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QUOTATION

EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENTS

The significant comment of James H. Dillard, of Charlottesville, Virginia, on one of the outstanding problems of financing our schools is all the more notable because Mr. Dillard is president of the Slater and James Funds. The following communication appeared in *School and Society* for November, 1922:

Here again we shall to realize the truth of the saying of Epictetus that nothing is to be had for nothing. Dr. Carter Alexander's paper appearing in *School and Society* in the issues of September 23 and 30 dealing with the problem of financing public education deserves careful attention. There are not many present problems that are so important. It is a question which the American public will have to face, because the fact is becoming more apparent every day that if we are to do the job of public education as it ought to be done, which means doing it far better than it is now being done, we shall need three or four times as much money as is now being got for the purpose. One item of greatly increased expenditure is outstanding. We must have fewer pupils to the teacher, and this of course means a considerable increase in the number of teachers to be employed and adequately paid.

I do not know how the matter of which I shall now speak stands in other parts of the country, but I do know that in the south one line of necessary improvement lies in the direction of fairer assessments. The question of assessments is a very unpopular one for the public discussion, none more so, but it is one, that, at least in the southern states, holds the secret of better revenue for public purpose. I refer particularly to the assessment of real estate and especially of real estate in the open country, where the need of money for better schools and better roads is most pressing.

As I have said I do not know whether the practice of making absurdly low assessments be the prevailing fact in the east and west, but that it is the prevailing fact in the south I do know. Many illustrations from each of the southern states could easily be given. I will give four specific instances which happened to come to my personal knowledge. In Virginia a farm was recently sold for \$8,750 cash on which the absentee owner was paying a total tax of \$2.92 per

year. In another part of Virginia a farm was sold for \$12,000 cash, the assessed value of which stood at \$800 on the assessor's list. In South Carolina the owner of a tract of valuable cotton land refused an offer of \$175 per acre. The land was assessed at \$8 per acre. In Alabama an offer of \$25 per acre was made for a tract of rather poor land and refused. The land was assessed at \$2 per acre. In the four counties to which these instances relate the rural school term in 1921 was six months in two instances and five months in the other two instances.

In another state, which I prefer not to name because I think it might be well to give a sad personal experience, the illustrations I could give would be even more discreditable than those cited above. I was invited to address the State Teachers Association and prepared a paper on the delights and advantages of education. When my moment came I had been listening to doleful accounts of lack of funds for school buildings, longer terms, and larger salaries. The spirit moved me to cast away my treasured paper and at least for once in a teacher's conventional life to speak out in meeting and tell the truth. In as modest and moderate a way as my feelings would permit I said I would venture to tell where the money could be found for schoolhouses, longer terms and higher salaries, with good roads thrown in. Then I gave my hearers illustrations of assessments in their state. "Now," I said, "in order to get money for all the good purposes concerning which this meeting has naturally been uttering well-founded lamentations you do not need to do so rash a thing as to obey fully the law on the subject of assessments; you can immensely improve conditions by following the law to even a third or fourth degree of fulfillment. If the lands which are valued at \$100 per acre on a low estimate were assessed, the revenues for public purposes would be greatly increased." I closed with an appeal that teachers, as good citizens, should direct the attention of their various communities to the enormous absurdities of our system of assessments.

This was in my salad days. I thought I had made a pretty effective speech, and there was a touch of glow in my heart when I sat down. But the glow was brief. It vanished in the atmosphere of the deadest silence I have ever listened to. I wished a trap-door might open in the platform and

swallow my mortified embarrassment. Usually, no matter how poorly a speaker may have carried off his part, some few sympathetic hands will give a timid clap. But for me there was not a movement. Nobody even looked my way. With a sort of suppressed air the chairman of the meeting continued the program.

I tell this experience to show the difficulty, not to discourage, for the sequel was almost amusing. It is true that neither at this session nor at any session of the three-day meeting was there any public mention of my effort, but I found encouragement in the fact that many of the brethren came up privately to approve, and almost all of these had some illustration in support. I am convinced that improvement in rural schools of the south depends upon convincing the people that they will be benefited in every way by paying for good schools, and that certainly one honest method of increasing the funds for the purpose lies in the direction of at least approximately fair assessments. There seems no other way of bringing this about except by continual preaching. There are signs of conversion. Now and then we see a stray paragraph in some newspaper which hints at a confession of sin. And how much better it would be to get the increased support for local schools from the people themselves rather than from any outside source. It seems to me that we stand in constant danger of forgetting a great fact. We are in danger of forgetting that being worked on and uplifted by outside organizations and outside finances goes but little way toward building up a people into the kind of manhood that is needed for democratic citizenship.

JAMES H. DILLARD

VI

PUTTING LIFE INTO REVIEW WORK

AN APPLICATION

When my sixth grade pupils had finished studying the Central States, we decided to build on the sand table a representation of the Great Lakes. This was to be used in reviewing the products of the states, cause of location of the cities, and everything of importance that we had studied during the past month.

First the class was divided into the following committees: (1) lakes, (2) mines, (3) cities, (4) boats, and (5) products. Each committee discussed its work, the children talking freely and making many suggestions. By having each committee know exactly what to do, confusion was avoided.

I think the most important thing the lake committee learned was the elevation of the lakes. Lake Superior was built the highest, the rapids were made, and the Soo canal was built around it. The other lakes were built lower, and then Ontario made a big drop, showing Niagara Falls with the Welland canal built around it.

The iron mines were located on the northern shore of Lake Superior, and brick dust representing iron ore was sprinkled around the opening of the mine and over the top of the mountain range. The copper mines were located in the same way. Bits of coal were sprinkled over the prairies, showing where to find the coal mines.

The cities were located by means of little cardboard signs held erect with toothpicks. The lakes were marked in the same way with the height of each lake on the signboard.

Products were brought and loaded into small paper boats sailing the lakes. Several were leaving Duluth loaded with iron ore, (bits of broken brick), and wheat from the Red River section. Near Cleveland and Toledo, boats loaded with pig iron (small nails) showed us where the iron had been smelted. Grain, flour and lumber from Chicago and Milwaukee could be seen on boats throughout Lakes Michigan and Huron, and some nearing Buffalo showed us that their cargoes were bound for foreign ports. A bag of flour, half emptied, helped locate Minneapolis on the Mississippi River near the falls of St. Anthony.

One committee at a time worked at the sand table until all was completed. In the class discussion which followed, several criticisms were made which sent the various committees back for further information. My, how these children studied their maps and textbooks!

The interest in the whole work was unexcelled, and with but few exceptions, each child put his best work into it.

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