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Our Schools and Our Constitution.

History of Public Education in South Carolina—Our Public Schools Not the "Free Schools" of the Constitution--School Fees, Local Taxation, Normal Schools and High Schools Discussed.

An Address on the Public School System of South Carolina, Delivered at Anderson, Before the Anderson Educational Association, on 27th September, 1879, by W. C. Benet, Esq., of Abbeville.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE ASSOCIATION.]

Mr. President and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Anderson Educational Association: When, some two months ago, I addressed the Abbeville Teachers' Association on the subject of our public schools, I did not expect that the opinions I advanced would be received so pleasantly then and published so widely afterwards. It seemed to me that beyond the intelligent and indulgent audience who listened to me, my words would fall like seed by the hard-trodden wayside of educational discussion. It was, therefore, gratifying to me personally, and satisfactory and cheering to me as a citizen of South Carolina, to find that my address was to some extent instrumental in stirring up a lively and prolonged discussion on our public schools, in which the newspapers in all corners of the State took part. Still more gratifying to me was your invitation to come here and address you on the same important subject; a high compliment which I did not look for, but for which I thank you. I came at your call the more readily because, since the Abbeville meeting, the State press has revealed to me not only the weak points in my argument, but the strong points also; and I gladly embrace this opportunity to consider more at length those divisions of the subject which have received most attention and provoked most discussion.

THE SUBJECT

which I was asked to bring before you is not simply education—an inexhaustible topic if considered in its widest sense; nor even public education, which is education considered in its relation to the State; but it is the public school system of South Carolina. A consideration of this subject saves us the fruitless, though may be pleasant, task of reviewing the boundless expanse of education; or even of surveying the more limited though still wide-extended domain of public education; and it enables us to concentrate our powers of vision and our thoughts, as it were, with a focus, in a thorough examination and close inspection of our own educational field—our public school system. I did not come here to deliver an oration—the field I ask you to survey with me contains few flowers of rhetoric. I came here to talk, to talk plainly, practically, strongly, with clearness and simplicity. I am not a teacher; I can therefore advocate the teacher's cause without being charged with doing so *lucri causa*. I am not a politician, and therefore I need not busy myself to say only such things as may be agreeable to my hearers. I came here at your request to give you the result of some years' experience and much reflection in connection with our public schools; a subject of infinite importance to us all; a subject surrounded with great difficulties and giving rise to an endless diversity of opinions; a subject which with us in South Carolina is the vital question of the day. On this subject I have much more to say than can well be overtaken in a public address. I therefore throw myself on your indulgence in case I may trespass on your patience—which I am anxious not to do—and without further preliminary remarks I shall first address myself to a brief review of the history of

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

In this State from the earliest period of her colonial history, attempts, more or less successful, have been made to establish systems of public education more or less liberal, the first State-aided school having been founded in Charleston in 1710. We then read of State colleges being established about 1770 at Charleston, Winnsboro, Alexandria and Cambridge. Then in 1805 was founded the South Carolina College, with whose history and noble work we are all acquainted. Down to this date the efforts of the State in behalf of education had all been directed towards higher education, and the beneficent results were such as to justify the proud boast of the South Carolinians of the eighteenth century that throughout their Commonwealth high schools, grammar schools and colleges were offering a classical education to all their sons, and that in addition more students went to the British Universities from this State than from any other of the thirteen colonies.

THE "POOR SCHOOLS."

Poverty and population increase *pari passu*. At the beginning of this century the greatly increased population of this State included a numerous class of poor people who were unable to bear the entire burden of the education of their children. Therefore, in 1811 a State appropriation was made for the benefit of "poor scholars." The appropriation was small, but as the beneficiaries were comparatively few in number, (all being white children,) the class of poor whites really obtained more substantial aid then than is now obtained by them from our vast public school fund. For instance, the indigent white people in Abbeville County before the war obtained about $2,000 a year from the poor school fund; now the entire white population receive from the public school fund only about $7,000 a year. With some changes and improvements in 1838, this old free school (or rather free scholar) system was continued until the war. In thus aiding higher education (which is not remunerative nor self-sustaining), and also paying for the education of the indigent poor, South Carolina pursued a wise and enlightened policy, and fulfilled towards her white population her whole duty as a State in the matter of education.

THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR

was utterly subversive of the *ante bellum* system of education. All State aid and State-aided educational institutions were swept away as by a deluge. When the war was over, the people of South Carolina saw that all old things had passed away, and behold all things had become new. Among the new things the most striking was the enfranchisement of the colored people, by which the voting population of the State was more than doubled. Universal suffrage and universal education should go hand-in-hand. The Constitution which conferred the suffrage was bound to provide for the education of the voter. Pity it was that the myriad dusky hands which then for the first time fingered a ballot had not been required, first of all, to thumb a spelling-book and handle a pen. We have nothing to do now with the wisdom or the rashness of the policy. The fact remains that the colored voters were, with few exceptions, utterly illiterate. No provision for their education had been made while they were slaves; now that they were enfranchised freedmen, the duty was imperative of providing for at least their elementary instruction. If we did not consider seriously and sensibly the question, "What shall we do with *them?*"—left in deplorable ignorance and yet possessed of terrible power, they would soon force us to consider the startling question, "What will *they* do with *us?*" The "universal voter" is uncanny at his best; the ignorant "universal voter" is to be feared more than the pestilence. If there is to be a Constitutional Convention in this State, let it not meddle with the public school fund. To abolish the school tax would be blindness and madness.

