

A University Education for Negroes

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A University Education for Negroes

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[The inauguration of Dr. George A. Gates, lately of Pomona College, on March 31, as president of Fisk University, gives special timeliness to this article. Dr. Washington's defense of higher education for negroes shows how mistaken is the idea that he is concerned only in the industrial training which will fit the race to support themselves in a humble station of life.—EDITOR.]

FISK University, located in Nashville, Tenn., was founded by the American Missionary Association in 1866, and it is under its fostering care that it has done its work up to the present time. It began in an abandoned army barracks, took its name from Gen. Clinton B. Fisk, who was at that time stationed at Nashville, and its first permanent buildings were erected on the site of Fort Gillam.

Coming thus on the heels of the war, it was one of the first tangible fruits, so far as the negro is concerned, of emancipation.

Those were wonderful days, directly after the war! Suddenly, as if at the

sound of a trumpet, a whole race that had been slumbering for centuries in barbarism awoke and started off one morning to school.

It was a sight to stir the heart and, moved by a generous enthusiasm, hundreds of young men and a still larger number of young women, came from the North to help the newly enfranchised race on its road to freedom. It was under these conditions, and by men and women of this type, that Fisk University was founded and, in sending out year after year since that time, into all parts of the South, young colored men and women who were inspired with the enthusiasm and high purpose of

those early teachers, this school has performed a service to the negro race and the South greater than can be measured in definite terms.

A few years ago there was not a school for negroes in the South so well known as Fisk University. It gained its fame thru the singing, by its students, of the old slave songs which the young freedmen had learned in the laps of their slave mothers. The Jubilee Singers, in the course of a seven years' campaign, made Fisk University known all over the world and brought back \$150,000 to the school to help erect its first permanent buildings. If Fisk had done nothing else or more, its work in gathering and popularizing these folksongs of the race has entitled it to be remembered with gratitude by the negro people and the world.

Thruout the South, and in other parts of the country as well, the colored people cherish a feeling of love and even reverence for Fisk University that is not generally understood by the rest of the world. It is a great advantage to a school to have gained that sort of a reputation among the people for whom it exists.

Fisk has, in this respect, an additional advantage. From time to time, as I have gone to Nashville, I have been careful to note how highly the work of this school is esteemed by the white people in Nashville and thruout that part of the State. I have never heard a white person in Nashville speak in any manner except in the most friendly way of Fisk University. As between the Southern white people in Nashville and Fisk University, there is little or no race feeling and their relations do not, as is sometimes the case elsewhere, constitute a special problem that has to be considered and solved. I have been at Fisk on public occasions when I have seen every inch of space in the auditorium crowded by the best white people in Nashville. This fact needs to be considered in estimating the value and usefulness of this school.

Mrs. Washington and I recently spent two days in Nashville, during which time we had an opportunity to go thru every department of the college in com-

pany with the new president, Dr. George A. Gates. I confess that I was surprised that any institution, with so little means, could do so much work and such good work, and care for so large a body of students, as is the case here.

Fisk University, because of the work it has already done and because of the high place that it holds in the hearts of the colored people, is in a position where, if its work could be enlarged and perfected, it could and should be of vastly greater service in the future than it has been in the past. The fact is, however, that it has reached a point where it is clear to any one versed in educational matters that the school must have more money or it must go backward instead of forward.

From the first, Fisk University has been most fortunate in the type of its instructors. The late president, Dr. E. M. Cravath, was a high example of what I mean. More than to any one other single individual, Fisk University is indebted to Dr. E. M. Cravath for the character of work done and for the atmosphere which surrounds the university. The son of Dr. Cravath, Mr. Paul D. Cravath, of New York, one of the most eminent lawyers in the country, is a trustee of Fisk and has been deeply interested in keeping the university up to the standard of usefulness which it reached when his father lived. Following President Cravath the standard of the university was maintained under the late Dr. James G. Merrill.

The new president, Dr. George A. Gates, whose formal inauguration will take place Thursday, March 31, although he had been at the institution but a short time, had already, when I made my visit there, gotten a firm grip upon his work and had found a strong place in the hearts of both faculty and students as well as the citizens of Nashville. In this respect the university seems to have held its own.

The faculty is divided between white and colored professors. The white people are now, as they have always been, men and women of an exceptionally high character and purpose, who are in the work not for dollars and cents, but for the good that they can

accomplish. The colored professors for the most part are graduates of Fisk University.

