NEGRO EDUCATION NOT A FAILURE.

The anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln and the presentation of the claims of the Hampton Institute furnish a fitting occasion to discuss the condition of my race.

Several persons holding high official position have recently said that it does not pay, from any point of view, to educate the Negro; and that all attempts at his education have so far failed to accomplish any good results. Except that these utterances come from official sources, they would have little claim to a place in a meeting of this character. But the Southern States, which out of their poverty are contributing rather liberally for the education of all the people, as well as individual and organized philanthropy, throughout the country, have a right to know whether the Negro is responding to the efforts they have made to place him upon a higher plane of civilization.

It is not possible to improve the condition of any race until its mind is awakened and strengthened. Does the American Negro desire to improve his mind, and what has been the result of his efforts? Will it pay to invest further money in this direction? In partially answering this question, it is hardly fair to compare the progress of the American Negro with that of the American white man, who, in some unexplained way, got thousands of years ahead of the Negro in the arts and sciences of civilization. But to get at the real facts and the real capability of the black man, let us compare for a moment the American Negro with the Negro in Africa, or the black man with the black man. As was recently suggested by Mr. Carnegie, in South Africa alone there are five million black people who have never been brought, through school or other agencies, into contact with a higher civilization, in a way to have their minds or their ambitions strengthened or awakened. As a result, the industries of
South Africa languish and refuse to prosper for lack of labor. The native black man refuses to labor because he has been neglected. He has few wants and little ambition, and his crude and few wants may be satisfied by laboring one or two days out of the seven. In the southern part of the United States there are more than eight millions of my race who, both by contact with the whites, and by education in the home, in school, in church, have had their minds awakened and strengthened,—have thus had their wants increased and multiplied many times. Hence, instead of a people in idleness, we have in the South a people who are anxious to work because they want education for their children; they want land, and houses, and churches, books and papers. In a word, they want the highest and best in our civilization. Looked at, then, from the most material and selfish point of view, it has paid to awaken the Negro's mind, and there should be no limit placed upon the development of that mind.

Does the American Negro take advantage of opportunities to secure education? Practically no school house has been opened for the Negro since the war that has not been filled. Often hungry and in rags, making sacrifices of which you little dream, the Negro youth has been determined to annihilate his mental darkness. With all his disadvantages, the Negro, according to official records, has blotted out 55.5 per cent. of his illiteracy since he became a free man, while practically 95 per cent. of the native Africans are illiterate. After years of civilization and opportunity, in Spain, 68 per cent. of the population are illiterate; in Italy 38 per cent. In the average South American country about 80 per cent. are illiterate, while after forty years the American Negro has only 44.5 per cent. of illiteracy to his debit. I have thus compared the progress of my race not with the highest civilized nations, for the reason that, in passing judgment upon us, the world too often forgets that either consciously or otherwise, because of geographical or physical proximity to the American white man, we are being compared with the very highest civilization that exists. But when compared with the most advanced and enlightened white people of the South we find 12 per cent. of illiteracy for them and only 44 per cent. for our race.

Having seen that the American Negro takes advantage of every opportunity to secure an education, I think it will surprise some to learn to what an extent the race contributes towards its own education and works in sympathetic touch with the whites at the South. In emphasizing this fact I use the testimony of the best Southern white men. Says the State Superintendent of Education of Florida in one of his recent official reports: “The following figures are given to show that the education of the Negroes of Middle Florida, (the Black Belt of Florida) does not cost the white people of that section one cent.” In those eight Black Belt counties the total cost of the Negro schools is $19,457. The total contributed by the Negro in direct and indirect taxes amounted to $23,984, thus leaving a difference of $4,527, which according to the Superintendent, went into white schools. In Mississippi for the year ending in 1899, according to an eminent authority, the Negroes had expended on their schools
about 20 per cent. of the total school fund, or a total of about $250,000. During the same year they paid toward their own education in poll taxes, state, county and city taxes, and indirect taxes, about $280,000, or a surplus of about $30,000. So that looked at from any point of view it would seem that the Negroes in that state are in a large measure paying for their own education.

