

The State's Voice

"Peter" "er"

Issued Twice a Month

Subscription Price \$1.00 a Year

VOLUME III.

DUNN, N. C., JAN. 15, 1935

NUMBER 1

FURTHER DISCUSSION OF SCHOOL PROBLEMS

I have just read a most able article in the November Mercury by Dr. Chase, former president of the University of North Carolina, and a review of an article in a magazine by Edgar W. Knight of the University faculty. These scholarly gentlemen were dealing with educational problems, but chiefly with those of the colleges and universities. They are comforting in that I am convinced that these articles of mine are as pertinent to the broader field of public school education as theirs to the higher realms. If the larger magazines can afford to publish them; then, I conclude, *The State's Voice* is justified in giving space to these cogitations. I commend particularly to the attention of all thinking citizens of the state Dr. Chase's article.

I devoted the last article chiefly to the importance of having teachers of high native intelligence, saying in effect that no amount or kind of training for teaching can take the place of original brains.

An Example of the Effectiveness of Native Talent.

Here is an example. In 1881 or 1882 the greatest break in former methods of teaching English grammar that was ever made in the state was made by the adoption of Reed and Kellogg's grammars, which emphasized the analysis of sentences instead of the rote parsing of words, a *la Smith* for example. A system of diagramming was thereby introduced. My teacher that winter had never seen anything like the Reed and Kellogg system before. Though I was only twelve I was given the *Higher Lessons in English*. Ask W. F. Marshall, veteran teacher of Raleigh, what about that book. That teacher, as suggested previously, had been to school hardly more than 30 months herself. Yet she taught that book as successfully as any college graduate could have done. She was simply a woman of the highest-grade intellect, and needed nobody to show her how to teach a book written in plain English, and in that four-month term I learned in a large measure what English grammar I know. As said previously, the teacher of A-1 native mentality understands. And that is the first requisite in teaching anything. It is possible for an understanding teacher to discover and remove the barrier in the understanding of a pupil.

In a Georgia school the son of the mayor of the town was studying, not the *Higher Lessons* I had studied as a child, but as a fifteen-year old youth he was studying the *Grade Lessons*. He was good in arithmetic. I therefore knew he had seasoning power. But that boy could not, after I know not how many years studying English before I came, name the subject or predicate of a simple sentence to save his life. I had explained possibly a dozen times, but kept on presenting the matter in new lights. One day I was sitting with him at his desk. He seemed no nearer able to discriminate between the functions of words than in the beginning. But all at once he saw the light and looked up in astonishment and said: "Why it's like arithmetic; it has sense in it." The job was done. Grammar was no more trouble to him. All the prior teaching had meant nothing to him, and now he didn't need any more teaching to count. The removing of the barrier to his understanding was the one task of the teacher.

"He Can't Learn."

A few hours before this is written, I saw a 18-year old boy loafing in a Dunn drug store. I asked if he didn't go to school. He replied, No. When asked why, he stated that he didn't start to school till he was eleven and that the teachers have told him he cannot learn and that he might quit if he wished to. He had quit, evidently convinced that he cannot learn. Yet the boy manifestly has good sense, and he seemed too candid to be lying about what has happened. I do not even know whether it was in a Dunn school. But if it happened at all, it was a tragedy. He may be "thing-minded" but that is no reason why he shouldn't be taught, while the chief attention is being given, possibly, to those who will learn under almost any circumstances. A teacher of real intelligence should account it a greater victory to

discover his mentality—to fit means to the end in his case—than to "pass" all the brighter pupils with an A grading. The question arises as to what North Carolina schools are going to do about such lads. He was born just as the great expenditure for schools began in North Carolina; yet here he is coming up in a haphazard way and liable to become a burden upon the state in years to come. And I guarantee that he can learn, if not by means of one medium by another. When I was helping that Georgia boy see day-light in grammar, I had the understanding pupils assisting the less understanding at the boards. My task for the time was to save the utterly blank mind. That eleven-year old boy, entering the first grade, clearly had no intelligent treatment. No method taught in the educational courses would redeem the situation. It takes native ability, an understanding mind, to reach such cases.

The Second Reason for the Existence of Lower-Grade Intellectuals in the Teaching Force.

I showed last issue that the chief reason for the existence of low or lower-grade intellectuals in the teaching force as compared with earlier days was the draft of the profession, industry, office-work, public work, etc., upon the material of first rank. The second reason is that there is no real test for certification upon a proper basis. As Dr. Chase, in the article referred to, lamented the Ph. D. craze, so North Carolina may lament the red-tape route to the teacher's job.

Take so many courses of this and that and you may teach. Remain on the job so long and your salary will be raised. That is essentially the method of teacher certification in North Carolina. Yet anybody who knows anything at all about the 20th century schools knows that cheating was never more rampant, and that grades are, in too many cases, no assurance at all of scholarship standing, and certainly none of character.