It was a pleasure for me, during the two days that we spent at the school, to mingle freely among the students. They are a fine lot. Nothing bumptious or foolish about them. They seem to have but one object in view, that of preparing themselves for service to their race. In looking over the list of the

Fisk graduates, I find that considerably more than half of them have gone out into different parts of the South as teachers. Some of the strongest men who are leaders in education, religious work and in the professions are graduates of Fisk University. In my recent trips thru Southern States, I have been surprised as well as gratified at the large number of Fisk men and women whom I have met, and almost without exception I have found that they are leading useful and honorable lives. For a number of

years, we have had from twelve to fifteen Fisk men and women at Tuskegee, in different departments. For example, Mr. Clinton J. Calloway, who has been so largely responsible for the organization and upbuilding of the rural schools thruout Macon and other counties in Alabama adjoining Tuskegee, is a Fisk graduate.

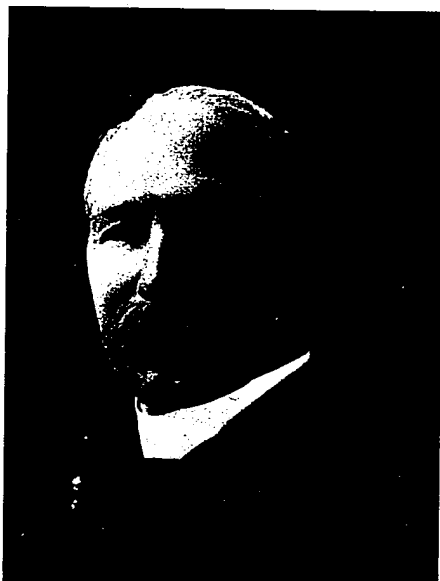
It should be remembered that the responsibilities, as well as the opportunities, of the colored teacher are greater than are those of the white teacher who is engaged in the same kind of work. For example, in Alabama, and I hope it will soon be so everywhere thruout

the South, a teacher who goes out into the rural districts is generally expected, in places where school exists for only three or four months, to extend the term to six or eight months. In order to do this it is necessary, of course, to devise some form or method of voluntary taxation. Frequently the raising of this money is the most important work a teacher has to do, because upon these voluntary contributions, not merely the character, but the very existence of the school depends.

On the other hand, a teacher may go into a community where there is no school building or where the building that has been used is so worn and old that it is no longer fit for use, and a good many of the country schools are in that condition. In such a case, the teacher is likely to be called upon to raise money and erect a new building or repair the old one.

In many parts of the South in the country districts, the burden of

erecting and maintaining the school system, so far as it touches the negro, is thrown largely upon the negro teacher. Not only this, but to a very large extent the success of negro education in the South depends upon the character of the individual teacher and the spirit in which he or she undertakes the work. If the teacher has learned to bring education so into touch with the life of the community that the people, both black and white, can be made to feel and see the effects of it in their daily life, then education will become popular in that community, and white people, as well as the colored people, will be glad to support it. Altho conditions are somewhat dif-



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ferent in the cities the negro teacher there—to a much larger extent than the white teacher—has the responsibility of showing, by the results of his teaching, the value of the kind of education that he is giving his pupils.

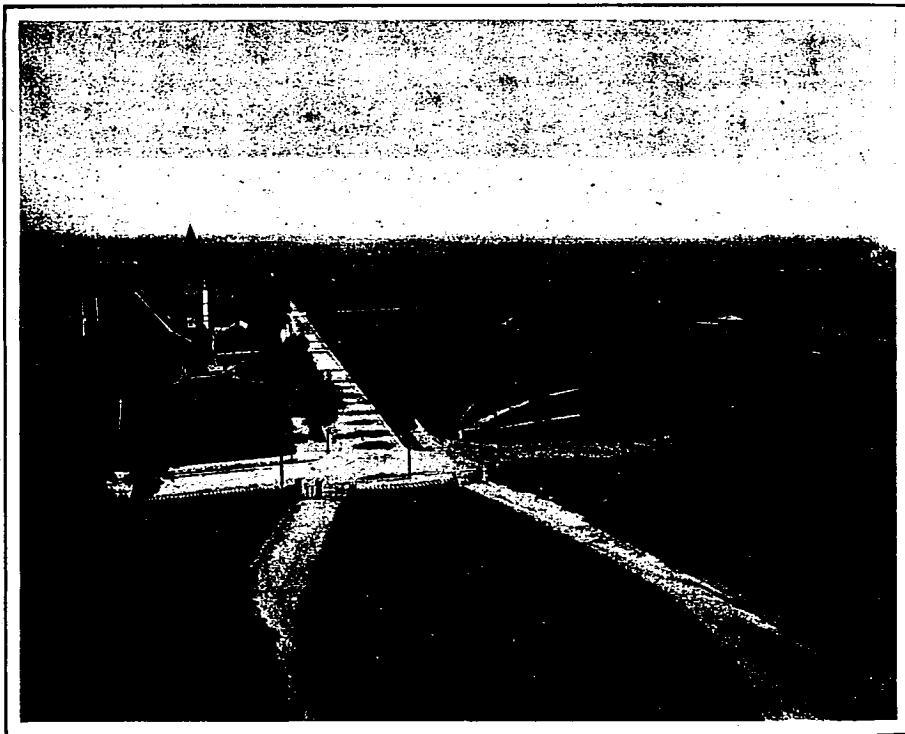
I mention these things in order to emphasize the fact that when his responsibilities are the same or greater, the negro teacher or the negro doctor ought to have just as sound, just as complete and just as thorough an education as the white man who performs the same work or shares the same responsibilities.