But all this has little to do with my main purpose, and that is to emphasize the fact that with all the Negro is doing for himself, with all the white people in the South are doing for themselves, and despite all that one race is doing to help the other, the present opportunities for education are woefully inadequate for both races. In the year 1877–8 the total expenditure for education in the exslave states was a beggarly $2.61 per capita for whites and only $1.09 7 for blacks; on the same basis the U. S. Commissioner of Education reasons that for the year 1900–1, $35,400,000 were spent for the education of both races in the South, of which $6,000,000 went to Negroes, or $4.92 per capita for whites and $2.21 for blacks; on the same basis, each child in Massachusetts has spent upon his education $22.35 and each one in New York $20.53, yearly.

From both a moral and religious point of view, what measure of education the Negro has received, has paid, and there has been no step backward in any state. Not a single graduate of the Hampton Institute or of the Tuskegee Institute can be found to-day in any jail or state penitentiary. After making careful inquiry I cannot find a half-dozen cases of a man or woman who has completed a full course of education in any of our reputable institutions like Hampton, Tuskegee, Fisk or Atlanta, who are in prisons. The records of the South show that 90 per cent. of the colored people in prisons are without knowledge of trades, and 61 per cent. are illiterate. This statement alone disproves the assertion that the Negro grows in crime as education increases. If the Negro at the North is more criminal than his brother at the South, it is because the North withholds from him the opportunity for employment which the South gives. It is not the educated Negro who has been guilty of or even charged with crime in the South; it is, as a rule, the one who has a mere smattering of education or is in total ignorance. While the Negro may succeed in getting into the state prison faster, the white man in some inexplicable manner has a way of getting out faster than the Negro. To illustrate: the official records of Virginia for a year show that one out of every three and one-half white men were freed from prison by executive clemency, and that only one out of every fourteen Negroes received such clemency. In Louisiana it is one to every four and one-half white men and one to every forty-nine Negroes. So that when this feature is considered, matters are pretty well evened up between the races.

As bearing further upon the tendency of education to improve the morals of the Negro and therefore to prolong his life, no one will accuse the average New York insurance company of being guided by mere sentiment towards the Negro in placing its risks; with the insurance company it is
a question of cold business. A few months ago the chief medical examiner for the largest industrial insurance company in America stated that after twenty years' experience and observation, his company had found that the Negro who was intelligent, who worked regularly at a trade or some industry and owned his home was as safe an insurance risk as a white man in the same station of life.

Not long ago a Southern white man residing in the town of Tuskegee, who represents one of the largest and most wealthy accident and casualty companies in New York, wrote to his company to the effect that while he knew his company refused to insure the ordinary, ignorant, colored man, at the Tuskegee Institute there were some 150 officers and instructors who were persons of education and skill, with property and character, and that he, a Southern white man, advised that they be insured on the same terms as other races, and within a weak the answer came back, “Insure without hesitation every Negro on the Tuskegee Institute grounds of the type you name.” The fact is that almost every insurance company is now seeking the business of the educated Negro. If education increased the risk, they would seek the ignorant Negro rather than the educated one.

As bearing further upon the effect of education upon the morals of the Negro during the last forty years, let us go into the heart of the Black Belt of Mississippi and inquire of Alfred Holt Stone, a large and intelligent cotton planter, as to the progress of the race. Mr. Stone says: “The last census shows that the Negro constitutes 87.6 per cent. of the population of the Yazoo-Mississippi delta. Yet we hear of no black incubus; we have had few midnight assassinations, and fewer lynchings. The violation by a Negro of the person of a white woman is with us an unknown crime; nowhere else is the line marking the social separation of the two races more rigidly drawn; nowhere are the relations between the two more kindly. With us race riots are unknown, and we have but one Negro problem—though that constantly confronts us—how to secure more Negroes.”