OUR PRESENT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND ITS FUND

have a very brief history, to which I shall briefly refer:

1. In 1868, when the Constitution was adopted, it was made the duty of the General Assembly to make provision for a liberal and uniform system of free public schools. (Art. X, Sec. 3.)

2. In the same Article, Section 5, the General Assembly was instructed to levy an annual tax on all taxable property for the support of public schools.

3. By the same Section the poll tax was set aside as a permanent fund to be applied solely to educational purposes; and (General Statutes, Chap. XXXVIII, Sec. 8,) to be expended for school purposes in the school district from which it was collected.

4. The power to increase the school fund by local taxation was conferred on the inhabitants of the respective school districts, said tax not to exceed three dollars for every child of scholastic age (6 to 16 years) in the district. (Gen. Stat., Chap. XXXIX, Sec. 15, 4th.)

5. By Joint Resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives, approved March 26, 1875, a constitutional amendment was passed amending Article X, Sec. 5, and empowering County Commissioners to levy an annual tax of not less than two mills on the dollar upon all taxable property in their respective counties for the support of public schools. This amendment was ratified by the votes of the people at the general election in 1876. The annual appropriations were thereby suspended; and

6. By an Act, approved June 8, 1877, to amend Sec. 15, Chap. XXXIX, Gen. Stat., the power to levy a local tax was wisely revoked.

We have therefore now no annual State appropriation and no school district local taxation; and it is hoped that future General Assemblies will be on their guard against reviving either. The abuses attendant on the power to levy a local tax caused it to be revoked in 1877. It is strange that in 1879 we should find in various parts of the State the desire expressed that it be again put in force. It is strange that part of the unfinished business of our Legislature last session is a Bill, which was reported on favorably, providing for the revival of the local tax power in cities, towns and incorporated villages. Let our Representatives beware of this wolf in sheep's clothing.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL FUND

is derived from two sources—the two mill tax and the poll tax. As a permanent fund it will keep pace with the progress of the Commonwealth, increasing in amount simultaneously with the increase in the value of taxable property and the increase of our population. At present it amounts to nearly $340,000, of which the two mill tax contributes about $270,000, and the poll tax the rest—a large part of the poll tax not being collected. When we add to this vast fund the $55,000 raised in Charleston by the local tax system, which has been established in that city for many years, we find that the public school fund of South Carolina amounts annually to nearly $400,000—that is, nearly fifty cents a year for every man, woman and child, white and black, in this State. South Carolina has certainly no reason for self-depreciating in this regard. As a State she contributes to public education a vast deal more than any other State in the Union.

Such is in brief a history of public education in South Carolina; such and so great is the provision made for the maintenance of our present system. I need not weary you by detailed explanation of the official machinery to whose management the system is confided—the State Superintendent with his State Board, the County School Commissioners with their County Boards, the School Districts with their Boards of Trustees. Nor in proceeding to discuss our school system, as it now stands, need I take time to demonstrate

CERTAIN ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES

upon which we are well enough agreed, and which we may take for granted. I shall only state these and then pass on to certain others which still are more or less in dispute:

1. It is an established principle with us that the *education of the people* is a matter which is not to be left wholly to *private effort* and sense of *parental duty*, but that it is to a certain extent *the duty of the State*. Some may doubt the validity of this maxim, but the logic of events at least is against them, and it is now too late in South Carolina to argue the point. The duty of the State to care for and provide in part for the education of all her children is part of our organic law, deeply and enduringly imbedded in our Constitution; and ample provision has been made by the last constitutional amendment for the performance of the whole duty of the State in this regard.

2. It is also an established principle with us, and is in fact expressed emphatically in the Constitution, that the State has only to do with the *secular* and not with the religious education of her children. We are thus relieved in South Carolina of the rancorous religious difficulty, and the *odium theologicum* does not intrude itself into the discussion of our public school system.