It sometimes seems to me that we spend too much time in the discussion of the relative value of higher educa-

are to have negro doctors, then I think every one will agree they should be good doctors. If we are to have negro teachers, ministers, bankers and business men, they should be just as efficient and just as moral as those of any other race.

For this, if for no other reason, we must keep up the standard in our schools. We must not draw the color line in the negro colleges as we will do if we voluntarily accept a low standard or less complete preparation in negro colleges than is required in the schools of any other race.

This is a matter, let me add, that touches the white man just as closely as it does the negro. We are all bound



FISK UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, SHOWING CHAPEL.

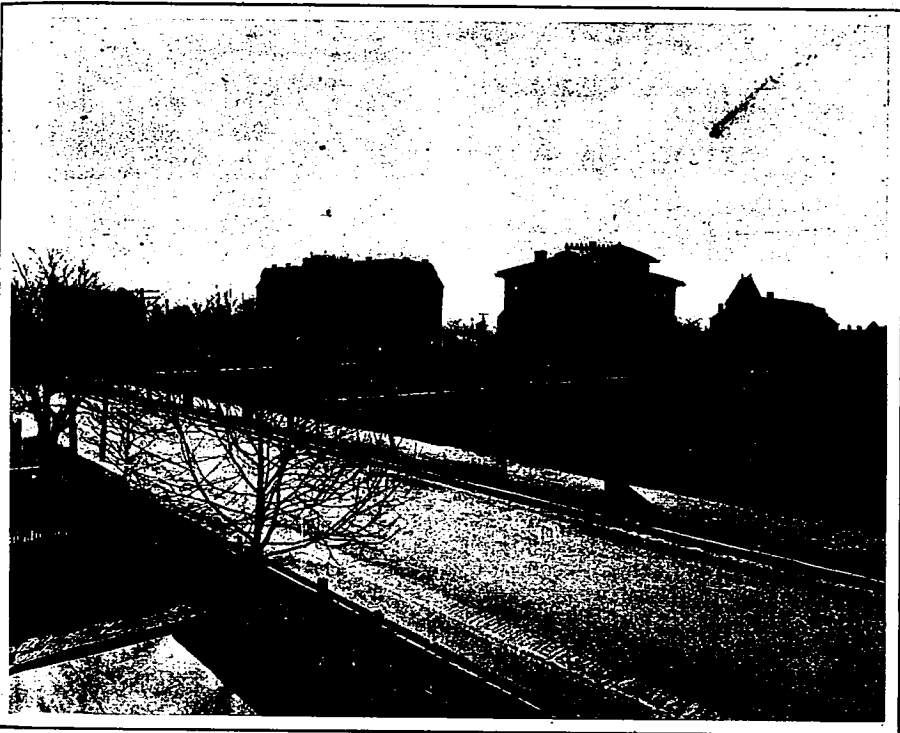
tion and lower education for the negro. As a matter of fact, it does not make so much difference whether education is high or low, professional or common, but it does make a great deal of difference whether the education the negro receives is real or merely a sham. If we

together in a system of relations; we cannot tear asunder if we would. Disease draws no color line. If a contagious disease breaks out in the part of the city inhabited by black people, it is pretty sure to reach, sooner or later, the part of the city inhabited by white

people. The negro doctor, in looking after the health of the individual negro, to a certain extent is looking after the health of the whole community. Morality draws no color line. If one portion of the community is living in helpless ignorance and degradation, every

that we should have in every Southern community well-trained, enterprising, thrifty and honest negro business men who will serve as examples to the other members of their race.