There are few higher authorities on the progress of the Negro than Joel Chandler Harris, of the Atlanta Constitution, of “Uncle Rein us” fame. Mr. Harris had opportunity to know the Negro before the war, and he has followed his progress closely in freedom. In a printed statement two weeks ago Mr. Harris says:

“In spite of all, however, the condition of the Negro has been growing better.” * * * * *

“We cannot fairly judge a race, or a country, or a religious institution, or a social organization, or society itself, nay, not the republic in which we take pride, unless we measure it by the standard set up by the men who are its best representatives.

“We are in such a furious hurry. We are placed in a position of expecting a race but a few years from inevitable ignorance imposed on it by the conditions of slavery to make the most remarkable
progress that the world has ever heard of, and when we discover that in the nature of things this is impossible, we shake our heads sadly and are ready to lose heart and hope.

“The point I desire to make is that the overwhelming majority of the Negroes in all parts of the South, especially in the agricultural regions, are leading sober and industrious lives. A temperate race is bound to be industrious, and the Negroes are temperate when compared with the whites. Even in the towns the majority of them are sober and industrious. The idle and criminal classes among them make a great show in the police court records, but right here in Atlanta the respectable and decent Negroes far outnumber those who are on the lists of the police as old or new offenders. I am bound to conclude from what I see all about me, and from what I know of the race elsewhere, that the Negro, notwithstanding the late start he has made in civilization and enlightenment, is capable of making himself a useful member in the communities in which he lives and moves, and that he is becoming more and more desirous of conforming to all the laws that have been enacted for the protection of society.”

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In connection with this testimony from Joel Chandler Harris, may I add, no one has a right to pass final judgment upon the moral status of a race unless he has visited the homes, the intellectual gatherings, the schools and churches, where he can observe something of the higher life of that people. Our moral progress must not be judged by the man on the street. You may not know it, but the moral lines are beginning to be as strictly drawn in my race as in yours, and it must not be forgotten that we are as proud of our race as you are of yours, and that the more progress we make in education, the more satisfaction do we find in our own homes and social circles.

We are to live in the South, and sympathy between the races is vital. We must convince the Southern white people of the value of educating the Negro, and this we are doing according to the testimony of Southern people themselves.

Sometime ago I sent out letters to representative Southern men, covering each ex-slave state, asking them, judging by their observation in their own communities, what effect education had upon the Negro. To these questions I received 136 replies as follows:

1. Has education made the Negro a more useful citizen?

Answers—Yes, 121; No, 4; unanswered, 11.

2. Has it made him more economical and more inclined to acquire wealth?

Answers—Yes, 98; No, 14; Unanswered, 24.
3. Does it make him a more valuable workman, especially where skill and thought are required?

Answers—Yes, 132; No, 2; Unanswered, 2.

4. Do well-trained, skilled Negro workmen find any difficulty in securing work in your community?

Answers—No, 117; Yes, 4; Unanswered, 15.

5. Are colored men in business patronized by the whites in your community?

Answers—Yes, 92; No, 9; Unanswered, 35. (The large number of cases in which this question was not answered is due to scarcity of business men).

6. Is there any opposition to the colored people's buying land in your community?

Answers—No, 128; Yes, 3; Unanswered, 5.

7. Has education improved the morals of the black race?

Answers—Yes, 97; No, 20; Unanswered, 19.

8. Has it made his religion less emotional and more practical?

Answers—Yes, 101; No, 16; Unanswered, 19.

9. Is it as a rule, the ignorant or the educated who commit crime?

Answers—Ignorant, 115; Educated, 3; Unanswered, 17.

10. Does crime grow less as education increases among the colored people?

Answers—Yes, 102; No, 19; Unanswered, 15.

11. Is the moral growth of the Negro equal to his mental growth?

Answers—Yes, 55; No, 46; Unanswered, 35.