These principles being granted, let us now consider the question,

HAS SOUTH CAROLINA DONE HER WHOLE DUTY

in this matter of public education? She certainly has furnished money enough in her public school fund; she has established by constitutional taxation a permanent and increasing fund greater in proportion to her population—much greater in proportion to her taxpaying population—than has been provided for public education by any other State in the Union. For each child actually attending the public schools she has given $3.25 a year, and for each child of scholastic age, $1.65. Massachusetts contributes only 23 cents 4 mills *per capita*. The State school tax of South Carolina is two mills on the dollar, exclusive of the poll tax; that of New York is only three-fourths of a mill on the dollar. As a State tax our school fund is the most liberal provision made for public schools in the United States. It supplies too much money, indeed, to be distributed indiscriminately and almost unconditionally. If disbursed under proper regulations and restrictions, it is amply sufficient for the support of a perfect system of public schools. But to supply money is not the be-all and the end-all of the State's duty. To furnish a fund only is to furnish locomotives with abundant water and fuel, but without engineers, and, indeed, without a railroad track to run on. Besides supplying money, it is the duty of the State

FIRST, TO FURNISH GOOD TEACHERS.

Speaking generally, good teachers are neither born nor do they grow; they have to be *made*. They are made only when there is a demand for them; the multiplicity of bad teachers is owing to there being small demand for good ones. The complaint about bad teachers is a very old one. Roger Ascham, the tutor of Queen Elizabeth, complained in his *Schoolmaster* that men were more careful in choosing a groom for their horses than a teacher for their sons. To-day, one of the most serious obstacles in the way of our school system is the employment of incompetent teachers. This is not peculiar to South Carolina. The common school teachers of the Northern States, outside of cities and towns, are generally of a low standard. In many places they are as bad as our worst. I read that in a French district of Canada a petition from school-teachers was signed by some of them with their cross-mark. We should have good teachers here, and by proper means we can have them. I have the authority of a distinguished English educator for saying that America furnishes the best material in the world for the making of good teachers. One of the worst effects of the present disbursement of the school fund is the discouragement it gives to good teachers, whereby the best are driven from the field. The unconditional distribution of the fund encourages the unnecessary multiplication of schools, which leads to the unnecessary multiplication of teachers. This causes the lowering of the teacher's pay and a consequent lowering of the teacher's standard, for the teacher's standard rises and falls with his salary. But the great desideratum in the training of teachers is the

NORMAL SCHOOL.

Without a Normal Training College no public school system is complete or can succeed; and our public schools, with their army of over three thousand teachers, will never be able to do work worth the money expended upon them until each teacher shall have either a Normal School certificate or a University diploma. The Constitution directs the establishment of Normal Schools (Art. X. Sec. 6,) "within five years after the adoption of the Constitution." There should be one, perhaps two, Normal Schools for each race, situated conveniently in Charleston, Columbia and some up-country town of sufficient population to supply four or five hundred children for the experimental school attached. The Normal Shools could be established and maintained without any additional tax, and our General Assembly should at once attend to this matter.

It is the duty of the State,

SECOND, TO ESTABLISH HIGH SCHOOLS.

While diffusing elementary instruction—the three R's—reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic—what I have called the knife, fork and spoon of education—it is the duty of the State to encourage and foster higher education. At present higher education is practically discouraged, which, especially to the poor man, is a great injustice. Under the old "free scholar" system, the poorest boy in South Carolina could enjoy the blessings of a High School and University curriculum; and some of the illustrious men of this State were such "poor scholars." Under the present system, the poor man's son is limited to the commonest and coarsest educational fare, and even the better classes are discouraged in their efforts to give their sons a good education. The State should establish and partly maintain one or two High Schools or Graded Schools in every county, in which schools the pupils might go beyond the narrow bounds of elementary instruction. Such High Schools could be supported without additional tax.

It is the duty of the State,

THIRD, TO TEST THE QUALITY OF THE WORK

done in her public schools—to see that she gets the worth of her money. It is a striking fact that there is not one thing to show the value of the education given in the public schools—not a thing in the State Superintendent's annual reports, nor in the reports of School Commissioners, nor in the monthly reports of teachers. With an unbusiness-like blindness that is astonishing, the State lavishly pays out her money for education and cannot tell nor find out what she is getting in return for it. She knows nothing either of the quality or the quantity of instruction given. No doubt she is furnished with statistical tables showing the number, sex and color of the school-children, the average daily attendance, the number studying each subject, the certificate, color and sex of the teachers, and the length of the school session. But all that is only interesting information; it affords no test by which the work done in the schools can be valued. To remedy this glaring defect a system of inspection is necessary. The School Commissioners have visitatorial power, but their general incompetence makes their visits and examinations fruitless of good. Our system needs six or eight

STATE SCHOOL INSPECTORS,

a set of well-qualified men, acting independently of the teachers, whose duty it should be to visit all the public schools once a year, and subject the pupils in each to careful examinations on certain subjects, the teacher's pay being greater or less according to the number of pupils that might pass successfully. In this way the work would be done by one set of men—the teacher; and its value placed upon it by another set of men—the Inspectors. Thus also the public money would be wisely expended, not according to the number of pupils simply, nor their age, nor studies, nor according to the teacher's certificate, nor the length of session, but chiefly by the *results* obtained. *Payment by results* would act as a most salutary stimulus on the teacher; and parents would soon discover that in this way the best teacher would be the cheapest to them. No solid objection can be urged against the establishment of a system of inspection. It would cost but little, and it would powerfully contribute to obviate the defects and to add to the value and effectiveness of our public school system.

