The Education of Freedmen, part 2

Harriet Beecher Stowe

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IT now remains to give a brief survey of the permanent institutions which have grown up out of this educational enthusiasm which has united all Christian churches since the war.

The American Missionary Society, formed in 1846, as an anti−slavery missionary body, stood ready equipped to go into the field and aid and supplement the course of Northern benevolence. All denominations availed themselves of its patronage, which was entirely unsectarian. As the work broadened and increased, however, each denomination had its separate society, carried on in its own special way.

The American Missionary Society has planted one college or university for the colored people in each of the Southern States.

These are Hampton Institute, Virginia; Berea College, Kentucky; Fiske University, Nashville, Tennessee; Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia; Talladega College, Talladega, Alabama; Tongaloo University, Tongaloo, Mississippi; Straight University, New Orleans, Louisiana. The society has also seventeen institutions of a lower grade scattered through the different Southern States, and eight common schools. It is calculated that 60,000 freedmen are annually instructed in these institutions.

In 1865 the Presbyterian Church began its separate and distinctive work for the colored race, organizing a Presbyterian Committee of Missions for Freedmen. From 1865 to 1870 the receipts of this Committee averaged $27,000 per year.

The Presbyterian Church sought to cultivate intelligence among freedmen by planting and maintaining among them church and school conjointly. This specialty of parochial schools characterized the movement both of the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians. Besides their parochial schools the Presbyterian Church maintains five endowed institutions, namely: Biddle Memorial Institute, Charlotte, North Carolina, with three professors, three assistant professors, 124 pupils value of property, $17,000; Scotia Seminary for Colored Girls, Concord, North Carolina, 105 pupils value of property, $2,500; Wallingford Academy, Charleston, South Carolina, one professor, 261 pupils value of property, $13,450; Mainerd School, Chester, South Carolina, one professor, 231 pupils value of property, $3,600; Fairfield Normal School, Winnsborough, South Carolina, one professor, 184 pupils value of property, $3,500: total, six professors, three assistant professors, 905 pupils value of property, $40,050.

The Baptist Church has not been behindhand in zeal for this work. It has invested in it $716,273, and has under its charge, besides its churches and parochial schools, the following endowed institutions: Wayland Seminary, Washington, District of Columbia, with one professor, 92 pupils; Richmond Institute, Richmond, Virginia, one professor, 75 pupils; Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina, one professor, 230 pupils; Benedict Institute, Columbia, South Carolina, one professor, 118 pupils; Augusta Institute, Augusta, Georgia, one professor, 52 pupils; Nashville Institute, Nashville, Tennessee, one professor, 136 pupils; Leland University, New Orleans, Louisiana, one professor, 92 pupils; total, 795.

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The following permanently endowed educational institutions attest her success: Central Tennessee College, Nashville, Tennessee; Shaw University, Holly Springs, Mississippi; Claflin University and Baker Institute, Orangeburg, South Carolina; Clarke University and Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans University and Thomson Biblical Institute, New Orleans, Louisiana; Wiley University, Marshall, Texas; Haven Normal School, Waynesborough, Georgia; Rust Biblical and Normal Institute, Huntsville, Alabama; La T che Seminary, Baldwin, Louisiana; Bennett Seminary, Greensborough, North Carolina; Richmond Normal School, Richmond, Virginia; Cookman Institute, Jacksonville, Florida; Centenary Biblical Institute, Baltimore, Maryland; Orphans' Home, Baldwin, Louisiana.

The Episcopal Church also has entered this field of Christian labor with zeal and success.

In the late Missionary Conference of the Episcopal Church in New York, the Right Reverend Bishop Dudley, of Kentucky, addressed the Conference upon this subject, and commenced by saying that the Episcopal Church was more to blame for the ignorance of the Southern negroes than any other body, because the members of that Church had been the largest owners of them in slavery. He added: "We are here to consider what we shall do, by the providence of God, now that the relation of the races has been changed; and remember that I as a Southern man am ready to thank God for this result of the civil war, and I am not here in any other sense than that we are come to consult how best to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ, as this Church has received it, to those four millions of people, who stand to−day in that land from which I come as free men, as citizens, yes, as a mighty power in the body politic, who are going to control, maybe, the legislation of this land. I remember once to have heard that apostolic man who has just taken his seat say to the men of New York what I want to say to the men of America to−day about this race. The Bishop of Minnesota said to the men of New York, 'You have got to take care of the poor people of this land or they will take care of you'; and so I say, 'You have got to take care of these people whom God hath set free from their bondage, and to whom have been given such civil rights that now the vote of one of them is just as mighty a factor in the land where I live as mine, or that of the Governor of the State — we have got to take care of them, or they are going to take care of us.'"

