

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## THE TEACHER'S OBLIGATION

Substance of an address before the North Carolina Education Association at the annual meeting, Friday morning, March 25, 1927, in Raleigh.

**M**EASURED by the state's own past, the educational progress of North Carolina since 1900 has been large. All of us are pardonably proud of that progress. Measured by national standards, however, that progress has been in reality quite small. No well-informed citizen of the state doubts our present low educational position. Frank admission of our actual place is the first safe step away from low rank.

Until this step has been taken we are likely to remain acutely sensitive to just criticism, afflicted with provincial prejudice and pride. Boosting and boasting have given us a superiority complex. We tell ourselves that we have made more progress in education than any other state. There are influential people in North Carolina who declare that our schools are the best in the world. Bragging afflicts us with a complacency so deadly as to make it fashionable to question the patriotism and loyalty of any one who points to our shortcomings and inquires into their causes. The facts of our weaknesses and not recitals of them defame us. Indifference to our backwardness or failure to admit it is a greater reproach than the backwardness itself.

We are a wealthy and powerful state, but we too often appear weak in the capacity to use our material powers to strengthen and increase our cultural resources. The refusal of the recent legislature to permit the people to say whether they desire a longer school term is another example of that weakness. The legislature failed of a high duty. That failure is also another pen-

alty which falls heavily upon underprivileged children for whose education the state neglects adequately to provide.

There is a peril in our emphasis upon the market-place outlook upon life. This outlook encourages the worship of gods which fail commonwealths as they also fail individuals. It would be unreasonable to reproach ourselves for being commercial. But we can be blamed for not being more of something else. Life for a state, as for any citizen of it, consists not in the abundance of its material possessions, but in the use it makes of them. The kind and extent of education which a state provides for its children are the best measures of its cultural and spiritual possessions. A state that holds high rank in material wealth and low rank in education is in a dangerous condition.

North Carolina is able to invest in education all that it is willing to invest. No longer is it a question of the state's ability, but of its willingness to educate. Substantial progress in broadening educational opportunity in North Carolina now depends upon the willingness of the state to provide adequate schools for its children. The development of this willingness depends upon a change in our attitude toward present conditions.

Simple educational justice can never be done in North Carolina until we have provided an adequate school term and a well trained teacher for all the children. These are attainable objectives. Until they are attained North Carolina must be counted among the laggards in civilization.

We permit scores of thousands of our children to be discriminated against by inadequate school terms and poorly prepared teachers. The neglected child soon learns to be content with being neglected. He cannot help himself. But he grows into a stub-



born opponent of progress. He becomes the dupe of those who praise him for virtues which he never had opportunity to acquire. By neglecting the rural children North Carolina encourages its own inertia and backwardness.

If North Carolina is poor either in material or cultural possessions the condition is the result of poor schools. It is time we learn this simple truth. Declamations against taxes have built and supported the foundations of any poverty with which we struggle. Those who say that North Carolina cannot afford an extended school term help to perpetuate that poverty. Those who suggest that young children must be worked in the cotton and tobacco fields are encouraging a peasantry that daily gains strength in North Carolina. These false and brutal notions must vanish. Worn-out traditions must fall away. The mendicant whine of the politician and the landlord must be hushed. Dead hands of the past must be lifted. We must provide well for all the children. Whether they are the sons and daughters of the rich and well-favored or those of the poor and the dull-faced tenants of the hovels, North Carolina's children are the state's most valuable resource.

The ideals of the state are reflected in its schools. A state does not have a great school system merely because it contains a few communities with well-developed schools. All its communities must have such schools. The educational greatness of a state is measured by the extent of its ministrations to the masses of its children. The excellence of its school system is measured by the condition of its weakest parts.

A generous and effective school system develops only among a people who have faith in and respect for thoroughness and excellence. Public opinion that will demand thoroughness and excellence in our educational work must be aroused in North Carolina. As teachers we can lead the state to a better conception of educational duty. One of our important obligations is to keep the

public fully informed about the schools and their needs. The right to any privilege which we enjoy as teachers and managers of schools is restricted only by considerations of our obligation to the children.

Through us conditions can be improved. Civilization can be quickened and the level of the life of the masses can be raised. But we cannot give that which we do not ourselves possess. If we would arouse men to energetic action for the improvement of North Carolina, we must be energetic ourselves. The influence of great teachers outlives that of any potentate or politician of their age. Immortality for the teacher is gained only when he blossoms in the lives and work of others. There is no higher immortality.

—EDGAR W. KNIGHT

### INTRODUCING THE COTTAGE PLAN IN HOME ECONOMICS

THE Cottage Plan, still in the experimental stage in Virginia, is a plan in which the class is divided into two sections. One of these sections has clothing work for one week while the other section, divided into four groups, has charge of the preparation and serving of the food, and takes care of the house.

One day each week (Monday suggested) the teacher uses as a class conference. Here the lesson guides that the pupils will use that week are distributed and talked over.

At Bridgewater two large rooms had been previously used as the foods and clothing laboratories. These were divided into more efficient and more home-like working areas by the use of screens which the pupils decorated as a part of their applied art work before the main part of the work began.

#### *Part One*

I. The cottage plan and laboratory methods were compared. The class decision was to adopt the cottage plan for the year's work.