

EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS*

BY REVERDY C. RANSOM

ALONG the line of education we have in this country two great big outstanding problems. One of them bulks large in the North and the other bulks large in the South. In the North it is the problem of the children of the immigrants:— to absorb them and to assimilate them through free public schools into American citizenship, so that, as they come by the thousands and tens of thousands from Southern Italy and Central Europe and Russia and elsewhere, as they come into great centers like Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York, the problem of the teacher, the problem of the public schools, among others, is to assimilate that particular group so that it may become Americanized.

In the South the great problem is—or should be, rather—the problem of assimilating and training the great bulk of those millions of Americans of African descent who have only had a little over fifty years in this country. The problem is difficult so far as this element is concerned, and both the teacher and the preacher must meet it.

According to the latest report issued by the United States Bureau of Education fifteen Southern States, among them Delaware, Maryland, and Kentucky, expended annually for the education of white children \$36,649,827. In the same period they spent for the education of colored children \$5,860,876. On a per capita basis this means that \$10.30 is expended for the education of each white child in the South per annum. To be more specific, the State of Virginia spends annually \$9.64 for the education of each white child. It expends \$2.74 for

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each colored child. North Carolina spends \$5.27 for each white child, \$2.02 for each colored child; Georgia, 9.58 for the white child, and \$1.76 for the colored child; and Louisiana, \$13.73 for the white and \$1.31 for the colored child.

This means a great many things to you teachers and it means a great many things to our American citizenship in those States and throughout the Nation, from the angle of the colored people, and it should from the angle of the white also. We do not need any jim-crow cars or any other segregation, any oppression or repression to "keep the Negro in his place." All we need to do is to spend \$10 on a white boy and \$1.31 on a black boy. That is enough without all this other stuff. It seems to me that these other abominations are works of supererogation.

Those are plain, cold facts published by the Government of the United States. Now what is your problem? You are trying to bridge the chasm between the \$10 child and the \$1.31 child. That is the meaning of Hampton and of Fisk University and of the schools on the hills around Atlanta, Ga. It is the meaning of the schools supported by the denominations and those other schools that have sprung up and I hope will continue to spring up through all the Southland. It is to bridge the gulf in order that all may be more equally endowed. That is the great thing that confronts us, not only colored people, but all Americans.

It is not simply a question of color and race; it is a question that affects our common country and our citizenship. These young women before me are a part of this problem: to bring the one-dollar boy and the one-dollar girl up to the standard so that they will be able to meet, on equal terms, the ten- and twelve-dollar boy and girl in the battle of life. When the Germans came with poison gas the Allies had to invent poison gas to meet poison gas. In other words they could not contend except on equal terms with equal instruments with the men who were confronting them.

So in our American democracy. In New York City we say that the children of the immigrants must be taken through the public schools and equipped so that they shall be able to go out into this great country and be absorbed in this life and meet the children of other Americans; that they shall become Americans on equal terms. So the children of Americans of African descent must be so trained that when the black boy and girl of to-day, fifteen or twenty years hence, go out into the battle of life, they shall be equipped and trained intellectually, so that, in the struggle for the prizes of life, they will not have to fight with unequal weapons. * *

Our America cannot go forward—and you might just as well face it—on the idea that any class of people in our common land can be handicapped by such circumstances as will by force cause them to take a secondary place in our civilization.

There are two things I want to speak of briefly to the teachers here. I look at some of the textbooks. It seems to me that the colored teacher everywhere should equip herself so as to supplement the teaching of history. I think that each teacher should specialize on the teaching of Negro history. If you do not do it how do you expect the generation that is coming up to hold up its head in the United States, when they read a so-called history of the United States with not a single line in it about the Negro. Your children should be taught the fact that the first ship ever built in the United States sailed from the United States to Newfoundland and was built by Paul Coffey and his brother—two Negroes. Of course you know the story of Crispus Attucks, but keep on telling it. Boston, Massachusetts, put it in bronze on the Common. Tell it!

Just a few weeks ago President Harding came over from Washington to assist us in dedicating a statue to Simon Bolivar, but there was not one line about us. What are the facts? Simon Bolivar had failed in his campaigns and battles to win the Independence of South America and in his discouragement and failure he put into the harbor of Port au Prince, and it was the president of that Negro republic who gave him money and ships to enable him to go back and win independence.

How is the colored child to get its inspiration? How is it to have its pride in achievement, when others are reading about their fathers as heroes and there is not one word about the great deeds of Negroes?

Not only in war but in the realm of invention as well the Negro has a place. I published not long ago some information furnished me by the United States Shoe Machinery Company. All the lasting of shoes in all the shoe factories of America had been done by hand until a colored man invented a machine to do the lasting. It was some years before they got it to operate, but to-day it is used, not only in all the factories of America, but in England and Europe as well. That machine is called "The Nigger." It is a mighty good "nigger." It cheapened the price of shoes. Every person who walks in shoe leather is able to do it more cheaply and perhaps more comfortably because a man of your race invented the machine that enables them to do it.

I simply say this much in order to emphasize the fact that the teacher must get busy, if she has not already done so, and supplement the histories by teaching also Negro history.

There is one other thing. Somebody must look out for the exceptional boy and the exceptional girl. The preacher must do it and the teacher must do it. I take great satisfaction in saying that more than once I have done that thing. I am a native of Ohio. When Paul Dunbar published his first little volume of poems called "Open Eyes," he got it to the printer but he could not get it out. I said, "Paul, go tell the printer to let you have a hundred copies and we will pay for them to-morrow." He got them and brought them down to the church and when the people saw them, they bought them. Later, when Dr. Howells said Dunbar was a poet, that settled it!

I think we should be on the lookout for these exceptional boys and girls and encourage them. That is one of the great needs of the hour. Perhaps in almost every community there is one such boy or girl. It may be a girl who has some special skill with the needle. Push her forward! Or it may be a boy with mechanical ability. Or it may be a writer or an artist. If you find exceptional ability, get behind it. I would get behind a white child just as quickly. He is among the favored ones, but he often has to fight against obstacles. We should be on the lookout for exceptional ability, if not for genius. * *

The Co-operative Education Association of Virginia has received from the Governor of Virginia and the heads of each of the State departments very strong letters of endorsement of the real constructive work that is being done by the community leagues and junior community leagues of the State.

During the past seventeen years over a million dollars has been raised through the league to improve the school buildings and grounds, equip laboratories, putting music, libraries, and pictures in schools, establishing medical and dental clinics, purchasing playgrounds and athletic equipment, instructing and furnishing teachers and providing suitable places for teachers to board, and in doing anything necessary for the school and community. The idea is to help and inspire each community to help itself, which is after all the only help worth while.

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