It is the duty of the State,

FOURTH, TO MAKE THE PUBLIC FUND SUPPLEMENTAL

and obtainable only on certain wise conditions; to exercise a wholesome influence on local and private energy by making the State aid conditional; to act as a central power, controlling and encouraging local enterprise; to make the public fund a premium or local energy. It is the duty of the State *to educate the parent to educate his child*. This moral education will be supplied by making the public fund act as a vivifying stimulus for a central source—a moral as well as a financial aid. At present the public fund, as a moral agent, is very hurtful by destroying the sense of parental responsibility. It should not be distributed unconditionally. It should be conditional, at least, as school fees, or, as some seem to prefer, as local taxation.

It should be borne in mind that the prime object of the State in giving pecuniary aid to public education is not to relieve the parents entirely of the responsibility of paying for their children's education, nor to render the school master entirely independent on payment by the parents, nor even to furnish the school-master with the greater part of his subsistence. The prime object is to encourage and help public education by supplying money, which shall serve as a species of retaining fee or premium, so as to secure the constant services of a teacher able to instruct the young, and influenced by the strongest motives to perfect himself in his business, and to attract to his school the greatest number of scholars.

THE PERFECT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

is not the one planned by Plato, by which children were to be taken in charge by the State away entirely from parental control, and in which a man could not tell his own father or mother; nor is it the Prussian bureaucratic plan, a central department controlling and directing all, which is so destructive of individuality; nor is it the common local plan by which money and nothing else is furnished by the government. The perfect system is a combination of the local and the governmental—it has an energetic local authority to get the work of teaching done, and a watchful governmental authority to superintend the work and test its quality. The parents on the one hand and the State government on the other pay their proportionate share of the expense and receive a good return for their money—the parents receive for their money the education of their children, the government receives proof that the education is good. The unconditional distribution of the school fund is demoralizing to the parents and unsatisfactory to the government.

But, say some, granting that it is the duty of the State (1) to establish Normal Schools and (2) County High Schools, and (3) to appoint State School Inspectors, and (4) to make the school fund supplemental, is the way clear and open for the performance of those duties? Where is the money to come from for the first three? and is not the Coastution in the way of the fourth? This question brings me to discuss

THE CONSTITUTION IN ITS RELATION TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

It is not my desire to "drive an omnibus through an Act of Parliament," nor, following a historical example, to "camp outside the Constitution." It is my desire, and my honest endeavor shall be, to correct what I believe to be misinterpretations of our Constitution, and the consequent mistakes. In what I shall say on this head I shall argue honestly from the *ipissima verba* of the Constitution. It is generally supposed that our public schools are free schools. I believe that the words of our Constitution justify me in saying that

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE NOT FREE SCHOOLS.

This will seem to many to be a bold statement, but I hope to show that a much bolder man than I am is the man who will maintain that the schools are free in the face of the consequences that flow from that understanding of the Constitution.

I find in Art. X, Sec. 3, that "the General Assembly shall, as soon as practicable, after the adoption of this Constitution, provide for a liberal and uniform system of free public schools throughout the State. * * There shall be kept open at least *six months* in each year one or more schools in each school district."

In Section 4 we read that "it shall be the duty of the General Assembly to provide for the *compulsory attendance*, at either public or private schools, of all children between the ages of six and sixteen years, not physically or mentally disabled, for a term equivalent to *twenty-four months* at least: *provided*, that no law to that effect shall be passed until a system of public schools has been thoroughly and completely organized, and facilities afforded to all the inhabitants of the State for the *free* education of their children."

These are the words of the Constitution referring to our public school system. What do they mean? It is quite plain that the framers of the Constitution intended to effect the organization of a *free* public school system; it is also equally plain that they proposed to make attendance at the free schools *compulsory*; and also to keep these schools open at least *six months* in each year. A rigid and fair interpretation of the Constitution shows that these three characteristics go together, (1) when the schools are *free*, (2) attendance at them shall be *compulsory*, and (3) their minimum session shall be six months. These three conditions stand or fall together. By no law of interpretation can we be justified in taking one and neglecting the other two. We cannot hold to the one and despise the others. If the "liberal and uniform system of *free* public schools" contemplated in the Constitution has been "provided for," why are not these schools "kept open at least six months in each year"? and why has not the General Assembly "provided for the compulsory attendance, at either public or private schools, of all children between the ages of six and sixteen years"? Is it not because "facilities" have not yet been "afforded to all the inhabitants of the State for the *free* education of their children"? The average public school session in this State is three months; attendance at the public schools is not compulsory; is it not a misconstruction of the Constitution to claim that the public schools are *free?* The framers of our Constitution borrowed their idea of an educational system from the Northern States, and there *free* education and *compulsory* attendance and minimum sessions of six months are the law—a law not always operative, however.

