With compliments of the writer

THE WHITE MAN'S PROBLEM

BY

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"And finally, in this case and many more, I have very clearly ascertained that the only proper school for workmen is of the work their fathers bred them to, under masters able to do better than any of their men, and with common principles of honesty and the fear of God to guide them."—*Præterita, John Ruskin, vol. iii, p. 22.*

The publication by the United States Department of Agriculture of an account given by Mr. C. B. Smith (who is attached to the Experiment Station office) of a "German common school with a garden" furnishes a rare suggestion for a short discourse on the "White man's problem," which is not only how to efficiently educate the millions of Negro "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in morals and in industrious habits, but how to qualify the other millions of whites at the North and in the South to lead in the industrial progress and development of both sections.

We have for years been showered with theoretical solutions of the so-called "Negro problem" *ad infinitum*, and have long been hungering for a Moses to lead us out of the wilderness of conceptual theories, so fruitless in results, so impracticable, and so embarrassing, to well directed effort.

The school which "points the moral and adorns the tale" of Mr. Smith is one of many rural schools to be found in Germany; and not only in Germany, but in France, where it has been popularly supposed that agricultural instruction was hardly needed.

"In Sweden, which had in 1876, 1,602, and in 1881 as many as 2,000 school gardens, scarcely any public school building is found without such a garden." In Belgium, too, "the prosperity of the rural population, which is derived chiefly from the extended cultivation of truck gardens, must be attributed primarily to the school gardens and the extensive knowledge of horticulture among the people." Similar schools are also to be found in Switzerland and Russia, as well as in England, Scotland, and Ireland, where their great economical importance and value are appreciated.

Englishmen have said of England, as we can say of some parts of our own country, that "the existing agricultural depression is a depression of brains"—a failure to do what we have the means, intelligence, and ability to do if we only knew how.

"Austria treats the school-garden question from a broader and higher standpoint. The imperial law of 1869 prescribed instruction in agriculture in all normal schools, and ordered the establishment of school gardens in villages for the purpose of aiding agriculture; and now the flourishing fruit culture of Bohemia is chiefly attributed to the instruction which the inhabitants have received in the school gardens attached to local public elementary schools." (Dr. Karl Ruland, in Cologne Gazette. Cited in Report of Commissioner of Education, vol. 1, pp. 97, 98.)

The subject of Mr. Smith's sketch is located in the village of Alfter, in the German Rhine province between Bonn and Cologne. The whole region lying round the village is farmed "intensively," and forms practically one vast garden. Vegetables alternate with orchards and occasional strips of grain or forage plants.

The school is what is known as a "people's school"—the common school of Germany.

In this school, which is attended by four hundred pupils and taught by six teachers, as in all others in this province, two hours of instruction weekly in fruit culture, gardening, and general farming during the last two years of the course is required. This has been compulsory by law since 1895.

Briefly, the outline of the agricultural course is: in April, May, and June, the inner structure of plants and the functions of their several parts; in July, the soil and its improvement

and the influence of climate; in August and September, fruit culture and fruit utilization; in October and November, fruit-tree management; in December and January, the enemies of fruit trees; in February and March, the minerals and their uses, etc.

In the second year, garden work: the utilization of vegetables and field crops, crop rotation and method of manuring, the enemies of plants and their control, the treatment of domestic animals, and the physiology of man.

The result of this education at Alfter is that nearly every tenant or possessor of a small piece of ground is an experience gardener. "He understands thoroughly the value of cultivation and the money worth of every pound of compost," of which the average Negro cultivator is extremely ignorant. "His wife and children work in the field with him, and the children at an early age have a very clear understanding of garden operations."

At the school the garden is "intensively" farmed and made a source of revenue, and the same soil utilized for two or three crops during the growing season, and the produce sold.

With this object lesson in mind as to what is being done elsewhere and a retrospective glance at the condition of many wastefully, half-cultivated, and abandoned farms and plantations in all parts of our country, at valuable lands worked by many deplorably ignorant and incompetent farmers, will it not at once occur to every thinking man that our present system of rural elementary instruction is, in the direction of practical utility, a misdirected and criminal waste of effort?

This melancholy result is due to our failure to adopt the ready means to accomplish the desired end, namely, to furnish its patrons with the practical technical ability to help themselves in the environment which in their battle for life the great majority is likely to be placed. The abstract must be reached through the concrete.