But it has been said that the Negro proves economically valueless in proportion as he is educated. Let us see: All will agree that the Negro in Virginia, for example, began life forty years ago in complete poverty, scarcely owning clothing or a day's food. Right here I lay emphasis 10 upon
conditions in Virginia for the reason that the Hampton Institute, whose claims we are considering, is located in that state, and is the oldest and most widely known of all our schools. From an economic point of view, what has been accomplished for Virginia alone largely through the example and work of the graduates of Hampton and other large schools in that state? The reports of the State Auditor show that the Negro to-day owns at least one twenty-sixth of the total real estate in that commonwealth exclusive of his holdings in towns and cities, and that in the counties east of the Blue Ridge Mountains he owns one-sixteenth. In Middlesex County he owns one-sixth; in Hanover one-fourth. In Georgia, the official records show that, largely through the influence of educated men and women from Atlanta schools and others, the Negroes added last year $1,526,000 to their taxable property, making the total amount upon which they pay taxes in that state alone, $16,700,000. From nothing to $16,000,000 in one state in forty years does not seem to prove that education is hurting the race very much. Relative progress has taken place in Alabama and other Southern States. Every man or woman who graduates from the Hampton or Tuskegee Institutes who has become intelligent and skilled in any of the industries of the South, is not only in demand at an increased salary, on the part of my race, but there is equal demand from the white race. One of the largest manufacturing concerns in Birmingham, Alabama, keeps a standing order at the Tuskegee Institute to the effect that it will employ every man who graduates from our foundry department. When the South had a wholly ignorant and wholly slave Negro population, she produced about 4,000,000 bales of cotton; now she has a wholly free and partly educated Negro population and the South produces nearly 10,000,000 bales of cotton, besides more food products than were ever grown in its history. In the making of these statements, it should not be overlooked that it is not the Negro alone who produces cotton, but it is his labor that produces most of it. And while he may pay a small direct tax, his labor makes it mighty convenient for others to pay direct taxes.

Judged purely from an economic or industrial standpoint, the education of the Negro is paying, and will pay more largely in the future in proportion as educational opportunities are increased. A careful examination shows that of the men and women trained at the Hampton and Tuskegee schools, not ten per cent. can be found in idleness at any season of the year. They have learned the beauty of work; the disgrace of idleness. But my real object, I beg to repeat, is not to enter into a controversy on this or that point of the progress of the race, but to emphasize the fact that with all the Negro is doing to help himself, with all that the Southern white people are doing, that the opportunities for education for my race are inadequate almost beyond description, and the same may be said of the poor white people in certain sections of the South.

Years ago some one asked an eminent clergyman in Boston if Christianity is a failure. The reverend doctor replied that it had never been tried. When people are bold enough to suggest that the education of the Negro is a failure, I reply that it has never been tried. The fact is that 44.5 of
the colored people in this country to-day are illiterate. A very large proportion of those classed as educated, have the merest smattering of knowledge, which means practically no education. Can the Negro child get an education in school four months and out of school eight months? Can the white child of the South who receives $4.92 per capita for education or the black child who receives $2.21, be said to be given an equal chance in the battle of life, or has education been tried on them? The official records in Louisiana, for instance, show that less than one-fourth of the Negro children of school age attend any school during the year. This one-fourth was in school for a period of less than five months, and each Negro child of school age in the state had spent on him for education last year but $1.89, while each child of school age in the State of New York had spent on him $20.53. In the former slave states ninety per cent. of the Negro children of school age did not attend school for six months during the year 1900.

I would seek to convince you that wherever the race is given an opportunity for education, it takes advantage of that opportunity and that the change can be seen in the improved material, educational, moral and religious condition of the masses. Contrast two townships, one in Louisiana where the race has had little chance, with one in Farmville, Virginia, says the United States Bulletin of the Department of Labor. In the Louisiana township only 10 per cent. attend school, and they attend for but four months in a year, and 71 per cent. of the people are illiterate. And as a result of this ignorance and neglect, we find only 50 per cent. of the people living together as man and wife are legally married. Largely through the leadership of Hampton graduates, 56 per cent. of the black children in Farmville, Virginia, attend either public or private school from six to eight months. There is only 39 per cent. of illiteracy. Practically all the people living together as man and wife are legally married, and in the whole community only 15 per cent. of the births are illegitimate.

