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IRVINGTON NEW YORK
WHEN I began the work of founding what is now known as the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, near the little town of Tuskegee, Alabama, I did not have a dollar to put into the work, nor did the institution own a dollar's worth of property. In looking about for a place in which to make a beginning, I happened to find an abandoned shanty that was about sixteen by twenty-four feet. This shanty was in such a condition that it was nearly ready to tumble down. The floor had holes in it so large that one had to be careful to see that one's foot did not slip through them. The walls were in about the same condition as the floor. When it rained the water would pour in at nearly every part of the house. At such a time the students would sit upon their books in order to keep them dry. More than once do I remember that when I would be hearing a recitation, one of the students would get an umbrella and hold it over me to shield me from the rain.

The seats on which the students sat were in many cases large rails or a split log which rested upon some stones, or had pegs driven into it for legs. There was no teacher's table, and a portion of the time I used a dry goods box for a seat. Of course, blackboards and such luxuries were hardly to be thought of. Books were very scarce. At one time I saw five students preparing a lesson from one book; the two who sat upon the front seat had a book between them, directly behind them there were two others looking over the shoulders of the first two, and behind the last two there was a fifth looking over the shoulders of all four.

During the first two years in the history of the Tuskegee Institute I spent a good deal of time, mainly on Saturdays and Sundays, traveling by dirt road through the country, letting the people know about the school and studying their actual conditions and needs. While on these journeys I made it a point, as far as possible, to see the people in their actual every-day life—to see them in their homes, their fields, their schools and churches; in real life rather
than in a stimulated, artificial life. With this in view, I confined myself carefully to the rural districts and smaller towns where the majority of our people live, and made my visits among them without notice of my coming being given. I found that the food of the people generally consisted of corn bread and a piece of fried fat bacon, with now and then a little "greens" or molasses. The meal was usually eaten without any pretence at sitting down at a table. Each individual would eat his portion from the hand, and often while sitting by the fire, or walking about in the yard, or perhaps more often while on the way to the cotton-field for the day's work. As a rule the people lived in cabins containing but one room. Sometimes I found as many as ten who slept in one room, and they would be of all sexes and all sizes, often including several who were in no way related to the family. It was rather an interesting experience to find myself waiting on the outside of the cabin at night for an opportunity to go to bed. But neither poverty nor the want of the simplest conveniences and comforts of life was the worst feature in the conditions which I found. This was the gloom that seemed to be cast over every one by reason of the constant presence of debt: debt for the rent of the land, the mortgage on the crop, on the mule or cow, as well as debt for clothes, for food, for whisky, for tobacco, for snuff. These debts not only covered in many cases the present year's operations, but had overlapped and would inevitably extend far into the future. Thus it was true that the past, present and future were mortgaged. The time was when I was rather inclined to blame the southern white man for the debts of the colored people, but closer observation has taught me that one of the main things that the southern white man has to guard against is to keep the negro from going too deeply into debt, and that, but for the refusal of many southern merchants and bankers to give more credit, both the negro and the southern white people would be farther in debt than they are.

In inspecting the schools, while I was on these journeys, I found that they were in about the condition that my school was in when I first came to Tuskegee; that they rarely were in session longer than...
that in the early days of the Tuskegee school, before any boarding department was started, there was an absence of any idea that book-knowledge should have connection with real every-day living—with such matters, for example, as the use of the bath-tub, the proper cooking and serving of food, the use of the tooth-brush, or the care of the sleeping-room. Such observations convinced me very early in the life of the school that to give these students mere abstract book-training would be time thrown away.

