

3 oct 6

BRIEF FOR THE HIGHER
O EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO

BY

PROF. KELLY MILLER

HOWARD UNIVERSITY



WASHINGTON, D. C.

1903

The Negro's Traditional Place in Society.

Ridicule and contempt have characterized the habitual attitude of the American mind toward the Negro's higher strivings. The African was brought to this country for the purpose of performing manual and menial labor. His bodily powers alone were required to accomplish this industrial mission. No more account was taken of his higher susceptibilities than of the mental and moral faculties of the lower animals. As the late Mr. Price used to say, the white man saw in the Negro's mind only what was apparent in his face, "darkness there, and nothing more." His usefulness in the world is still measured by physical faculties rather than by qualities of mind and soul. The merciless proposition of Carlyle that, the Negro is useful to God's creation only as a servant, still finds wide acceptance. It is so natural to base a theory upon a long-established practice that one no longer wonders at the prevalence of this belief. The Negro has sustained servile relation to the Caucasian for so long a time that it is as easy as it is agreeable to Aryan pride to conclude that servitude is his ordained place in society. When it was first proposed to furnish means for the higher development of this race, some, who assumed the wisdom of their day and generation, entertained the proposition with a sneer, others, with a smile.

MANIFESTATIONS OF HIGHER QUALITIES.

As the higher susceptibilities of the Negro were not wanted, their existence was at one time denied. The eternal inferiority of the race was assumed as a part of the cosmic order of things. History, literature, science, speculative conjecture, and even Holy Writ were ransacked for evidence and argument to support the ruling dogma. While the slave-holder had proved beyond all possibility of doubt the incapacity of the Negro for knowledge, yet he, prudently enough, passed laws forbidding the attempt. His guilty conscience caused him to make assurance doubly sure by re-enacting the laws of the Almighty.

For three hundred years the Negro by his marvelous assimilative power and by striking individual emanations has been constantly manifesting the higher possibilities of his nature, until now whoever assumes to doubt his susceptibility for better things needs himself to

be pitied for his incapacity to grasp the truth. The same Carlyle who regards the Negro as an "amiable blockhead," and amenable only to the white man's "beneficent whip," also declares: "That one man should die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy, were it to happen forty times in a minute." When it is known that the Negro has capacity for knowledge and virtue there can be no further justification for shutting him out from the higher cravings of his nature.

IS THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO WORTH WHILE AS A PRACTICAL PHILANTHROPY?

The education of the Negro is not of itself a thing apart, but is an integral factor of the general pedagogic equation. Race psychology has not yet been formulated. No reputable authority has pointed out just wherein the two races differ in any evident mental feature. The mind of the Negro is of the same nature as that of the white man and needs the same nurture. The general poverty of the Negro, however, and his inability to formulate and direct his own scheme of culture, render the question not so much one of abstract pedagogics, as of practical philanthropy. The philanthropist is supremely indifferent as to whether an individual, white or black, should study Kant or Quaternious, except, in so far as the resulting development reacts beneficially upon the common welfare. Does the higher education of the few capable Negroes possess sufficient advantage to the race at large to justify its continuance by a wise and discriminating philanthropy? The great missionary societies, representing the philanthropic arms of the Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist denominations after forty years of arduous, earnest endeavor and the expenditure of many millions of dollars in this field, answer this question emphatically in the affirmative. An ounce of opinion from such sources should be worth a ton of speculation from those who reach their conclusions by a process of "pure reasoning."

THE FUNCTION OF EDUCATION TO A BACKWARD RACE.

The African was snatched from the wilds of savagery and thrust into the midst of a mighty civilization. He thus escaped the gradual progress of evolution. Education must accomplish more for a backward race than for a people who are in the fore-front of progress. It must not only lead to the unfoldment of faculties but must equip for a life from which the recipient is separated by many centuries of development. The African chieftain who would make a pilgrimage from the jungle to Boston might accomplish the first

part of his journey by the original modes of transportation—in the primitive dugout or on the backs of his slaves; but he would complete it upon the steamship, the railway, the electric car and the automobile. How swift the transformation and yet how suggestive of centuries of toil, struggle and mental endeavor. It required the human race thousands of years to bridge the chasm between savagery and civilization, which must now be crossed by a school curriculum of a few years' duration. In a settled state of society, the chief function of education is to enable the individual to live the life already attained by his race, but the educated Negro must be a pioneer, a progressive force in the uplifting of his race, and that, too, notwithstanding the fact that he belongs to a backward breed that has never taken the initiative in the progressive movements of the world.