The report of the Episcopal Commission of Home Missions to colored people gives a list of thirty−seven missionary stations among these people, each supporting a missionary, a church, a parochial school, and a Sunday−school.

The system of the Episcopal Church seems in many respects exactly adapted to bring into an orderly and edifying use some of the peculiarities of the colored race. Her ritual, admitting responses, chanting processionals, and some scenic and ¾sthetic effect, will be attractive; while her liturgy, with its constant reiteration of Scripture reading, its collects, its affecting sacramental forms, will be a constant source of religious instruction. An effort being made in this Church to prepare an educated colored ministry is also specially interesting, as showing the decrease of the unchristian prejudice against color in a denomination which contains a great body of the former slaveholders. Rev. A. T. Twing, in his report to the Domestic Committee, September 1, 1878, gives this instance: "In a diocese at the capital of the State, where the beginning was with a few children taught under great opposition from the whole community by a noble presbyter and his wife, the result is — he being dead, but yet speaking — a Sunday−school of three or four hundred, instructed and sustained by the best people of the parish, the former and bitter prejudice having passed away. The present rector, honoring the memory and course of his predecessor, looks forward, not to a mission−chapel in an obscure and out−of−the−way place, but to an enlargement of the church to proportions ample for the accommodation of colored as well as white worshipers, and to the day not far distant when he hopes to have with the hearty approval of his people an antiphonal choir of white choristers on one side and black choristers on the other, and when a colored clergyman will minister with him at God's holy altar." This will certainly be a consummation worthy a Catholic and Apostolic Church.

To this summary of the various educational institutions of different Christian bodies must be added a notice of

Howard University in the national capital.

This institution, organized primarily under the national patronage by the Freedman's Bureau, offers equal advantages of education to all, without distinction of creed, race, or sex.

The departments of instruction at Howard University are as follows:

1. The Academic Department, including five courses of study, viz.: a the Model School Course of three years in the elementary English branches (students completing this course are prepared to begin either of the three following); b, the Normal Course of three years, adapted to those who have the work of teaching in view; c, the Literary Course of four years, designed to furnish a good practical education for those who are unable to take the full college curriculum; d, the Classical Preparatory Course of three years; and e, the Classical College Course of four years.

2. The Medical Department.

3. The Law Department.

4. The Theological Department.

The institution has a library of seven thousand volumes of general literature, and each professional department has its library. There are a cabinet of minerals containing four thousand specimens and a museum of history.

In the medical department, such are the advantages that a majority of the students are white. The theological department has about thirty students — some quite mature in age — in various preparatory, special, and regular courses, some of whom are already preachers, in a humble way, in their respective denominations. In the other departments worthy young persons are seeking to prepare for all the different vocations in life. They come from the abodes of poverty, and help themselves so far as opportunity offers, by labor, at leisure hours, and during vacations. But such earnings are usually insufficient. The charge for tuition is only twelve dollars a year, and room−rent is the same, while board is furnished at about ten dollars per month. No charge is made for tuition or room−rent to students for the gospel ministry.

With extensive buildings and grounds, the institution has no available endowments. Formerly it had liberal aid from the Freedman's Bureau, which no longer operates. Its temporary dependence is on rents, tuition, fees, and other scanty resources. With endowments for the professorships it could not only permanently sustain the present limited arrangements for instruction, but could greatly enlarge them to the advantage of the interests concerned. If permanent scholarships of $1,000 or $1,500 each could be secured, the best talent among the needy might be educated for important service. Even with temporary annual scholarships of fifty or a hundred dollars, the number of deserving students could soon be doubled. Often a donation of fifteen or twenty dollars will suffice to supplement the resources of a student so as to enable him to go through the year. A large addition to the female students could be made if friends would enable the institution to render slight aid. Churches, Sunday−schools, and individuals will here find a noble opportunity to do good, by contributions of money, clothing, bedding, stationery.

