit, men and brethren, let us examine the arguments brought out by the Vardaman idea advocates, and see whether or not the plan would really be of benefit to the South.

And first of all we have the charge that education increases negro crime. We have heard it a thousand times. "Educate the negro and fit him for the penitentiary," is a common, everyday expression. And Rev. S. A. Steel in an article recently quoted by Dr. T. B. Kingsbury in a contribution to the Charlotte Observer, declares that the United States Census bears out the charge. "The negroes who can read and write are more criminal than the illiterate," he says. "To educate the negro is to unfit him to be a citizen. The more intelligent he is, the higher the per cent of his criminality." This is the Reverend Mr. Steel's clear-cut charge. If true, it should give pause to educational advocates, for anything that weakens morals does harm, however glittering its other advantages may be. If not true, it is dangerous and reprehensible to make such a false charge against the chief civilizing influence in dealing with a belated and inferior race. And we find that the charge is not true. Repeated as it has been on a thousand occasions and passing until now unchallenged, it is nevertheless easy to show that the Reverend Mr. Steel's statement is exactly the reverse of the truth. The 1900 Census Report on Crime has not yet been compiled, but the 1890 Report shows that of the negro criminals only 38.88 per cent were able to read and write while 42.90 of the entire negro population over ten was literate. And of every 100,000 colored people who could not read and write 489 were criminals, while of every 100,000 literate colored people only 413 were criminals. Our own North Carolina Penitentiary corroborates this testimony, for within the two preceding years, according to Governor Aycock, the illiterate North Carolina negroes in proportion to numbers have furnished 40 per cent more criminals than those who could read and write. And of the hundreds of negroes who have graduated at Booker Washington's school, 90 per cent are regularly at work the year round, and not one has ever been in a penitentiary. The men therefore who assert that schooling increases negro crime fly in the face of the sworn official figures and records of all our prisons and penitentiaries. On

the contrary, the positive testimony is given that the negroes who can read and write are more law-abiding and better citizens of the community than are the illiterate.

But in the second place it is charged that education decreases the negro's efficiency in agricultural and domestic occupations, and promotes the movement cityward. Whether or not this charge is absolutely true, there is enough of truth about it to give color to the entire accusation. If the school does not actually encourage unwholesome aspirations, if it does not actually train away from common work, it certainly is not so efficient as it should be in training for service. "Education the great remedy?" exclaimed Dr. John Graham Brooks of the Winston-Salem Educational Conference two years ago. "Yes, but the kind of education that trains to effectiveness and pride in the tasks one has to perform. Otherwise, it is not education, but balked and disfigured life."

This expression, we confidently believe, is the keynote of the situation. The plan for racial division of school taxes, Heaven knows, is not the remedy. Take away the negro schools and ten times as many farm hands will go to the towns as are going now. Take away the negro schools and ten times as many negro cooks will go North as are going now. For the North Carolina negro to-day is very jealous of his school privileges, and will not long remain where they are denied him.

Moreover, we are going to risk the assertion that if we take away white support from negro schools there will be many times as many "uppish" negroes, many times as much offensiveness among the negroes, as now. So far as we have observed, the negro teachers we keep in the schools are giving pretty good advice and setting pretty good examples. For a month past we have seen only one young negro tipping his hat to passing white men, and that young negro was a teacher in a West Raleigh school. The Elizabeth City Tar Heel bears similar testimony regarding the teachers there. The published advice from negro educators is generally conducive to peace, industry and good morals. But what kind of teachers would the negroes have if this Vardaman plan for division of school taxes should carry? The answer is not far to seek. Northern "philanthropists" (and Dr. Hale has defined a philanthropist as "a man with long hair who doesn't know what he is talking about") social equality advocates, and maddened negro leaders—these elements would start up negro schools throughout the South, and this sort of "education" would indeed be a curse and a snare; this would indeed train the negro away from the plow and the cook-stove; this would indeed menace the peace and progress of the South.

It is not a question, men and women of North Carolina, as to whether or not the negro shall have school training. No class of people, as we have said before, can live on the American continent in the daybreak of the twentieth century without having schools provided for them. The only question is whether or not we are going to keep our control of these negro schools—whether they shall be under the direction of the white State governments of the South, or under the control of the fanatical social equality advocates who would speedily take up the work if we should abandon it. If the white man on either side of the question, is an enemy to his race, is it not the man who would turn over negro training to such elements rather than keep it under the direction of the white South?

The Vardaman idea therefore is not a remedy for anything. It could only make a bad matter worse; we should only have confusion worse confounded. But there is a remedy, and we have already hinted at it. Let us hear again the words of Dr. Brooks: "Education the great remedy? Yes, but the kind of education that trains to effectiveness and pride in the tasks one has to perform." This is to-day the great need of both white and black schools. There is an imperative,

irrepressible call for the remaking of the public school curriculum. We must train men to work, not away from it. Instead of trying to give the negro a smattering of impossible "culchah," we must give him the three R's—every man needs them, whatever his work—and make the rest of his schooling bear directly on the common tasks of the black race. We must teach the child to find glory and beauty in the tasks at his door rather than spend a life in morbid longing for a career for which he is not fitted. Making agriculture a regular study in country schools is but the beginning. Domestic science must follow. We must give an industrial cast to the entire system of negro education. To the white man this is important, but to the negro it is hardly less than a life and death matter. Let the negroes persistently refuse to fit themselves for the tasks now open to them, let them continue to reject the substance for the shadow, and the doom of the race is sealed. It has been well said that if the negro once abandons an occupation to white men, he never regains it. Blacksmithing, carpentry, the barber-shop business—these and other lines of work seem at times to be slipping from them. It is a crucial period for the black man.

But the South needs the black man, and if he will only fit himself for the common duties of his sphere, he may become an element of wealth and prosperity. And the negro certainly needs the South and the friendship of the Southern white man. For both therefore industrial education is a crying need.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

Education does not increase negro crime. That is plain. On the contrary, the records of the prisons and penitentiary show that the negroes who can read and write are less given to crime than are the illiterate negroes.

The negroes are going to be educated. If the Southern white people abandon the work, it will be taken up by Northern fanatics who will complicate an already much-muddled situation. The question is not whether or not we shall have negro schools, but whether or not they shall remain under the control of the Southern white man.

To withdraw aid to negro schools will not contribute in any degree to the solution of the labor problem. Ten times as many negro cooks and farm hands would go away as are now leaving, but enough negroes would remain to keep out white immigration.

The real remedy is to make the schools train for work. A long step has been taken by the introduction of the study of agriculture, and this policy must be followed up and the entire system industrialized. We need a crusade not against negro schools, but against the wretchedly inefficient and unsuitable methods which have been in force in negro schools.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUB-ALLIANCE MEETINGS.

The Program Committee of the State Farmers' Alliance—consisting of Dr. C. W. Burkett, Dr. F. L. Stevens, Secretary Parker and the writer—suggests the following topic for discussion at the January county meetings: "To what extent should farmers co-operate?" In the sub Alliance meetings in January, it is suggested that the following subject be discussed: "In view of the great fluctuations in prices of cotton and tobacco, and the peculiar conditions existing, should we increase or decrease our 1904 acreage of these money crops?" The Committee further recommends that at the next meeting of each sub Alliance, the Secretary read the entire list of free farmers' bulletins, as published in last week's Progressive Farmer, and send to his Representative in Congress a complete list of those desired by the members of the sub. In cotton growing counties, it might be well to discuss the necessity of a Government appropriation for fighting the boll weevil, and petitions in regard to this matter would not be out of order.