THE HIGHER TRAINING OF CHOICE YOUTH.

The first great need of the Negro is that the choice youth of the race should assimilate the principles of culture and hand them down to the masses below. This is the only gate-way through which a new people may enter into modern civilization. Herein lies the history of culture. The select minds of the backward race or nation must receive the new cult and adapt it to the peculiar needs of their own people. Japan looms up as the most progressive of the non-Aryan races. The wonderful progress of these Oriental Yankees is due in a large measure to their wise plan of procedure. They send their picked youth to the great centers of western knowledge; but before this culture is applied to their own needs it must first be sifted through the sieve of their native comprehension. The graduates of the schools and colleges for the Negro race are forming centers of civilizing influence in all parts of the land, and we confidently believe that these grains of leaven will ultimately leaven the whole lump.

SELF-RELIANT MANHOOD.

Another great need of the race, which the schools must in a large measure supply, is self-reliant manhood. Slavery made the Negro as dependent upon the intelligence and foresight of his master as a soldier upon the will of his commander. He had no need to take thought as to what he should eat or drink or wherewithal he should be clothed.

Knowledge necessarily awakens self-consciousness of power. When a child learns the multiplication table he gets a clear notion of intellectual dignity. Here he gains an acquisition which is his

permanent, personal possession, and which can never be taken from him. It does not depend upon external authority; he could reproduce it if all the visible forms of the universe were effaced. It is said that the possession of personal property is the greatest stimulus to self-respect. When one can read his title clear to earthly possessions, it awakens a consciousness of the dignity of his own manhood. And so when one has digested and assimilated the principles of knowledge he can file his declaration of intellectual independence. He can adopt the language of Montaigne "Truth and reason are common to everyone, and are no more his who spake them first than his who speaks them after; 'tis no more according to Plato than according to me, since he and I equally see and understand them."

Primary principles have no ethnic quality. We hear much in this day and time of the white man's civilization. We had just as well speak of the white man's multiplication table. Civilization is the common possession of all who assimilate and apply its principles. England can utilize no secret art or invention that is not equally available to Japan. We reward ingenuity with a patent right for a period of years upon the process that has been invented; but when an idea has been published to the world it is no more the exclusive property of the author than gold, after it has been put in circulation, can be claimed by the miner who first dug it from its hiding place in the earth. No race or nation can preempt civilization any more than they can monopolize the atmosphere which surrounds the earth, or the waters which hold it in their liquid embrace.

I have often noticed a young man accommodate his companion with a light from his cigar. After the spark has once been communicated, the beneficiary stands upon an equal footing with the benefactor. In both cases the fire must be continued by drawing fresh supplies of oxygen from the atmosphere. From whatever source a nation may derive the light of civilization, it must be perpetuated by the exercise of their own faculties. Self-reliant manhood is the ultimate basis of American citizenship.

TRAINING FOR LEADERSHIP.

The work of the educated colored man is largely that of leadership. He requires, therefore, all the discipline, judgment and mental equipment that long preparation can afford. The more ignorant and backward the masses the more skilled and sagacious should the leaders be. If a beneficial and kindly contact between the races is denied on the lower plane of flesh and blood, it must be

sought in the upper region of mental and moral kinship. knowledge and virtue know no ethnic exclusiveness. If indeed races are irreconcilable, their best individual exponents are not. All dignified negotiation must be conducted on the high plane of individual equality.

"For east is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet,
Till earth and sky stand presently at God's great judgment seat ;
But there is neither east nor west, border nor breed nor birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth "

The irreconcilable become reconciled only after each has manifested the best possibilities of a common nature. The higher education tends to develop superior individuals who may be expected to exercise controlling influence over the multitude. The individual is the proof, the promise and the salvation of the race. The undeveloped races which, in modern times, have faded before the breath of civilization have probably perished because of their failure to produce commanding leaders to guide them wisely under the stress and strain which an encroaching civilization imposed. A single red Indian with the capacity and spirit of Booker T. Washington might have solved the red man's problems and averted his pending doom.

THE MORAL IMPOTENCY OF ELEMENTARY AND MECHANICAL KNOWLEDGE.