This failure of our public school systems, in the North as well as in the South, is confessed by the oldest and most experienced educators.

Said Francis A. Walker, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: "Popular education must be made more sensible, practical, and useful. The housewifery arts must be taught to

girls in schools, and there the boys must learn to use the hand and eye and brain."

In short, we must get back to the first principle of education, a principle which had its genesis in the home and in the practical necessities of the life of the masses.

The Pilgrims brought their appreciation of this training from Holland, where it was thoroughly understood and extensively introduced, and as early as 1667 education was made compulsory in all places of 50 families; and in 1671 parents and masters were made culpable unless children and servants were taught religion and trained for some calling.

French, German, Latin, Greek, geology, astronomy, and drawing will not help a man to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before, or to raise 40 bushels of oats where his father raised but 20, or two or three crops on land where he never raised but one, or to acquire a knowledge of things fundamental and absolutely necessary for his maintenance.

We do not intend to depreciate these accomplishments, but to suggest that they become useful, or a source of pleasure, only when one has, by his own or some one else's labor, gained the leisure to acquire and maintain a greater knowledge of them than is or can be obtained in the course of the ordinary common-school curriculum, in which the tendency is to encourage "the restless habit of mind which passes at will from one view of a subject or from one kind of knowledge to another," which was condemned by Professor Jowett, master of Balliol, and is not the acquirement of intellectual power.

By this system we possibly gain in superficial refinement and decorum at the expense of correct judgment, of the reason, and general physical and mental power.

It is frequently remarked that boys who have received a manual or industrial training are "in the power of mental concentration and in the ability to take and follow directions, in executive ability and judgment much superior to those who have not."

An ex-headmaster, and a Massachusetts teacher for a third of a century or more, in a personal note says:

"It is my feeling, which must be derived from experience and observation, that the old town schools, with their few studies and practical home training, did give a larger percentage of

good, well-balanced minds, prepared for good work, than the elementary schools of the present fashion and time."

Our college entrance examinations conclusively show that our schools impart knowledge rather than train the mind to reasoning processes.

In an agricultural population like that of our Southern States, where 87 per cent. are employed in the fields, the problem of public education ceases to be racial or local and becomes of general public interest.

It is difficult to imagine anything more unphilosophical and unpractical and entirely unfitted for the needs of the poor white and Negro than the instruction at present, given chiefly at the white man's expense.

In these rural communities the white man's practical opportunities are the Negro's opportunities, and, in field culture, what the white man knows and practices the Negro knows and practices.

In a great degree the two populations are materially and mutually dependent; what benefits the one benefits the other; what is disastrous to one is disastrous to the other.

The great economic value the technically trained Negro has in his special field of labor is not now and has never been properly understood or appreciated, and the problem immediately before us, which it is our mutual interest to solve, is how by elementary instruction to better adapt him to his economic and social environment. The Negro, handicapped by his poverty and indifference and ignorance, has little active part to take in the solution of this problem in which the white, by his superior mental endowment, greater practical ability, hereditary training, and larger means, is able at once to take the initiative.

Mr. W. W. Baldwin, Jr., in an excellent address upon "The problem of Negro education" before the American Social Science Association at Saratoga last summer, which is highly appreciative of the work of Hampton, Tuskegee, and similar institutions, emphatically said: "But I deny there is longer any problem to be solved. I maintain that the solution has been found, and there remains only the question of means to carry it out."

It appears to us that the determination of the means and methods by which this education is to be successfully carried to and benefit the masses, a difficulty which has been inherent in

the industrial movement and comparatively lost sight of from the beginning, is the "industrial problem," which still remains to be solved, as the value of industrial education has long since been proven and acknowledged. I suppose that it will be admitted without argument that the great present need of the South and of the North is scientific agriculture, and the problem pressing for immediate solution, how most economically to extend and diffuse this knowledge among the people as we see it diffused in the little village of Alfter in the object lesson before us is emphatically the white man's problem.

I suggest that this can only be done by connecting the instruction given in the different State and private institutions with the curriculm of the public elementary school, and by so doing carry out the avowed purpose and object of the industrial school, which is to furnish teachers to carry the industrial training they receive to the people, in which purpose they have thus far signally failed for want of opportunity and because of the neglect to correlate these institutions with the elementary educational systems.