FREE EDUCATION AND COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE

are correlatives; they go hand-in-hand, and are logically inseparable. This is a maxim too often forgotten. What justifies the interference of the State in the education of the people? A due regard to the security of society by the elevation of the masses. What plea does the State make in levying taxes for public education? The plea of self-defence. If the public schools are *free*, what guaranty do the people give the State that the interests of society will be secure and that the State will be protected by the intelligence of the people? The guaranty that all the children shall attend the public schools. It is a *reductio ad absurdum* to say that the schools are *free*, if also the scholars are *free* to stay away or attend as they please. It is a *reductio ad absurdum* to say that A is to be taxed for the education of the children of B, and yet that B is not to be compelled to have his children educated. Free schools are no guaranty of public education any more than free water is a guaranty of public cleanliness. We may build free schools sufficient and convenient to accommodate all the children in the State, but unless we go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in and be instructed, we have no guaranty that our people will be educated.

Not only is compulsory attendance the logical correlative of free education; it is also the obvious

RIGHT OF THE TAXPAYER.

B's right to have his children educated at the expense of A can only co-exist with A's right to demand that B's children be educated. Reciprocal duties beget reciprocal rights. A free school system based on any other theory is an anomaly. In no other country in the world do we find free education without compulsory attendance. I have referred to the Northern States. There we see free school systems and we find the law trying to enforce attendance of the children by means of truant officers and by penalty of fines. We find also there (e. g., in Massachusetts and Connecticut) that State help is given on this among other conditions that the public schools be kept open at least six months.

Are we, then, willing to submit to a law enforcing attendance at school on all children and youths and maidens between six and sixteen years of age? I, for one, would oppose it to the utmost, and I do not think our people would pass their shoulder under such a burden, and most likely those that are loudest in claiming *free* education would be loudest in denouncing *compulsory attendance*. Yet, if we insist on it that our schools are free, we must make up our minds to have compulsory attendance insisted on also and rightly. And they that urge that by our Constitution the public schools are free, must not and cannot subtly shirk from accepting the logical sequences of that freeness—the compulsory attendance, which is also in our Constitution.

I have tried to show that our public schools are not, even in the light of the Constitution, free schools. They are public schools in the sense of being aided by the public exchequer. For it is the duty of the State to encourage and help the education of the people—not to pay for it entirely, but to defray some of the expense and assume some of the control and supervision. To such as still have constitutional objection to this understanding of our system, I would say that the Constitution itself refers to public schools "supported in whole or *in part* by the public funds." I am persuaded, therefore, that the Constitution offers no formidable obstacle to the method I suggest, namely, that the public school fund should be made simply a supplemental fund, to be obtained

ON CERTAIN CONDITIONS.

What the conditions should be is too much a matter of detail to detain us now. Speaking generally they should be,

1. That the school session shall be at least nine months long.

2. That since the school fund can pay one-third of the expense, the patrons shall pay the other two-thirds. (The school fund already pays for a three months' session.)

3. That the teacher shall hold a certificate from a Normal School, or its equivalent.

And if any fears exist that the people would rather do without schools than pay anything for them, we might borrow from Massachusetts, our great educational exemplar, her system of penalties by which a community that neglects to open a school is subjected to a heavy fine.

NO OBSTACLES.

But does the Constitution offer no obstacles to the maintenance of State Normal School, County High Schools and State School Inspectors out of the public School Fund? Let us see.

As to the two mill tax: By the direction of the constitutional amendment "the school tax shall be distributed among the several school districts of the counties in proportion to the respective number of pupils attending the public schools.—This does not mean that the money shall be spent, exhausted in these "respective school districts," else the school law is at fault when it directs that the salaries of the County School Commissioners shall be paid "ratably *out of the funds* apportioned to the several school districts." (School Law, Sec. 28.)

As to the poll tax: It is to be "applied solely to educational purposes," just as the two mill tax is levied for "the support of public schools." The support of county high schools, of State normal schools, of State School Inspectors—would not that be an "educational purpose?" would not that be to support public schools? And if we can pay County School Commissioners "ratably out of the funds apportioned to the several school districts," we can in the same way appropriate "ratably" sufficient to pay for high schools, normal schools and Inspectors. Our enormous fund of $400,000 might well spare enough for these purposes and still leave enough for the common schools. Massachusetts spends *one-half* of her State school fund on high schools and normal schools, while the other moiety is attainable only on condition of raising about twenty-five times as much.

HOW IS THE MONEY TO BE RAISED?

It is now time to discuss the best mode of raising the necessary amount of money which, with the public fund as a supplement, will be sufficient to pay our teachers adequate salaries, and to keep the schools open at least nine months in the year. There are three modes:

1. By private voluntary subscriptions.
2. By local taxation.
3. By school fee-bills.

The first, the voluntary subscription plan—according to which the patrons of schools contribute to the expenses of the school according to their several ability—is neither a sure nor a safe one; and with this I dismiss it as unworthy of our consideration or of recognition by the State.