The entire floating debt of over $100,000 has been paid off within three years, and the only incumbrance on the buildings is $11,000. There is every reason to hope that this noble institution may receive that aid of which it is worthy. We have not space in this article to particularize the different institutions which in each State are working in this field of education. The writer has been through an extensive examination of the latest catalogues of each one up to the present year. Certain points are observable in which they all agree:

1. The use either of tobacco or of ardent spirits in any form is prohibited to pupils.

2. While all of them allow of the co−education of the sexes, such judicious regulations exist, with regard to all the proprieties and decorums of life, that no breath of suspicion or scandal has arisen in this regard. The presence of the two sexes is so guarded as to produce the delicacy, refinement, and purity of a Christian family.

3. All of them are guided by an earnest religious influence, and make it their object to enlighten the quick religious sensibility of the colored race, and bring it under the control of intelligent faith.

Berea College, in Kentucky, has accomplished the great point of co−education of the colored and white races.

On this point Professor Peabody, of Harvard, remarks: "Of all the experiments in co−education that have been instituted, we regard Berea College, in Kentucky, as the most important in its sphere of influence and in its prophecy of enduring benefit to the colored race. It has carried the war into the enemy's camp, and has brought its whole Christian panoply and armament into the immediate encounter with the surviving spirit of slavery. The college has shown its large educational capacity. Its public exercises have been attended in successive years by

persons of established reputation as educationists and literary men, and have received their unqualified commendation and praise. There is, for many miles around, no institution of learning that does nearly so much or so well for its pupils. The consequence is, that those at first vehemently opposed to it are fast falling into the ranks of neutrals or friends. Many who deemed it a nuisance have already sent their children to it. Its sterling value as a seminary of education is now recognized on all hands. But it is of much more worth for its silent yet most efficient propagandism of the due relation between the races; for co−education includes within itself, or involves as its necessary consequence, equality in all civic and social rights, immunities, duties, and obligations. Moreover, a State in which white citizens already seek for their children the privilege of co−education with colored youths, can not long retain its hostility to public schools in the late slave States is, as we have said, essential to their political and social well−being; and for the advancement of this end Berea College is now doing more than can be effected by any possible legislation, by any action of political parties, or by the combined influence of press, platform, and pulpit."

It is a matter of surprise that so noble and intelligent a State as Kentucky should be far behind other Southern States in its provision for the education of its emancipated citizens.

In South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana the law allows no distinction of race, or color, or previous condition. The Legislature of Georgia in 1870 voted an annual appropriation of $8,000 to Atlanta University; the State of Virginia voted a liberal allowance of public money to the Hampton Normal Agricultural Institute; and South Carolina has made a generous appropriation to Claflin University.

With this enlightened policy of other Southern States, it surprises us to find that in Kentucky the colored race have no share of the common−school fund, and are oppressed by peculiar laws. A colored schoolhouse is not allowed within a mile of a white school, nor in towns within six hundred feet. It is forbidden by law for a colored child to attend a white school or a white child a colored school.* President Fairchild says in defense of the co−educatory system of Berea: "We advocate it — 1. Because it is impossible to educate both races separately. In the rural districts it is impossible to maintain two sets of schools. In the cities it may be done, but in the country it can not. In hundreds of districts there are very few (from five to twenty−five) colored children. They must be admitted to the schools which white children attend, or be left without schools. In other districts the same is true of white children. 2. The separation fosters a spirit of contempt, and haughtiness, and domineering on the one side, and a sense of debasement and a spirit of sycophancy or surliness on the other, entirely inconsistent with the highest good of either. It is cruel and abusive to teach the colored children from the very beginning that they are only fit for servants of white people, and are not at all to be tolerated in the same schoolroom with white children. Such treatment will never make them self−respecting, patriotic, independent citizens."

It is impossible even to give a minute notice of all the principal universities or colleges that have been established for the freedmen. But Fiske University, in Nashville, Tennessee, having a history which has given to it a wide celebrity, we select that as a specimen of the rest.