As often as possible I would go into the churches on Sunday. In the churches, as was true of the teaching in the schools, I found that with few exceptions there was no attempt made to connect the preaching with anything that concerned daily life in this world. As an illustration, I listened for an hour or more one day to a minister preaching most earnestly to a large congregation, and the whole burden of his sermon was advising the people "to get rid of the world." Instead of advising the people how to get hold of land, homes, and other property, he was intent upon their getting rid of what little earthly possessions they did have. Since, on examination, I found that only two men in the congregation

four months, while the ignorance and incompetency of most of the teachers was something almost impossible to describe. Teachers, pupils and parents had implicit faith in a vague idea that all that one had to do was to learn to read and write, to memorize some facts in history, and especially to learn something about Latin, Greek, or some foreign language, and the more foreign and the more useless the more highly they prized it, and the future of the race would be secure. They had no idea of connecting education with anything that was to be done in every-day life.

While there was prevalent almost a worship of books, it was pathetic to note...
owned an acre of land, and only four owned the mules which they were using, and that practically all were in debt to the extent of several times all their earthly holdings, the "getting rid of the world" doctrine in that community was useless.

But through all the history and struggle of the early years of starting the Tuskegee Institute, there was one thing that was a constant source of encouragement and led one on irresistibly to do his very best. This was the almost pathetic anxiety of the students and parents to improve their condition. Just how this was to be done they did not know, but they knew they wanted something that they did not have. Another thing that made me feel very serious was the absolute faith that they seemed to have in me and my efforts. The longing of students and parents for better things not only impressed me, but the interest manifested by many of the southern white people in colored young men and women was encouraging. In many cases this interest was shown because the parent of the student, or the student himself, had been owned by some member of the white family. Here again was brought out that peculiar attachment between master and slave in the south which it is hard for the outside world to understand. Few people take more genuine pride in the intellectual or material advance of colored boys and girls, in many cases, than the white people who once owned them or their parents.

The information which I gained by a study of the condition of the students who first came to the school, together with my close observation of the life of the masses of the people and the relations between
the races, gave me the necessary information for planning a course of training which I thought would be effective in reaching the conditions and needs of the members of my race in the part of the country in which I was to work. In making an analysis of their condition, I found that a very large percentage of the people lived by agriculture in some form. Notwithstanding that they depended upon agriculture, the soil was cultivated as a rule in an unintelligent, unskilled manner. I found that while the soil was capable of producing almost any product fit for the use of man, still the people raised little aside from cotton, and this was pro-

agriculture should occupy the first place because it was out of this industry that the masses of my people were to get their daily living. I observed, further, that many had left the rural districts and were eking out a miserable existence in large cities because farm life was so isolated and unattractive, since most of the work on the farm was done in an ignorant, shiftless and costly manner.

To remedy these conditions, we began to teach agriculture at the Tuskegee Institute very soon after the school was organized. There were many difficulties in the way. The first was that most of the students came to us from the farms, and that

produced in a very costly manner, for the reason that the farmers were often in debt for it before the crop was planted. Instead of raising pigs, cows, chickens, grain and vegetables and producing eggs and butter and other forms of fresh and nourishing food, they went to town for their supplies, which, as I have stated, consisted for the most part of corn bread and bacon with little variation during the twelve months, except that now and then a little molasses, also bought at the store, would be used. These facts led me to conclude, as General Armstrong had done years before at the Hampton Institute, that whatever else should be taught at the Tuskegee Institute, their main object in seeking an education was to enable them to escape farm life. They felt, too, that they knew about all there was to be known concerning agriculture. They were over-anxious to learn in an abstract manner whatever was in books, but nothing else. To add to the trouble, the institution was so poor that we had nothing in the way of conveniences and implements that would lead them to believe that the instructors at the school knew any more about farming than the student knew. Gradually, however, after a number of years of hard work, we changed the ideas of the students regarding agricultural work, and through the students the ideas
of the parents were changed. The opposition faded away in proportion as we were able to improve the teaching and the apparatus used. I will not attempt to tell the whole story, except to say that at the present moment we never hear of the least objection coming from parent or student to agricultural work, and not only is there a vital enthusiasm in favor of it at Tuskegee to the extent that we cannot supply the opportunities to all who want to come, but this spirit has spread to every part of the south.