LOCAL TAXATION.

The second—the local taxation plan—is the one which is best known and has been pursued in most of the Northern States for many years—was adopted, indeed, some years ago in this State, but because of the abuses to which it led was rejected in 1877. It behooves us to consider this local taxation plan with earnestness, care and honesty, for although one of the first acts of our reformed Legislature was to repeal the statute which empowered school districts to increase the school fund by local taxation, I notice with regret the gradual growth in various parts of the State of a sentiment in favor of restoring local taxation. The same circumstances which caused its repeal in 1877 still exist, and to the abuses which loudly called for its repeal then it still is liable. It is highly proper for us, therefore, to get what light we can on this subject before the next session of our Legislature, when it will undoubtedly be brought up for action. I ask you to consider with me some

OBJECTIONS TO LOCAL TAXATION.

1. It is unjust to the tax-payers of this State, who, in proportion to our population, are fewer in numbers than in any Northern State; who already are surely sufficiently tax-burdened, and who already contribute $350,000 to public education. It is unjust also to that numerous class of our fellow-citizens who, in addition to their school tax, have already paid for their own children's education, to tax and compel them now to pay for the education of their neighbors' children.

2. It is demoralizing to the people in removing from the fathers the responsibility of caring for and paying for the education of their children. In this State where mendicants and tramps are almost unknown, and where the laboring class is always able to find employment, a healthy public opinion would compel a man to send his children to school and pay moderate fees for them; especially as the State has already contributed so liberally to the expense, and it is ready to help him to bear the burden.

3. The power to levy a local tax is liable to many and great abuses, which I need not enumerate. The consequences of the exercise of this power a few years ago in this State are still remembered by our people.

4. Local taxation is not suited to an agricultural State like this, where we have few large towns, but where the vast majority of our people live in small towns, hamlets and isolated homesteads. It is well adapted to Charleston, but Charleston is in this no criterion for the rest of the State, for this reason: the rule in local taxation is, *where the tax is largest in its rate per child it is smallest in its rate per dollar*. The child is paid for best where the dollar is taxed least. That is, the burden of local taxation is lightest where population is densest. This is no theory; this is a fact which figures prove. For instance, the city of Boston with its light local tax of 1.02 mills on the dollar contributes for the education of its children an average of $16 *per capita*. In rural Massachusetts, on the contrary, where there is a heavy local tax of 2.78 mills on the dollar, this raises only $6 *per capita*. A similar disproportion is found everywhere else. So glaring is the inequality that in New York State, while the cities and towns support their schools by local taxation, the school-fee system obtains exclusively in the rural districts. Before asking our Legislature to pass a local taxation law, let us ask ourselves if we are willing to impose on our own shoulders a burden which we are unable to bear.

THE COST OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

throughout the United States is about $9 per school-child; e. g., $9 in St. Louis, $15 in Baltimore, $16 in Boston, $9 in Charleston—not to speak of the $36 *per capita* among the Cherokee Indians.

Now, our two mill tax, *plus* our poll tax, yields only $3.25 for each child actually attending school, or $1.65 for each child of six to sixteen years. As we cannot expect to have public education at a cheaper rate than in the economical North, we must be ready to pay $9 *per capita*: e. g., we must furnish $5.75 additional for each child actually attending school. If this is to be raised by local taxation, a local levy of four or five mills would have to be made. This added to the existing two mill tax would make our school tax not less than six or seven mills on the dollar. Nor is this all. When *compulsory attendance* is insisted on, as it will be and ought to be if by local taxation the public schools shall be made absolutely *free*, then the increased attendance will require an increased fund; and the $1.65 already furnished to educate every child in the State will have to be increased to $9. To do this our school tax will have to be raised to nine or ten mills on the dollar. Surely our people will not ask that so grievous a burden be placed on their shoulders; and it is the duty of those that are in favor of local taxation to count the cost before they pray for its adoption.

Let us now consider what I believe to be

THE BEST MODE—THE FEE-BILL SYSTEM.

By a system of school fees, tuition fees, or rate-bills, as they are variously called, money is paid by the parent directly to the teacher or school manager; i. e., those pay directly who are directly benefited. The school fees may be made payable monthly, quarterly, or for the session. The following are a few of the advantages of this system:

1. It is fair and just to all, to rich and poor alike. It enables the poor man to get State aid from the public fund and at the same time to help himself. He is thus prevented from becoming an educational pauper.

2. It encourages in the people a livelier and healthier interest in education. People do not value highly what they get for nothing. The man who pays five or six dollars a year for his child's education takes a higher and better view of education than does the man who whose child is educated wholly at the public expense. A popular sentiment in favor of education and a popular determination to pay for education, are a nobler product of a public school system than the mere ability to read and write.