From this institution went forth the small band of liberated slaves called the Jubilee Singers, who conceived the generous plan of endowing their institution by the exercise of their musical talent.

Their history is the romance of our period. Starting poor, simple, unknown, with the disadvantage of their color in their way, they first gained the ear and heart of the most refined circles in this country. Crossing the water, they were admitted to sing before the Queen of England and royal family, and treated with distinguished hospitality and kindness by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone. In Germany they were received with no less consideration by the Emperor and royal family. In Holland the crowned heads and royal personages were no less kind, graciously receiving the singers and openly declaring themselves their patrons. With such patronage their concerts in all these countries were a brilliant series of triumphs, and Jubilee Hall and Livingstone Hall, with their noble proportions, and fine architecture, will for ever be a monument of the success of this simple effort of emancipated slaves.

The catalogue of Fiske University for 1878 gives twenty−six in the college course, fifty−four in the preparatory department, twenty−five in the theological course, one hundred and fifty−three in the normal school course, and eleven in the higher normal.

The total attendance was three hundred and thirty−eight, of whom one hundred and eighty−one were boarders. Since 1868 regularly trained teachers have been going out from this institution. In 1877 one hundred and five teachers thus prepared were at work in the field of education. Fiske University has also sent out four missionaries

to the Mendi mission on the coast of Africa. A deep feeling for mission−work pervades the institution, and ennobles and enlarges the aims of its students, and doubtless others will follow in the steps of those who have so nobly volunteered.

It remains now to speak of those institutions which unite the higher culture of the mind with practical scientific knowledge.

Of these the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, at Hampton, Virginia, is a favorable specimen. This institution was founded ten years ago by the American Missionary Association, and has been aided by the Freedman's bureau and the Peabody Fund, and very largely by individual Christian benevolence. In 1872 the State of Virginia designated Hampton as trustee of that portion of the Agricultural Land Fund which was assigned to the colored people. The amount of $95,000 was invested in State bonds, on which full interest has been paid.

The object of Hampton is to raise up a class of intelligent, cultivated workingmen, to produce thoughtful, intelligent farmers, mechanics, and teachers.

The plan of the Hampton School was suggested by the educational system of the Sandwich Islands, introduced by American missionaries and built up chiefly by the labors of the Rev. Richard Armstrong, D. D., Minister of Public Instruction.

His son, General Armstrong, the Principal of Hampton, inherits and uses to the very best advantage the stores of his father's practical experience.

The following is a list of school industries:

The farm, with bone−grinding, grist−mill, soap−making, blacksmith's shop, butcher's shop, and milk−dairy.

The Engineer's Department, with knitting−machines, broomshop, shop for iron−work, rag−carpet weaving, and carpenter−shop.

Girls' Industrial Department, for making and mending garments, and learning to sew by hand and machine.

Household work, including washing, ironing, table duty, and cooking−lessons for the girls.

The details for work this year have been as follows:

Girls. — Housework, 98; industrial room, 52; knitting−machine, 21; laundry, 24; weaving rag−carpet, 1; cooking, 20; No work has yet been found for day scholars, 32.

Boys. — Farm, 91; painter, 1; carpenters, 5; broom−making, 2; steam−engine, 1; bone−mill, 2; shoemakers, 4; janitors, 8; knitting−room, 6; blacksmith, 1; office duty, 3; mail−carrier, 1; greenhouse, 1; waiters, 16; laundry, 5; general duty, 5; employed by teachers, 2; day−scholars on orderly duty, 33.

Students' earnings have been as follows:

1875−'76. 101 boys, $5,982.04; 59 girls, $1,647.93; total, $7,629.97.

1876−'77. 125 boys, $7,440.97; 73 girls, $2,139.56; total, $9,580.53.

1877−'78. 138 boys, $11,384.97; 87 girls, $3,046.04; total, $14,431.01.

Average earnings in 1875−'76, boys $59.23 each; girls, $27.92 each.

Average earnings in 1876−'77, boys, $59.23 each; girls, $29.00 each.

Average earnings in 1877−'78, boys, $82.50 each; girls, $35.00 each.