In all these respects Fisk has been, to a certain extent, a model for the other



FISK UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS.
Gymnasium.

Library.

Livingston Hall.

other portion of the community will sooner or later be infected with these conditions. For this reason, it is important that the negro teacher and negro preacher should be properly trained.

It is just as true in business, and in all the economic relations of life, as it is in the matter of disease that the success and prosperity of one part of the community is dependent upon the success and the prosperity of every other part. If one part of the community performs its work and fulfils its obligations in a slipshod, careless way, the whole community will feel the effects. For this reason, it is important to every one

colored schools in the South. For its effort to maintain its standards under peculiar disadvantages Fisk deserves especial credit. As indicating what those disadvantages are, let me make a comparison.

Thirty years ago, the University of Chicago was, like Fisk, a comparatively small and unimportant school. Without pretending to any definite knowledge of the facts, I believe I am safe in saying that Chicago University was not, at that time, much ahead of Fisk either in the character of its work, in the number of its students or in the extent of its influence upon the communities. That

was the day of small colleges. I do not believe there was a university in the country that had much over a thousand students.

How do the two institutions compare today?

According to the report of the Commissioner of Education for 1908, Fisk had 516 students, while Chicago had 5,617, which is but 2,882 less than the number of students in the twenty negro colleges reported by the United States Commissioner of Education. The total annual income of Fisk in that same year was \$24,590. The value of its scientific apparatus, library and buildings was estimated at \$419,000, of which \$400,000 was buildings. The total annual income of Chicago University in 1908 was \$1,772,015. The value of its scientific apparatus, library and buildings, exclusive of its endowment, was estimated at \$10,320,036.

In order to show just what this means, let me make a further comparison. While the income of Chicago University in 1908 was \$1,772,015, the total annual income of the twenty negro colleges mentioned in report of the Commissioner of Education was \$804,663. In other words, the annual income of a single school in the North was more than twice as large as that of all the negro colleges in the United States.

Fisk University has an endowment at the present time of but \$60,000. The total endowment of the twenty negro colleges reported by the Commissioner of Education in 1908 was only \$1,383,726. In that same year, \$1,468,129 was added to the endowment fund of Chicago University, while the total endowment of that school was \$14,000,000.

I have mentioned Chicago University because it is a convenient illustration of the rapid development of the larger educational institutions in the North, not only with respect to the size of the plant employed, but in respect to the character of the teaching and the influence of these schools upon the community. But Chicago University is by no means exceptional. There are at least fifteen larger institutions of learning which expend more money every year for current expenses than is expended for all purposes by negro colleges in the South.

Several of these large institutions expend annually twice, and one of them, Harvard University, nearly three times as much, as all the negro colleges in the United States.

In addition to the fifteen larger universities to which I have referred, there are at least seventeen other and smaller institutions, among them technical schools and agricultural colleges, which spend nearly or quite as much as any ten negro colleges south of Washington, D. C. One of these schools to which I refer is an agricultural and mechanical college for white students in the State of Mississippi.

In the matter of endowment, Chicago University is not exceptional. The University of Pennsylvania, for example, has an endowment of \$12,000,000. The endowment of Harvard University amounts now to over \$20,000,000; that of Columbia is \$23,000,000, and Leland Stanford has an endowment of \$24,000,000.

In making these comparisons I do not intend to reflect in any way upon the work of the colored colleges. From all I can learn, most of them are doing the best they can. In pointing out the difficulties under which these schools labor, my purpose is to make the world understand their needs.

I would not take a single dollar from any of the institutions in the North to which I have referred. They are doing a good work and need even more money, but I am using their names simply for comparison.

In all the discussion which is taking place as to the effect of one kind or another of education in solving the negro problem, we should bear in mind that education of no kind has been tried on a sufficiently large scale or with a sufficient consideration of what are the actual needs of negro people to show what education for the masses of the people will do. There are ten millions of negroes in the United States today. Why not have somewhere—in the South—at least one large, thoroly equipped university where the actual needs of the negro people could be studied and where such of them as desire to be teachers, doctors or ministers of the gospel could be thoroly equipped for their work?