Again, the higher education should be encouraged because of the moral impotency of all the modes of education which do not touch and stir the human spirit. It is folly to suppose that the moral nature of the child is improved because it has been taught to read and write and cast up accounts, or to practice a handicraft. Tracing the letters of the alphabet with a pen has no bearing on the Golden Rule. The spelling of words by sounds and syllables does not lead to the observance of the Ten Commandments. Drill in the multiplication table does not fascinate the learner with the sermon on the mount. Rules in grammar, dates in history, sums in arithmetic, and points in geography do not strengthen the grasp on moral truth. The ability to saw to a line or hit a nail aplomb with a hammer does not create a zeal for righteousness and truth. It is only when the pupil comes to feel the vitalizing power of knowledge that it begins to re-act upon the life and to fructify in character. This is especially true of a backward race whose acquisitive power outruns its apperceptive faculty.

THE SOCIAL SEPARATION OF THE RACES.

The Negro has now reached a critical stage in his career. The point of attachment between the races which slavery made possible has been destroyed. The relation is daily becoming less intimate and friendly, and more business-like and formal. It thus becomes all the more imperative that the race should gain for itself the primary principles of knowledge and culture.

The social separation of the races in America renders it imperative that the professional classes among the Negroes should be recruited from their own ranks. Under ordinary circumstances, professional places are filled by the most favored class in the community. In a Latin or Catholic country, where the fiction of "social equality" does not exist, there is felt no necessity for Negro priest, teacher, or physician to administer to his own race. But in America this is conceded to be a social necessity. Such being the case, the Negro leader, to use a familiar term, requires all the professional equipment of his white confrere, and special knowledge of the needs and circumstances of his race in addition. The teacher of the Negro child, the preacher of a Negro congregation, or the physician to Negro patients, certainly requires as much professional skill as those who administer to the corresponding needs of the white race. Nor are the requirements of the situation one whit diminished because the bestower is of the same race as the recipient. The Negro has the same professional needs as his white confrere and can be qualified for his function only by courses of training of like extent and thoroughness. By no other means can he be qualified to enlighten the ignorant, restrain the vicious, care for the sick and afflicted, or administer solace to weary souls, plead in litigation the cause of the injured.

THE PROFESSIONAL NEEDS OF THE CITY NEGRO.

According to the census of 1900, there were 72 cities in the United States with a population of more than 5,000 persons of color, averaging 15,000 each, and aggregating 1,000,000 in all. The professional needs of this urban population for teachers, preachers, lawyers and physicians call for 5,000 well-equipped men and women, not one of whom would be qualified for his function by the three R's or a handicraft.

THE EFFECT OF HIGHER EDUCATION UPON THE RURAL MASSES.

The supreme concern of philanthropy is the welfare of the unawakened rural masses. To this end there is need of a goodly sprinkling of well educated men and women to give wise guidance, direc-

tion and control. Let no one deceive himself that the country Negro can be uplifted except through the influence of higher contact. It is impossible to inaugurate and conduct a manual training or industrial school without men of sound academic as well as technical knowledge. The torch which is to lighten the darksome places of the South must be kindled at the centers of light.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTIVATED TASTE.

Rational enjoyment, through moderation, is perhaps as good a definition as can be given of culture. The reaction of culture on conduct is a well known principle of practical ethics. The Negro race is characterized by boisterousness of manner and extravagant forms of taste. As if to correct such deficiencies, his higher education, hitherto, has largely been concerned with Greek and Latin literature, the norms of modern culture. It is just here that our educational critics are liable to become excited. The spectacle of a Negro wearing eye-glasses and declaiming in classic phrases about the "lofty walls of Rome," and the "wrath of Achilles" upsets their critical calmness and composure. We have so often listened to the grotesque incongruity of a Greek chorus and a greasy cabin and the relative value of a rosewood piano and a patch of early rose potatoes that if we did not join in the smile in order to encourage the humor, we should do so out of sheer weariness. And yet we cannot escape the conviction that one of the Negro's chief needs is a higher form of intellectual and esthetic taste.

THE RELATIVE CLAIMS OF INDUSTRIAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

Whenever the higher education of the Negro is broached, industrial training is always suggested as a counter irritant. Partisans of rival claims align themselves in hostile array and will not so much as respect a flag of truce. These one-eyed enthusiasts lack binocular vision. The futile discussion as to whether industrial or higher education is of greater importance to the Negro is suggestive of a subject of great renown in rural debating societies: which is of greater importance to man, air or water. We had as well attempt to decide whether the base or altitude is the more important element of a triangle. The two forms of training should be considered on the basis of their relative, not rival, claims.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION STIMULATES INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY.