3. It prevents the unnecessary multiplication of schools, which is one of the many evils of an absolutely free system. When people pay school fees they discover that to have fewer schools, and these more numerously attended reduces the school fee. When they pay nothing except in the interest form of taxation, there is a constant clamor for additional schools, until in many districts we see three or four times too many schools—with the unavoidable result of lowering the teacher's standard and pay, and of shortening the school session.

4. It elevates the standard of the teacher. People who pay fees will see to it that they employ a teacher who will give them the worth of their money. At present the public fund seems to be regarded by many as a pension fund to be administered not so much for the education of the children as for the benefit and relief of those who, whether competent or not, are fortunate enough to get employment in the public schools. Establish a school fee system and much more care will be taken by both school trustees and parents in the employment of teachers. Favoritism, nepotism and misplaced compassion will then have no room, for there is no affection in business.

5. A school fee system is the cheapest in the end, as it naturally discourages any waste of money. Only that work is paid for which is done. It is not so easy to be extravagant with private money as with public funds. A facile and lavish generosity is more closely associated with the public purse than with the private purse.

6. It is preferable to local taxation because it renders unnecessary the enforcement of a compulsory attendance law, which is the attendant and concomitant of a local tax law. It is wiser and better to pay out some of our private money than to give up some of our personal liberty.

IS IT PRACTICABLE?

Many other recommendations suggest themselves which I need not enumerate. I am persuaded the school fee system is the one best suited to our State and to our agricultural population. Some of my critics have argued strongly, though kindly, against this method. The Winnsboro *News and Herald* commends it, but says it is "not practicable," and, therefore, prefers local taxation. I state no mere hypothesis when I say it is practicable. Take plan of supporting schools partly by public fund and partly by school fees is in successful operation now in many parts of our State. In my town of Abbeville both the white and colored schools are conducted on this plan. They are kept open ten months, and the school fees are paid. In Abbeville County there are six or seven colored schools voluntarily supported by school fees for five or six months after the public money is exhausted.

The Charleston *News and Courier* says that my preference for school fees is "an abstact question of superiority," and that the popular vote would be for local taxation. I hope I have shown that it is a very concrete matter affecting very seriously the popular pocket, which the popular vote may be trusted to protect. This certainly is a very serious and by no means an abstact question. Are we ready to be taxed heavily enough to pay $9 or $10 a year for every child in the State?

I am glad to find that my suggestion to

LIMIT THE SCHOLASTIC AGE

from 6–16 to 8–14 years has been so favorably received and heartily advocated by the press. This, I conceive, would be a great and manifest improvement, letting loose fully one-third of the public money, and there increasing largely the State contribution *per capita*.

If time permitted I should discuss other important subdivisions of my subject, but I can only briefly refer to one or two and then close this address.

If we ever shall have a

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

in South Carolina, and if school matters are to be discussed and adjusted therein, it would be a wise policy to set our public school system entirely free from the Constitution in all but the levying of the school tax. The system would work better and be more elastic if placed under the control of the General Assembly. The Constitution should create the public school system and provide money for its support, but it should leave all the details of its working to the General Assembly. It would also be a wise policy in a Constitutional Convention to force the office of State Superintendent of Education and County School Commissioners from the injurious influences of popular elections. Men should be appointed and not elected to such offices, for obvious reasons.

The last thing I shall advert to is the miserable

HAND-TO-MOUTH EXISTENCE

which our public schools and their teachers are having at the present time, because the work of the school is done before the school tax is collected. We are just one year behind the taxes. The result is, that poor teachers cannot get their pay certificates cashed at the County Treasury, and they have to submit to the usurious shaving process, whereby their poor pay is made still poorer. Let the public consider this question: Would it not be well to stop our public schools for one year, so as to get ahead of the school tax? I see no other way out of this great trouble, and no other salvation for the teachers.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, my long address is ended. I thank you for the close attention with which you have listened to me—an attention owing more to your indulgent patience than to my power to interest and entertain you. I have tried to discuss our public school system and its fund in a practical manner, and with the light of our own experience and the experience of the Northern States, where exist systems somewhat similar. It is good for us at this time to study our own and other school systems. Ours is not yet thoroughly organized. We must, therefore, try to insure it against failure by making it not only as good as but better than the other systems. Defects in the Massachusetts system are warnings to South Carolina, and advantages in the New York system are examples for our imitation. The coat that fits Connecticut may be too tight for South Carolina. We have the raw material to make our coat from and shape it as we please. South Carolina is passing through a transit period in education as in many other respects. Of the many sad losses caused by the war, among the saddest is the loss of those educational traditions for which this State was distinguished. It is ours to try to restore her to her former high place among the intelligent and educated Commonwealths of the world. We can do so, in spite of many difficulties, with a good public school system. We can do so if we use our enormous school fund so as to diffuse elementary instruction and elevate the masses, and also to encourage higher education, even the highest, and give the poor man's son the chance to acquire a complete education. We can do so if, while spreading the genial warmth of rudimentary instruction, we are careful to keep alive the lamp of higher learning. We need not be discouraged if in our short life we shall not see the work of our hands completed nor our whole desire fulfilled. Good, solid work is always slow. It may not be ours to build the beautiful temple of knowledge which is one day to rise in South Carolina. Concerning the Temple at Jerusalem, it was said unto David: "Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war and hast shed blood." But it was permitted to him to give to Solomon, his son, "the pattern." It may be that this generation of ours likewise is forbidden to build the temple of knowledge. But it is permitted us too to give to our sons the pattern. It is in our power, it is our duty, it is our high privilege, to lay deep, broad and enduring the sure foundation, and to collect and prepare the material for building the temple that is to be.

