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DO THE SCHOOLS' PRODUCTS PROPERLY FUNCTION?

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Before the Schools Demand Greatly Increased Appropriations Let Them Not Attempt to "Sell Themselves to the People Again," But Let Them Convince the People That They are Turning Out Salable, or Properly Functioning, Products.

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As indicated in an article in a recent issue of the State's Voice, we were particularly impressed with the fitness of the new State superintendent of schools after talking with Rev. W. V. Tarlton, pastor of the Rich Square Baptist church, who for a number of years was a teacher under Supt. Erwin in Rutherford county. We had not met Mr. Erwin at the time, but had not only the pleasure of meeting him last Saturday but of hearing him address the district association of teachers in session at Fayetteville.

Mr. Erwin is a pleasant gentleman, an attractive speaker, and a fine personality from every standpoint. His address, till the very last section, was to the point and its sentiments heartily approved by this writer. But Mr. Erwin, whose life has been devoted to school work, is apparently as yet an unsafe interpreter of economic conditions.

Fallacious Arguments Hurt.

There is plenty of argument for an adequate support of the public school system without lugging in any fallacious, not to say false, support for a liberal appropriation by the General Assembly. In the first place, Mr. Erwin assumed that North Carolina enjoyed a healthy prosperity during the twenties, and in the second place he attributed that really fictional prosperity to the State's liberal appropriations to the schools. He quoted the fallacious statement that the State's wealth increased from a billion, or something like that, to five or six billions during the spending era. In congratulating him upon the tenor of the address in the main, we could not refrain from telling him that an increase in prices, or valuations, of existing wealth was an altogether different thing from an increase in wealth. We quoted our statement so often made while the people of North Carolina were under the hallucination that the State was rich, namely, that 'there is no more land than when I was a boy, and that then the land was covered with timber but now with mortgages; that there are not as many horses, mules, cattle, hogs, sheep, goats, as much cotton and corn, as in other days, but more automobiles, all of which latter would be upon the junk heap in five years.' More and better factories, better store buildings and homes, were the two chief instances of actually increased wealth, including power plants. Yet very much of the capital invested in factories and power plants was owned by extra-state parties, while too many of the homes were mortgaged to extra-state interests, as were tens of thousands of the farms.

The spending spree for schools, along with that for roads, automobiles and every other conceivable object of desire, served only to help bring the people of the State to the very verge of economic destruction. Indeed, Mr. Erwin goes further than the hoodoo-ed spend-thrifts of the era went, who claimed that the spending of millions for education would make the State rich through the superior wisdom and efforts of the product of the schools. He claims that the very spending of the money was an enriching process, or did so claim, though it is to be hoped that he will never do it again. Even the more rational claims of the spenders seem to show little indication of fulfillment—the products of the schools since 1920 being far from having set anybody's river afire with the spirit of enterprise and achievement—but, alas, how booze and gasoline have blazed! But that is unfair to the exceptional individuals who have already proved most capable in almost every line of endeavor, though the number of those exceptions would hardly tally up to the number of penitentiary and chain-gang birds under the age of thirty.

The Schools Must Furnish Adequate Results.

Please let no one assume from what I have just written or from anything I shall write, now or later, that I am not gratified with the appointment of Mr.

Erwin, or that I, in any degree, under-value education. On the contrary, I am convinced there could scarcely have been a better man chosen for the position, and I am one of the greatest enthusiasts for education in the State. Indeed, I have spent forty-two years in educational work—over twenty of them as a teacher with mighty small pecuniary reward. In fact, I suspect I have spent more hours in actual class-room work than has any school official in North Carolina, and those hours have been spent under every kind of condition—from the most unfavorable to favorable. I have taught practically everything from the alphabet through the high school course, and several college subjects, and can do it today. Accordingly, it is not a novice or a theorist that is writing. But, be it understood that I am not a school administrator—I am a teacher, and, if I do say it who should not, I get results—results in character, mental alertness and capacity, and in a disposition to pay one's way in the world, unless the twig has already been bent so seriously and has grown in its debased form so long that restoration is practically impossible in the time I have to give the misshapen individual.

Yes; I am a believer in education, but I insist upon differentiating between a machine and its output. I prefer an acre of corn that makes its fifty bushels if ploughed with an ox and an old turn plow to one that produces fifteen, even though it be cultivated with the most modern cultivators.

It is the product that counts. And it would just as well be understood that the people of North Carolina are far more concerned in the quality of the product of the schools than in the school as a system. That is, the schools are for the children, and not the children and the State's appropriations for the maintenance of a pride-producing school system.