Indeed, one of the strongest claims for the higher education of the Negro is that it will stimulate the dormant industrial activities of the race. The surest way to incite a people to meet the mate-

rial demands of life is to teach them that life is more than meat. The unimaginative laborer pursues the routine rounds of his task, spurred on only by the immediate necessities of life and the taskmaster's stern command. To him, it is only time and the hour that run through the whole day. The Negro lacks enlightened imagination. He needs prospect and vista. He does not make provision because he lacks prevision. Under slavery he toiled as the ass, dependent upon the daily allowance from his master's crib. To him the prayer, Give us this day our daily bread, has a material rather than a spiritual meaning. If you would perpetuate the industrial incapacity of the Negro, then confine him to the low grounds of drudgery and toil and prevent him from casting his eyes unto the hills whence come inspiration and promise. The man with the hoe is of all men most miserable unless, forsooth, he has a hope. But if imbued with hope and sustained by an ideal, he can consecrate the hoe as well as any other instrument of service, as a means of fulfilling the promise within him. When a seed is sown in the ground it first sends its roots into the soil before the blades can rise out of it. But is it not actuated by the plant consciousness to seek the light of heaven? For what is the purpose of sending its roots below, if it be not in order to bear fruit above? The pilgrim fathers in following the inspiration of a lofty ideal developed the resources of a continent. Any people who attempt to reach the sky on a pedestal of bricks and mortar will end in confusion and bewilderment as did the builders of the Tower of Babel on the plains of Shinar in the days of Eld. It requires range of vision to stimulate the industrial activities of the people. The most effective prayer that can be uttered for the Negro is "Lord, open thou his eyes." He can not see beyond the momentary gratification of appetite and passion. He does not look before and after. Such stimulating influence can be brought to bear upon the race only through the inspiration of the higher culture.

MEN OF HIGHER TRAINING THE LEADERS OF INDUSTRIAL
EDUCATION.

It requires men of sound knowledge to conceive and execute plans for the industrial education of the masses. The great apostles of industrial education for the Negro have been of academic training, or of its cultural equivalent. The work of Hampton and Tuskegee is carried on by men and women of a high degree of mental cultivation.

DR. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AN EXAMPLE OF HIGHER CULTURE.

Doctor Booker T. Washington, note the title, is the most influential Negro that the race under freedom has produced. He is the great apostle of industrial training. His great success is but the legitimate outcome of his earnestness and enthusiasm. And yet there is no more striking illustration of the necessity of wise, judicious and cultivated leadership as a means of stimulating the dormant activity of the masses than he who hails from Tuskegee. His success is due wholly to his intellectual and moral faculties. His personal opportunities of association and contact have been equivalent to a liberal education. Two of America's greatest institutions of learning have fittingly recognized his moral and intellectual worth by decorating him with their highest literary honors. Mr. Washington possesses an enlightened mind to discover the needs of the masses, executive tact to put his plans in effective operation, and persuasive ability to convince others as to the expediency of his policies. He possesses no trade or handicraft, if so he has never let the American people into the secret. Nor can it be easily seen what possible benefit such trade or handicraft would be to him in the work which has fallen to his lot. Tuskegee has been built on intellect and oratory. If Mr. Washington had been born with palsied hands, but endowed with the same intellectual gifts and powers of persuasive speech, Tuskegee would not have suffered one iota by reason of his manual affliction. But, on the other hand, had he come into the world with a sluggish brain and a heavy tongue, whatever cunning and skill his hands might have acquired, he never could have developed the institution which has made him justly famous throughout the civilized world.

THE DEFICIENCY OF THE SLAVE MECHANIC.

Slavery taught the Negro, to work but at the same time to despise those who worked. To them all show of respectability was attached to those whom circumstances placed above the necessity of toil. It requires intellectual conception of the object and the end of labor to overcome this mischievous notion. The Negro mechanics produced under the old slave regime are rapidly passing away because they did not possess the power of self-perpetuation. They were not rooted and grounded in rational principles of the mechanical arts. The hand could not transmit its cunning because the mind was not trained. They were given the nack without the knowledge.

MONEY SPENT FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO
NOT WASTED.