The problem of the school, industrially, is —

1. To make labor as instructive as possible.

2. To turn it to the best account.

By giving each student one and a half or two days of work each week, and four whole days for study (by having a detail of one fifty out each school day, and all or one half on Saturdays), his mental interests do not suffer materially; he is physically better off, is able to pay about one half — in some cases the whole — of his personal expenses, is better fitted to take care of himself, and be−comes more of a man.

Of the results of this school so far, General Armstrong thus speaks in his last report:

"To the question, 'What becomes of your graduates?' we answer: Not less than ninety per cent. have taught school. We are satisfied that eighty per cent. were teaching last winter, and that the large majority will devote themselves to the good of their people. Those who do not teach are generally working for themselves or others. I know of but few worthless ones. There seems to be no general tendency to relapse from the tone given to their lives at the school. I have observed in many a moral growth after graduation, the reaction of right life upon character. That some will degenerate there can be no doubt; but, after leaving here, the general movement is upward.

"The little army of Hampton's graduates is becoming a power. For the first time in the school's history they have, this year, an alumni meeting. Their union and mutual sympathy, and their relations with the school, are of great importance. To many, the school is their only home. It is the birthplace of their better life; and they give to it an affection and confidence that create an obligation on our part.

"This year the newspapers of the school reading−room have, after lying a week on the table, been distributed among graduates in every direction, also quantities of illustrated papers; many have been given by friends of the school for this purpose. They have received much benefit from the State 'Educational Journal' which is sent to them. Next year we intend to have a graduate department; making as complete a record of them as possible, corresponding with each one, supplying good reading matter, of which they are often destitute, thus keeping them in pleasant and close relations with us, and encouraging and cheering them in every possible way. By such moral support they will be stronger, better, safer. Thus will the result of our labor be preserved, and a guild of earnest, high−minded, united, and powerful workers be formed as a nucleus of civilization, a barrier to the mischievous element among their people, and, in connection with a similar class from other institutions, become a basis of hope for the race; they will be civilizers rather than mere pedagogues; the future leaders of their race, and occupy a place not yet taken."

The institution publishes a paper called "The Southern Workman," which has a large circulation and is a most valuable and efficient means of continuing its good influences over those who have left. Its practical essays on the subject of health, cleanliness, ventilation, drainage, and general hygiene, have been so valuable that a series of them called "Hampton Tracts" have been extensively circulated and recommended in Northern States.

The printing and press−work is entirely done in the institution, and furnishes one more useful trade for those who are employed in it.

A similar work to that of Hampton is being done at Claflin University, Orangeburg, South Carolina, and at Talladega College, Alabama, and at Tongaloo University, Mississippi. There is also the beginning of an agricultural department announced in connection with Atlanta University, Georgia, to which the Legislature of the State has made an appropriation of $8,000 per annum.

The last and most significant item in our review of the tableau of educational effort among the freedmen is the increasingly friendly attitude of most of the Southern States toward this enterprise.

We have purposely omitted to dwell on those exhibitions of bitterness and violence which often marked the commencement of these educational enterprises at the South. It is due to the intelligent Southerners to admit that such violence proceeded mostly from the uncultivated classes, and that everywhere through the South educated men have been prompt to feel the imperative need of culture for the enfranchised slaves.

In 1871 the Commissioners appointed by the State of Georgia attended the annual examination at Atlanta University. The report of this Committee, signed by ex−Governor J. E. Brown, thus speaks: "At every step of the examination we were impressed with the fallacy of the popular idea (which, in common with thousands of others, a majority of the undersigned have heretofore entertained) that the members of the African race are not capable of a high grade of intellectual culture. The rigid tests to which the classes in algebra and geometry, and in Latin and Greek, were subjected, unequivocally demonstrated that, under judicious training and with persevering study, there are many members of the African race who can attain a high grade of intellectual culture. They prove that they can master intricate problems in mathematics, and fully comprehend the construction of difficult passages in the classics.

"Many of the pupils exhibited a degree of mental culture which, considering the length of time their minds have been in training, would do credit to members of any race."

Dr. Cooke, President of Claflin University, writes us that both Governor Wade Hampton and Mayor H. S. Thomson, State Superintendent of Education in South Carolina, attended their late commencement and addressed words of encouragement to all interested in the advance of the institution. Two appropriations of $7,500 have been made to the institution since Governor Hampton took the chair.