There is no real test of character and adaptability to school work, and a teacher who has no character is a menace to the state. Teaching is a holy task. It calls for the best in the best.

North Carolina should provide some means of sifting out the intellectually feeble and the unmoral (I do not say *immoral*) from the strong mentalities and the moral candidates for positions in the schools.

As suggested last issue, when one has taught for a year or two, it is possible to judge by the fruits. But one does not have to wait for a winesap apple tree to bear fruit to know that it is a winesap, nor a crab. An experienced orchardist, or even this writer, can identify a winesap tree yards away from it almost any time of year. A young man or young woman who has apparently never given a serious thought to anything and whose ambition is to have a big time is almost assuredly a crab.

That type of candidate bears the marks as deeply imprinted before he or she enters the school room as after a year or two of teaching. But if one of that type has been inadvertently employed, there will be no excuse after she has taught a year; her true character should manifest itself. And the interest of the children outweighs a hundred-fold that of the teacher as a teacher. It should be emphatically impressed upon all school people that the schools are for the education of the children, and not for men and women called teachers to make a living in.

Over-Professionalizing the Teachers.

Dr. Chase, in the article referred to above, scores the attitude of the Ph. D's. in the college faculties. They lose sight of the task at hand—to instruct undergraduates in subject matter that seldom requires any scholarly studies, and, with a view to making a reputation for themselves among their own groups, set to work to write a book, which will never be read by anybody except those who know just about as much about the subject matter as do the author. They have their eyes set, according to Dr. Chase, upon the day when they will no longer be mere college teachers but learned professors in the university ranks.

Such a spirit has prevailed among the teachers of North Carolina. Not all the thousands taking summer school courses have been doing so with a view to making themselves better teachers, but with a view to promotion, or at least such an idea I got during the flush times. As remarked earlier, I have attended only one summer school for teachers. Then I found men and women there who would much better have been learning something to teach than driving ahead in a course reputedly intended to make them better teachers.

Again, I say with emphasis, no man or woman can teach what he or she does not know. I am going to tell you here what I discovered with respect to a group of about thirty principals and high school teachers, including one university professor, who boarded at the old hotel in Chapel Hill in 1924.

If there is a matter of universal concern it is that of climate. And climate depends upon the power of water to absorb heat and hold it in latent form and then to release it. I may say positively that it is impossible to understand the changes of climate at all without a knowledge of this property of water. Yet it incidentally developed in that hotel group that not one of those principals or high school teachers understood that physical characteristic of water. In fact, I had to get the backing of Prof. A. H. Patterson, professor of physics at that time, in order to convince any of the group that a given weight of ice had several times as much cooling effect as the same weight of ice-cold water. One principal even denied that water could be as cold as ice.

The whole matter of the ability of water to absorb and disperse heat was discussed in the physical geographies and in the general science books taught in the high schools, or those books were not deserving a place in the schools. I learned all about the matter from Maury's physical geography in the winter of 1885 and 1886 and have understood it from that day to this. Yet here was a bunch of professional teachers who, every one of them, had had apparently a much better chance to get a real knowledge of such things who knew not the first basic principle of latent heat, and therefore nothing of the basis of climatic changes. The last one of the bunch, I am quite sure, would have hooted at the idea of "wasting time" in school teaching, Latin or Greek. But I have often wondered what they did know. I had been to school years less than any college graduate among them, and just about all of them were college graduates; yet I knew Latin and Greek, had studied all the higher mathematics taught in the state forty-five years ago, and also knew something about the ordinary phenomena of nature. What they knew to teach would, apparently, have been hard to discover; yet they were driving ahead for further advancement in the theory and art of teaching. Of course this was only one reed shaking in the wind, but its pointing was so positive that the direction of the wind could scarcely be questioned.

I want the time to return when North Carolina teachers must know things from the ground up. Do you recall the interview with a county superintendent who deplored the urbanization of the country schools, saying that there were large boys and girls in the country schools of his county who could not name three of the native trees of their community? Isn't such a state of affairs a poor commentary upon a school system that has probably absorbed more money within the last fourteen years than all the schools of the state had absorbed in one hundred years prior to 1920? Isn't it another commentary when you can ask the average school boy of ten to fifteen what a fourth of 2 1-2 is and find he cannot tell you?

The Text Books Partly to Blame.

But let's lay part of the blame on the text books of the last twenty years. Some of them have been as unteachable as any that could be made. There was that set of readers of the war and post-war period that was based, apparently, on an esthetic notion. I recall a class of children who had not learned to read laboring over the many pages of "Golden River." The good old

(Concluded at Foot of Column 1, Page 2)