The charge has recently been made that money spent on the higher education of the Negro has been wasted. Does this charge come from the South? When we consider that it was through Northern philanthropy that a third of its population received their first impulse toward better things; that these higher institutions prepared the 30,000 Negro teachers whose services are utilized in the public schools; that the men and women who were the beneficiaries of this philanthropy are doing all in their power to control, guide and restrain the South's ignorant and vicious masses, thus lightening the public burden and lifting the general life to a higher level; that these persons are almost without exception earnest advocates of peace, harmony and good-will between the races; to say nothing of the fact that these vast philanthropic contributions have passed through the trade channels of Southern merchants, it would seem that the charge is strangely incompatible with that high-minded disposition and chivalrous spirit which the South is so zealous to maintain. Does this charge come from the North? It might not be impertinent to propound a few propositions for their consideration. Is it possible to specify a like sum of money spent upon any other backward race that has produced greater results than the amount spent upon the Southern Negro? Is it the American Indian, upon whom four centuries of missionary effort has produced no more progress than is made by a painted ship on a painted sea? Is it the Hawaiian, who will soon be civilized off the face of the earth? Is it the Chinese upon whom the chief effect of Christian philanthropy is to incite them to breathe out slaughter against the stranger within their gates? It is incumbent upon him who claims that this money has been wasted to point out where, in all the range of benevolent activity the contributions of philanthropy have been more profitably spent.

It is true that forty or fifty millions of dollars have been thus spent, but when we consider the magnitude of the task to which it was applied, we find that it would not average one dollar a year for each Negro child to be educated. Why should we marvel, then, that the entire mass of ignorance and corruption has not put on enlightenment and purity?

NOT MERE THEORIZERS.

We often hear that the advocates of higher education are mere theorists without definite, tangible plans and propositions. There has recently sprung into prominence a class of educational philoso-

phers who deny the value of stored up knowledge. We are informed that only such information as will be honored at the corner grocery or is convertible on demand into cash equivalent is of practical value, while all else is an educational delusion and a snare. The truth is, that all knowledge which clarifies the vision, refines the feelings, broadens the conception of truth and duty and ennobles the manhood is of the highest and most valuable form of practicability. An institution which sends into the world a physician to heal the sick, a lawyer to plead the cause of the injured, a teacher to enlighten the minds of the ignorant, or a preacher to break the bread of life to hungry souls is rendering just as practical a service to the race as those schools which prepare men to build houses and plant potatoes.

NEED FOR THE NEGRO COLLEGE.

It is sometimes claimed that the few capable Negroes can find opportunity for higher training in the institutions of the North. It is by no means certain to what extent these institutions would admit colored students. The Northern College is not apt to inspire the colored pupil with the enthusiasm and fixed purpose for the work which Providence has assigned him. It is the spirit, not the letter that maketh alive. The white College does not contemplate the special needs of the Negro race. American ideals could not be fostered in the white youth of our land by sending them to Oxford or Berlin for tuition. No more can the Negro gain racial inspiration from Harvard or Yale. And yet they need the benefit of contact and comparison, and the zeal for knowledge and truth which these great institutions impart. The Negro College and the Northern institutions will serve to preserve a balance between undue elation for want of sober comparison, and barren culture, for lack of inspirational contact with the masses.

DOES THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEAD AWAY FROM THE RACE?

It is often charged that the higher education lifts the Negro above the needs of his race. The thousands of graduates of Negro Schools and Colleges all over the land are a living refutation of this charge. After the mind has been stored with knowledge it is transmitted to the place where the need is greatest and the call is loudest, and transmuted into whatever mode of energy may be necessary to accomplish the imposed task.

The issues involved in the race question are as intricate in their relations and far reaching in their consequences as any that have ever taxed human wisdom for solution. No one can be too learned or too profound in whose hands are entrusted the temporal and eternal

destiny of a human soul. Even if the educated Negro desired to flee from his race, he soon learns by bitter experience that he will be thrown back upon himself by the expulsive power of prejudice. He soon learns that the Newtonian formula has a social application: "The force of attraction varies directly as the mass."

A CONCRETE ILLUSTRATION.

But Wisdom is justified of her children. As an illustration of the value of the higher education of the Negro race, I point to Howard University, which is the largest and best equipped institution of its class. The establishment and maintenance of this institution during the past 35 years has cost between two and three millions of dollars. As returns on this investment it has sent into the world 200 ministers of the Gospel, 700 physicians, pharmacists and dentists, 300 lawyers, and 600 persons with a general academic and collegiate training, together with thousands of some time pupils who have shared the partial benefits of its courses. These graduates and some time pupils are to be found in every country and district where the Negro population resides and are filling places of usefulness, honor and distinction, as well as performing works of mercy and sacrificial service. They serve as inspiration and stimulus, quickening the dormant energies of the people and urging them to loftier ideals and nobler modes of life. It devolves upon the complainant to present some plan by which a like sum of money, in a like space of time, can be spent upon an institution of whatever designation so as to produce a more wholesome and more wide-spread effect upon the general social uplift.