And while the system must be maintained to produce adequate results, it does not necessarily follow that the cost of maintenance and the adequacy of results are proportionate.

An Inept Illustration.

In our conversation, a very brief one, with Supt. Erwin, our talk approached the last mentioned point. "But," he says, "you must admit that the quality of the product usually corresponds with its cost; for instance, a Packard is a better car than a Ford." "Not for the Ford's job," I quickly replied. "And most of the product of the schools will have to do the work of Fords." "You mean you want cheap schools, then?" asked Mr. Julius Warren, secretary of the N. C. Teachers' Association. "But Mr. Erwin understood better and said: "No he doesn't."

But the illustration was not only inept from the standpoint indicated, but was in absolutely reverse gear. Both the school officials were making the cars analogous to the school equipments and teacher personnel. The cars on the contrary, correspond to the pupils turned out by the schools. And neither the quality of the car nor that of the pupil depends in any measure upon the costliness of the plant of which they are products, nor upon the size of the wage of the employees in either the school or the automobile plant.

The Ford plant is as costly, unit for unit, I doubt not, as the Packard plant, and Ford is notable for the liberality of his wage scale. Nor, I am sure, has the Packard plant any more masterly mechanics than the Fords themselves and their other master mechanics.

The Ford Plant Equipped to Make Fords.

The difference is this: The Ford plant is designed to make Fords and to make them in mass quantities, corresponding exactly with the requirements and necessities of the public school system. On the other hand, the Packard or the Rolls Royce plant produces its cars more on the individual basis, corresponding in method to that of the more expensive private

schools of this country.

The Sine-Qua-Non the Same.

Yet the essential features of both cars are identical in principle and in aim. The essential aim of each manufacturer is to convert the force generated by the combustion of gasoline into motive power. The differences that appear in the finished cars are not due to the cost of the plant or to the wage of the workmen, but to the difference in the conceptions of the manufacturers as to what they wish to produce. Ford conceives as the desideratum of his product a car that will take one anywhere and bring him back in comfort. The manufacturer of the Rolls Royce or the Packard, on the other hand, wishes to create a car for the "Big Ike" to show off in. But Mr. Ford can make his Lincolns too. But he knows that this country has no room in it for ten million Lincolns, while it absolutely needs (and NEEDS in capital letters) its millions of A Models, adapted as roadsters, coupes, sedans, etc., to the varying needs and desires of the purchasers—but all with the sine-qua-non, the ability to convert the power generated by the combustion of gasoline into motive power, that prime necessity without which the Packard is more useless than a wheelbarrow. Ford emphasizes the essentials; the manufacturer of the Rolls Royce does not neglect the essentials, indeed, refines them, but nevertheless so magnifies the non-essentials as to put them beyond the means of the masses and to unfit them for the rough road service which every Ford is created to withstand, so that it is not an unimaginable thing to conceive of a puny Ford's stopping in its unhindered flight to push or pull the Packard out of a mud-hole.

North Carolina Cannot Educate Upon a Packard Basis.

However desirable a Packard education is for the son of the man who can afford it, one thing is certain—North Carolina, in the first place, does not need all its children educated upon a Packard basis; and if it did so need them, it absolutely cannot afford to educate upon that model or basis.

This State has one of the most expensive educational plants ever possessed by a State of no greater per capita wealth. The cost of the plant is beyond recall. The wage of the personnel must be determined with two things in view: the ability of the State to pay and the salability, or intrinsic worth, of the product of the plant as operated by the said personnel—the same two principles upon which the Ford plant is operated.

Mr. Ford is not paying his employees from funds existing apart from those accruing to him from the operation of the plant. He had no billions to start with from which he could pay wages to mechanics and superintendents to produce a useless car. So soon as the personnel of the Ford plant cease to produce a salable car—salable because it will do the work it is designed to do—wages will not only dwindle in the Ford plants but ultimately cease altogether. Similarly with the teacher and supervisory force in North Carolina. Future funds for the payment of salaries must come from the product of the schools. If the schools turn out an unsalable product, one unfitted for the work-a-day business of the world, the sum total possible of collection for school funds will grow perceptibly less and less. That diminution of the school funds will be due to disability on the part of the next generation to pay—that is, if it occurs. But the liberality of the present taxpayers depends upon both their degree of ability to pay and their inclination to pay.

The Schools Must Convince the People That Their Product Is Valuable.

There has been no lack of purchase of Fords by
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