

THE CHEYNEY TRAINING SCHOOL FOR TEACHERS



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LESLIE PINCKNEY HILL

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THESE is wide-spread and heated discussion current at present along the border states and in some of the northern states on the relation of the public schools to the Negro population. This discussion, notably in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, is dividing colored people into bitter camps and factions. The arguments revolve around the fundamental question of segregation. Is segregation spreading in the North? Is there any kind of segregation that is not wholly evil? How shall it be met? How far do Negro institutions developing in these states make for a disastrous cleavage between the races? Shall Negro institutions be encouraged, or shall they be abolished? All these questions are of the nature of explosives. They are questions that require self-possession, and the wariest use of words, if issues are not to be confused.

Inasmuch as the discussion in Pennsylvania centers for the present around the new status of the Cheyney Training School for Teachers, a brief statement of the relation of this school to the whole question may help towards public enlightenment. The attitude of the principal and faculty of this school, although well known, may serve at least to lay bare the grounds of the debate.

First, I believe in no kind of enforced segregation, and in no kind of Jim-crowism. On the contrary, the whole weight of this school has always been exerted against these evils. The very purpose of the Cheyney discipline is to develop a strong body of clear-minded leaders, who will consecrate their lives, if possible, to the stern task of helping to lift from the nation this incubus of Jim-crowism in all of its manifestations. But I believe completely in the right of any group of Negroes to organize, by themselves alone, or in co-operation with white friends, for any proper ends which they themselves may voluntarily choose to further. This right of self-determination is of the very essence of democracy. It is the Negro's surest weapon against Giant Despair. When others will not help us, we will help ourselves. Any other attitude marks the craven or the poser.

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ers, now the fourteenth standard normal school of Pennsylvania, represents this principle. Nobody now connected with the administration had anything to do with the founding of this school. I was called to the principalship after the institution had served the race and the nation for nearly a hundred years. The school was established in 1832 by Richard Humphreys, a Philadelphia Quaker, who bequeathed the sum of \$10,000 to certain Friends for "*the benevolent design of instructing descendants of the African race in school learning, in the various branches of mechanic arts and trades, and in agriculture in order to prepare, fit and qualify them to act as teachers*". This statement of the origin and purpose of the school has been published in catalogues and reports literally for generations, and there never has been any reason why anybody should misunderstand or misstate either. The present elevation of the work crowns a long process of gradual and natural evolution.

In other words, this is not a school which was set up by white state officials and forced upon Negroes, but a voluntary undertaking developed from within by the finest type of inter-racial co-operation. The State did not create Cheyney. On the contrary, Cheyney represents the basic principle of voluntary group endeavor. The school of its own motion sought and

secured the professional recognition and the financial support which it now enjoys. To confuse these two types of development will be fatal to all true race building, and destructive of all dignified inter-racial co-operation. This is the confusion now rampant.

I came into this work with definite understanding of its origin and purpose. Three needs had to be met promptly and with concentrated attention. The first of these was the grading up of the school so that it would have a professional standing equal to that of the other teacher training schools of Pennsylvania. In this undertaking, representing the labor of years, we have been entirely successful. In 1920 our graduates, after passing the state examinations, were recognized by the Department of Public Instruction as fully qualified to receive certificates and diplomas, opening to them the public schools of Pennsylvania.

The next need was money for the widening work. Here again we have been reasonably successful. I found this school, as a private institution, securing, in 1914, \$6,000 biennially from the state. The appropriation for the current biennium is \$125,000. This amount still runs far short of needs, but it represents a great advance.

The third need remains—physical equipment reasonably commensurate with the requirements of our program. We need dormitories, class rooms, cottages for workers, gymnasium, a new training school, up-to-date laboratories, assembly hall, and much remodeling. These cannot all be supplied at once, but I am confidently expecting a substantial beginning of these improvements before the end of the present year.

Now has this progress at Cheyney brought about any enforced segregation in the normal schools of the Commonwealth? No group of Negro workers can ever tell when or how far their activities suggest to other people dissocial thinking and conduct. The following, however, are facts essential to any intelligent appraisal of the present situation:

1. The state law admits of no enforced segregation.
2. Cheyney as a private school was avowedly for colored students. Under the State, it continues its primary service to the race, but must admit any qualified applicant without regard to race, color or creed.

3. Any qualified colored student may attend any other Pennsylvania State Normal School.
4. There are more colored students in these other state normal schools today than ever before, and there are more students at Cheyney and a larger, stronger faculty.
5. There is no student at Cheyney who has not deliberately chosen to attend this institution.

It is not for me to examine or interpret the motives of any citizen who refuses to consider these facts.

With regard to the vicious sort of enforced segregation which all decent people oppose, there is no question as to where any colored man must stand. There is, however, a very serious question as to method. Something happens to a colored child in some mixed school, some colored teacher fails of appointment, colored children suffer from inconvenient transfers, some colored student in a normal school is denied rights and privileges. When these things happen, it is not, in my judgment, the part of wisdom to set up in this state a general hue and cry about segregation. The law here is clear and adequate. The effective method is to treat each case *specifically, locally and directly*. My own limited experience in Pennsylvania teaches that wherever two or three colored men of personality, clear mind and good judgment, careful of the meaning of words, confer directly with officials about these local embarrassments, they almost invariably get a hearing and clear up the muddle. Indignation mass meetings, appeals to the passions of the crowd, general condemnation of the whole white race, bad manners and violent language turn back all the wheels of progress. I am ready to go with any man who has a definite grievance, and who means bravely and directly, but with sober courtesy, to correct any evil that may afflict our people in the public school of the state. But I do not join any man who exhibits the same blind prejudice that we ourselves abhor, and who rushes to judgment without fact, or truth, or evidence.

This, then, briefly is my position in the whole discussion. It is my business to continue to develop this school primarily in the interest of my people, to keep its doors open at the same time to all qualified youth of any other race, to broaden the whole scope of its teaching, to work for the high-