In the fact that there is now no such practical connection lies the present great weakness of these institutions in the practical results for which they are designed and which they are supposed to attain.

No one conversant with the subject will fail to give to these great industrial schools all the credit they so well deserve, or fail to recognize the energy and intelligence shown in their administration; but he will reluctantly be obliged to confess that through no fault or neglect of theirs they have thus far failed to accomplish their highest purpose because the instruction so carefully given fails to reach the masses.

This failure can be shown by the records of each institution.

I have no very recent reports at hand, but by that of the Bureau of Education for the years 1889–1890 I find that of the 1,243 graduates of 17 industrial colored schools, but 12 were farming and but 3 were working at their trade, while 693, or 55.75 per cent. of the whole number of graduates, were teaching not practical industries, but academic studies. One hundred and seventeen were ministers, 116 were lawyers, 27 college professors, 5 editors, 15 merchants, 36 office-holders, 5 druggists, 14 dentists, 2 book-keepers, 2 printers, 3 butchers, and 30 were

in miscellaneous pursuits. It will be seen that of the total number of these graduates less than 1½ per cent. were employed in the industries for which they had been especially educated, and that while the instruction they had received was individually of great value, it is practically lost to the community, which also suffers an additional loss by the turning of a productive into a largely non-productive class.

The solution of this phase of the white man's problem does not seem to be difficult or expensive. By State or local action the curricula of the rural elementary public schools can be easily increased, if necessary, at the expense of some less practical study, by the addition of three or four hours' practical agricultural instruction weekly, given by the graduates of the higher industrial schools, who will thus practically utilize their knowledge for the public benefit.

In the city or larger town schools the same time can be profitably given to practical economic technical instructions and domestic science.* If to provide the funds to accomplish these reforms in our Southern States it is found necessary to abandon secondary education at the public expense, it would not be a great misfortune to the working class, as so very few of that class North or South ever reach the secondary school.

In Australia it has been found that "it is only for the picked children of the working class that a demand for secondary education exists."

"In New South Wales fees are charged in these schools, and they are practically self-supporting." "It is therefore probable," says Sir Charles Dilke, "that secondary education in the colonies will continue to be carried on by private enterprise." (Problems of Greater Britain.)

By this agricultural education of the masses through the elementary school, and by the organization of farmers' institutes and conferences, and by practical observation of the object les-

*It is a singular coincidence that the Agricultural Educational Committee of England (of which some of the most eminent men of science and agriculturists are members) emphatically asserts, as reported in *Nature*, February 1, that agricultural instruction must begin with the elementary school, for that is the foundation upon which the whole superstructure is to be built. The committee also emphasizes the importance of differentiating the curriculum of the rural from that of the urban school.

sons always before them, the great agricultural population of the South will be benefited to a greater degree than that of any other section of the country, as her lands are cheap, her labor willing and abundant, and her soil capable of double or treble its present productive capacity.

From Mr. Smith's report it would appear that our rural communities would in the supply of trained teachers have a great practical advantage over the German schools. He says:

"As a matter of fact, in the great majority of the schools of this province the instruction in agricultural subjects is almost wholly theoretical. The teachers who make use of the school garden for the purposes of instruction are the exception. The majority of teachers in German schools come from the cities, and thus have not been in close association with rural life and work. The technique of orchard, garden, and farming operations has never been mastered by them, and with only a theoretical knowledge of these subjects the difficulty of teaching them is greatly increased. The principal of the Alfter school ascribes whatever of success he has been able to bring to the school along agricultural lines amost wholly to the fact that his early academic teacher was a man who thoroughly understood and who was thoroughly in love with horticultural work. The tendency is to confine the work too largely to the school-room. Even from this standpoint, however, the course, when illustrated by good charts, prepared specimens, and the use of simple text-books, has considerable educational value. But the Germans are becoming fully aware of the fact that the complete success of such a course will depend almost wholly on the teaching ability, theoretical and practical knowledge of the subject, and enthusiasm of the individual teacher."

It will be particularly fitting if the Southern States take the initiative in this development of the elementary school, as it was within their borders, at Lethe, in Abbeville district, South Carolina, that the first farm and manual labor school in the United States was established by Dr. John de la Howe, in 1797.

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