General Armstrong, of Hampton, remarks on this subject:

"Our relations with the State of Virginia, as trustee of that part of the land fund devoted to the colored people, have been in all ways satisfactory. Interest has been promptly paid. Throughout the State the feeling is kindly and encouraging to good work for the negro race.

"During the past ten years there has been a progress in Southern sentiment, in respect to the negro, readily

apparent only to those who can look behind the front presented by politicians and periodicals. Thought, experience, and necessity have pushed out old ideas and pushed up new ones. The change has been, I believe, as great as was possible for human nature under the circumstances, and in time will be so regarded. Other lines than those of race are being drawn. Common sense and common interest are working against deeply seated notions and prejudices that will yield because weak in themselves, and because they do not pay."

The Hon. Robert M. Lusher, State Superintendent of Education in Louisiana, uses this noble language: "It is with the aid of education alone, finally, that patriots can hope to see the vexed question of the harmonious relation between the two races settled — with no humiliation to the higher, with no degradation to the humbler. This question is, indeed, one that trenches upon the imminent present. For good or evil, a race equal to the whites — at least in numbers — passing suddenly from a condition of slavery to a condition of freedom, continuing and needed to continue in its former home, must assert itself. It should be the duty — as it is clearly the interest — of the State to see that that race shall assert itself in knowledge — not in ignorance; in a loyal understanding of its obligations — not in a blind disregard of them; in an intelligent participation hereafter in the responsible duties of American citizenship. . . . If the next colored generations, then, are to consist of good citizens, not weak tools for designing politicians, they should be educated. If they are to be conservative American citizens, lending their aid alike to the progress of the State and to the advancement of the public, they should be educated. If they are to make common accord with the whites, only recognizing in the latter the superiority that lies in lineage and in noble memories, indissolubly connected with the history of the world's most exalted civilization; and if they are to work with these, with good heart and earnest endeavor, to a common patriotic end, they must be taught that their State has no preferences, but that, like a kindly mother, she gathers in her tender bosom all the children who owe their existence to her."

In the State where the author now has a home, Governor Drew, in his first message to the Legislature of Florida, uses this language in relation to the education of the freedmen: "Now that a very large constituent element of our population is released from bondage and intrusted with the power of the ballot, a system of free schools has become a means of self−preservation. To educate the colored race and fit them to exercise the privilege of voting intelligently — to perform all the sacred duties of freemen, to enjoy their liberty, to become wise and good citizens — imposes upon us a task to perform, a responsibility from which we can not escape. Then let us set about the work cheerfully."

The author can bear testimony, so far as personal observation goes, that the government of the State of Florida is administered in this spirit.

Before coming to the close of this article, one acknowledgment — one tribute of admiration — is here due to the agency of a noble man, who, though dead, has been living to a most glorious purpose in this work of Southern reorganization. The Peabody fund, amounting to millions of dollars, has been a constant factor in all the good accomplished. Its agent has administered this delicate and difficult trust with an energy, a wisdom, an impartiality, that lead us to feel that the Father of Lights must have imparted to him divine guidance. In all the reports we have examined we meet everywhere the traces of this noble charity, administered with such timely wisdom as to double the value of every sum contributed. America will long have reason to bless God for the bequest of Peabody, and for the administration of Dr. Sears.

Thus have we given a very imperfect summary of the lasting results which have followed a great educational enthusiasm — a great national reconstruction.

Is not this army of schools and colleges — this educational impulse pervading society — a better guarantee for the future than any ignoble party strife?

And if our national Government should grant to the impoverished Southern States the funds they ask to carry through a universal system of education, would it not be an investment which would yield the nation a thousand−fold in return?

Class prejudices can not be legislated away, but they can be educated away. This noble system of common schools, colleges, and industrial institutes now rising at the South, if re‘nforced by national grants, would in a few years regenerate society, and entirely prevent the possibility of such struggles as have lately dishonored the voting−places of the United States.

Education will bring quiet, refinement, respect for law, respect for the mutual rights of races; and America, where so many races meet and mingle, will be the true millennial ground, where the fatherhood of God is shown

in the brotherhood of man.

H. B. STOWE.