But the vital point which I want to emphasize is the disposition of the Negro to exercise self-help in the building up of his own schools in connection with the state public school system. Wherever we send out from Hampton, Tuskegee, or any of our Southern colleges, a Negro leader of proper character, he shows the people in most cases how to extend the school term beyond the few months provided for by the state. Out of their poverty the Southern States are making a tremendous effort to extend and improve the school term each year, but while this improvement is taking place, the Negro leaders of the character to which I have referred, must be depended upon largely to keep alive the spark of education. But when all this has been said, the question as to the elevation of the black man goes deeper than the interests of the Hampton Institute, deeper than the interests of a single race, deeper than the interests of the South. In the last analysis it means that we shall have in this country either a democratic form of government, or a mere sham and semblance of the same.
It now seems settled that the great body of our people are to reside for all time in the Southern portion of the United States. Since this is true, there is no more helpful and patriotic service than to help cement a friendship between the two races that shall be manly, honorable and permanent. In this work of moulding and guiding a public sentiment that shall forever maintain peace and good-will between the races on terms commendable to each, it is on the Negro who comes out of our universities, colleges and industrial schools that we must largely depend. Few people realize how, under the most difficult and trying circumstances, during the last forty years, it has been the educated Negro who counseled patience, self-control and thus averted a war of races. Every Negro going out from our institutions properly educated, becomes a link in the chain that shall forever bind the two races together in all the essentials of life.

Finally, reduced to its last analysis, there are but two questions that constitute the problem of this country so far as the black and white races are concerned. The answer to the one rests with my people, the other with the white race. For my race one of its dangers is that it may grow impatient and feel that it can get upon its feet by artificial and superficial efforts rather than by the slower but surer process which means one step at a time through all the constructive grades of industrial, mental, moral and social development which all races have had to follow which have become independent and strong. I would counsel: We must be sure that we shall make our greatest progress by keeping our feet on the earth, and by remembering that an inch of progress is worth a yard of complaint. For the white race the danger is that in its prosperity and power it may forget the claims of a weaker people; may forget that a strong race, like an individual, should put its hand upon its heart and ask if it were placed in similar circumstances how it would like the world to treat it; that the stronger race may forget that in proportion as it lifts up the poorest and weakest even by a hair's breadth, it strengthens and ennobles itself.

All the Negro race asks is that the door which rewards industry, thrift, intelligence and character, be left as wide open for him as for the foreigner who constantly comes to our country. More than this, he has no right to request. Less than this a Republic has no right to vouchsafe.

Neither must the nation grow impatient and faithless. It must remember that during the last forty years, the South has been passing through a tremendous industrial and social crisis. This is true of the white race, equally true of the black race. The change from slavery to freedom could not be accomplished without mistakes on both sides, without each race going to extremes. Time, the great leveler, will exercise a modifying, a sobering influence upon all concerned, and in all proper directions.
With all his faults the Negro rarely betrays a trust or manifests a spirit of ingratitude. Whenever he has been called upon to render service in behalf of his state or nation, such service has been ungrudgingly given. Further, whether in ignorance or in intelligence, whether in slavery or in freedom, the Negro has always been true to the Stars and Stripes and the best interests of the nation; and no black-skinned citizen has ever lifted his hand to strike down the Chief Magistrate of the nation, or raised the red flag of anarchy. Every dollar that is put into our education by the North or South through such agencies as the Hampton Institute, the race will more than repay by a life of industry, intelligence, high Christian character, and in helpful friendship between the races; and because of our elevation, it shall be said of the South "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."