Mrs. Spriggle.

Not a week later Mrs. Spriggle presented herself again at Briarely. The black dress had suffered visibly from contact with muddy roads on the way. The black sun bonnet was limber and rustier than ever. The wearer dropped into a chair, and covered her face abjectedly on her knees.

"Recon ye done heered 'bout my gal bein' married," she said, without raising her eyes from the floor.

"Yes, I was much surprised to hear it," the mistress replied. "She must be very young."

"Yes, she is tol'able young, is she—go-in' on fifteen. But low, I was married at thirteen—I was so."

She looked up quickly, but catching an expression of disapproval on the mistress's face, she cast her eyes again upon the floor.

"The wust on it is," continued she, "he ain't got a cent, nor he can't make one nuther."

"Why did you let your daughter take him then?"

"Well, he come a-dawdlin' round sis, and he'd allus a powder-horn a-hang-in', on to him, so I just 'lowed he'd a gun, and could keep sis in coons and 'possums. She's a master-hand at fresh meat, in my gal! He scraped up two dollars somewhar to get the license with an' to pay the preacher, but I dout reckon he'll ever arn any more."

"Not earn any more!" cries the mistress incredulously. "What is the matter that he can't work and support your daughter properly?"

Mrs. Spriggle pushed back her bonnet and crossed her knees before she answered. Then she shook her head mournfully.

"I never found out," she said "till they was done married as how he'd nary gun at all—nothin' but a powder-horn. "And," with a gesture of disgust, "he's the powerfullest no account critter ye ever did see."

"You must feel badly to let your daughter go away with such a man."

"Oh law, she ain't gone! Did ye think he had ary house to put her in? Why don't you know? They's a-livin' to home with me."

This amazing piece of intelligence nearly took away the mistress' breath. Before she could reply, Mrs. Spriggle continued:

"What's did's did. 'Tain't no use fussin', I reckon."

"But how could you let her marry him without knowing more about him than you did?"

"Well, it's flyin' in the face o' Providence not to take up with a husband when he comes along." She glanced up appealingly as she spoke. "Gals can't get a good husband every day—they can't so!"

"But," said the mistress "it seems he is not a good husband."

Mrs. Spriggle's face, which had brightened slightly, took on a gloomie hue, and she pulled the black bonnet down over it.

"That's so," she assented tearfully. "He's wuss than nary husband. That's so, I do say. But," as she rose to go, "mebbe he can ketch rabbits, if he knowed how to make a trap, now! I must be gettin' along."—*December Atlantic.*

The Blue Ridge Railroad.

This great enterprise, the line of which was indicated in his day by Mr. Calhoun, and the work on which was begun nearly twenty years ago, has been suffered to lie dormant for several years. The little work done on it by the Radical party after the war was more of a speculation than an honest desire to complete the road and benefit the State. The great importance of the road has been lost sight of in the bad management of the party in power and the line of connection with the West marked out by nature seems about to be abandoned. Shall our people permit this without any effort to complete the road? Shall this line be superseded by other and more distant routes, and our State be insulted by roads bording her Western frontier and carrying trade and travel into Georgia and North Carolina. We hope not. This road should be completed as a convenience and as a necessary stimulant to the development of our State. We have always contended that its completion was a certainty, marked out by nature and demanded by our interests, but all must admit that the longer it is delayed the more injury we sustain. We can conceive of no more important matter demanding the attention of our present Legislature than the completion of this road. It may be we are unable to appropriate money at this time to this end, but cannot some scheme be devised, whereby a private corporation would take the work and carry it on? We think if the Legislature would pass an act donating the interest of the State, if any, in the road to any company who would undertake its completion, and further, would donate to such company three hundred or more convicts without wages for a proper length of time, the company to feed, clothen and guard them, that some one in a year would, with the work done, undertake the completion of the road. This would cost the State nothing, for we believe there are now about seven hundred convicts on the penitentiary rolls, and many of them are farmed out at nominal wages. If crime continues, in five years we will have fifteen hundred idling away their time, while this great enterprise is neglected. If no company will undertake the job then the State could carry it on at little expense with convict labor and thus reap the great benefits likely to flow from it.

Would the road, in a p