We began teaching agriculture in 1882 with one hoe and one blind horse. At the present time the school cultivates by the labor of the students seven hundred acres of land, and grows a large part of the food consumed by the one thousand four hundred students, instructors and families upon the grounds. At the same time the academic teaching is dove-tailed into the agricultural teaching in a way to make the one help the other. Instead of a student writing an essay about something in the air, he writes about the growing of potatoes, or describes the dairy or poultry yard. In the debating societies they discuss such questions as whether or not the incubator or the hen is the better method of raising chickens. Instead of the one hoe that we began with, there are at present upon our farm scores of hoes and numbers of the latest and most improved labor-saving pieces of machinery. Instead of one blind horse the school owns fifty horses, mules and colts.

Our first dairy consisted of one cow that we used to tie out under a pine tree. Our present dairy consists of one hundred and fifty-eight cows, bulls and calves, and a large, attractive dairy barn that is said to be the best in the south. The dairy-house is supplied with all the best apparatus for teaching our students to make butter and cheese.

The farm work has not only grown in the directions that I have mentioned, but a number of girls are now taking a course in agriculture, including truck growing, gardening, fruit growing, dairying, bee raising, and poultry raising. Our large poultry yard, for example, is wholly cared for by
A LESSON IN NURSING.

Girls who are taking practical and theoretical agriculture in connection with simple English branches. How much better, it seems to me, it is to teach a girl how to raise poultry intelligently and skilfully, so that she can earn an independent living, than to have her spend her life as a book agent or as a clerk in a shop or department store.

What I saw of the houses led me to decide that one of the great needs of our people was decent houses. In order to help supply this demand, I resolved that next to the teaching of agriculture, house-building should be the industry that we would emphasize most. Since we were without buildings at the institution it seemed to me best to begin by teaching the students how to erect their own school-buildings, shops and dormitories, and teachers' cottages, so that, having learned practical and theoretical house-building at Tuskegee, they would be able to go out and build for themselves decent homes, and teach our people how to do the same thing. I confess that I was almost ashamed of some of the bricks the students molded, and of some of the houses they erected, in the earlier years of the institute, but what was lacking in perfection of finish was more than counterbalanced in teaching the lesson of self-help and moral backbone. As the visitor drives through our school-grounds at the present time, among the fifty and more buildings built almost wholly by the students, I think he could not tell whether they had been erected by students or by skilled workmen. He would see the plans being drawn by students, first-class bricks being manufactured and laid by them, and he would see plumbing and electric-lighting being done in the same way. Driving a few miles out into the country, in any direction, he would come to neat cottages that have been built by Tuskegee students. He could scarcely go into a city or town in the south without finding a number of neat, comfortable homes owned by Tuskegee Institute graduates. What is true of the Tuskegee Institute in this respect is, in a large degree, true of other institutions. As an old colored man put it some time ago, all through the south evidences are multiplying that "we's gwine to quit libin in de ashes."

In further analyzing the condition of my people in the south, I found that next to agriculture the largest number were engaged in some form of domestic service. I naturally reasoned that since this was true, in our teaching at the Tuskegee Institute we ought to teach them to perform such service in a skilled, intelligent and conscientious manner. This, I confess, was perhaps...
our hardest task. We were confronted with three difficulties; one was that every girl, as well as her parents, felt that she knew all there was to be known about cooking, table-serving, laundering, and housekeeping in general. The second was, that each girl and her parents felt perfectly sure that as soon as she had mastered a certain number of rules in arithmetic and grammar, and could remember certain dates in history, and locate a large number of cities, rivers and lakes, she would have no earthly use for anything that had any connection with such ordinary things as cooking, laundering or sewing. The last and main difficulty was that a large proportion of the colored people throughout the south would become inflamed at the mere suggestion of teaching their children any of the domestic or industrial occupations; they connected such teaching with slavery and considered it a badge of degradation. Aside from the regular text-books, as one mother said to me, the only things that she was willing her daughter should be taught were "music and embroidery." It was a tedious and often a trying process to convince parents and students that every girl should know how to perform well all duties in connection with a home, and that the disgrace came in only when poor service was performed.

But all this I am glad to say has to do with the past. Since those early years not only has there been a revolution on the part of the students, but equally so in the minds of parents in practically every part of the south. One of our main difficulties at present at Tuskegee is to prevent the students from devoting too much of their time to industrial branches to the neglect of the academic training. Every girl comes with a request from parents or herself to be taught some industry. There are five kitchens at the institution where students are trained in cooking, table-serving, and such household duties. One of the things that is insisted upon is that the kitchen shall be made one of the cleanest and most attractive places in the home, that the dining-room shall be made sweet and inviting with the help of flowers and in every
other possible way. The same spirit exists regarding sewing, laundering and general housekeeping. I am sure that all the young men honor the girl who is specializing in cooking or laundering as much as the one who is preparing to be a music-teacher. The need of this kind of training can be appreciated from a conversation which I heard some years ago between a colored principal of a school and three of his assistant teachers. Everything inside and around the schoolhouse was miserably dirty and dilapidated. The new principal of the school determined to bring about a change and asked one of the lady teachers to take charge of a squad of pupils and show them how to sweep the floor. She flatly refused, remarking "I am a literary teacher." He asked another to take charge of the dusting. She too refused, saying that she too was a "literary teacher." The man assistant was asked to take charge of the cleaning of the yard and the whitewashing of the fences and the outside of the schoolhouse, but he remarked that he had been employed to teach rhetoric and English literature.

Throughout the history of this change in the ideas of the colored people, it was interesting to watch their mental processes during the different stages of this development. As I have intimated, soon after the freedom of the race, merely to intimate to the average negro father that his son was not to be a lawyer, minister, member of the legislature, or congressman was to insult him. It was hard in the earlier years to induce any one to see that any race must lay the foundation for what the world calls the higher positions by mastering first the more fundamental and common things of life. But, as I have stated, it was interesting to note how they gradually began to reason things out for themselves. One old colored farmer told me his story which will illustrate the case of many. He had three sons; the oldest was sent to a purely literary college, where he remained several years and graduated, but he did not return to his father's farm. When the second son grew old enough, he was also sent to a purely literary institution, and after his education he too failed to return to the farm. The old man had been hoping that at least one of these sons would return and use his education in showing his parents how to raise fifty bushels of corn where only twenty-five grew before, and with less labor. He had hoped that one would return and help him put the old farmhouse in a comfortable and convenient condition. When his third son grew old enough, the old man had reasoned the matter out and was fully decided that his third son must be sent to a school where he would not only study literature and science, but the application of the sciences to the raising of corn, peas, and stock—something that would make his boy imbibe such a love for the old farm that he would not want to leave it, but would be glad to return to it and show his parents how to improve the plant and animal growth upon it.

In the earlier years of the Tuskegee Institute a large proportion of the southern white people had the idea that every negro who was educated would become a minister, or teacher, or dude; that an educated negro meant as a rule a high hat, a big walking-cane, kid gloves and patent leather shoes, with no benefit to accrue to the negro himself or to the southern white man. Not long ago I met a southern white man who once entertained such ideas. Just before I met him his wife had been sick near unto death. During all the anxious days of her sickness she was carefully and intelligently nursed by a black girl who some months before had graduated at the Tuskegee Institute nurse-training school. This white man could not have spoken in more high terms of commendation of the education given at Harvard, or the "University of Virginia, than he did of the Tuskegee Institute. Near Montgomery, Alabama, is another southern white man who a few years ago did not have much, if any, interest or faith in the education of the negro. This white man has a large dairy. In some way a few years ago a graduate from our dairy-school secured employment under this white man. I will not describe in detail the success of this dairyman except to say that the man who once had little faith in the education of my race now keeps a standing order with the head of our agriculture department to the effect that he must have the first choice from every class that graduates from the department of dairying.