

FOR COLORED YOUTH

The Proposed Agricultural And Industrial Institute.

Messrs. Editors: The promoters of the Maryland Agricultural and Industrial Institute for Colored Youth are firm in their belief that such an Institution has long been needed in this State. Maryland has a colored population of nearly 250,000. It is no idle question to ask or answer, What are the masses of this population doing to develop themselves along such lines as will make them industrious, honest and law-abiding citizens? The fact that there is no public institution in this State (except penal institutions) where the colored youth can be taught in the mechanical, agricultural and other arts makes the establishment of such an institution the first step in the direction of training along these lines. Facilities for the higher and manual education of the colored youth in the city of Baltimore have been amply provided and the last decade has shown that these opportunities have been accepted, the practical result being that there are now more than 100 well-educated young men and women of the race trained in our public schools who are teachers in the same system and who are laboring among and lifting up the youth of the race and instilling into them the proper ideals of life.

But the vast number of our people, like the masses of any other people, must be educated along mechanical, agricultural and industrial lines, and this is especially true of our race for this reason, if for none other, viz.: that the greatest curse that affects us today is idleness. Am I asked why we are so largely represented in the jails, the penitentiary and workhouse of the State, my answer is that the chief reason therefor is idleness. It may be said that the absence of influential friends, the lack of money, the existence of prejudice and other things operate to convict 90 per cent. of negroes charged with crime, and for that reason our large representation in penal institutions is not a test of our inclination to commit crime. Be this statement true or false, the fact remains that if we are industrious and not idle, honest and not dishonest, we will not be charged with the commission of crime, and therefore we will not be convicted of and imprisoned for it. The law has no terrors for the man who is a law-abiding citizen.

Our greatest concern, therefore, is to deal with the question of idleness. How can it be lessened and extinguished?

My experience among my race in this State has taught me that there are two classes of idlers among us. There is a class which I would to a certain extent call "forced idlers." To this class belong those young men who have fitted themselves for a certain line of work, who are capable and efficient, but who look around after they have prepared themselves to find that because of prejudice the avenues along which they had hoped to win success are closed against them. It is not entirely the fault of this class that they are idlers. A recognition of merit, a disposition to do the right would soon extinguish this class. However, they do exist, and, becoming discouraged, they drift into idleness and crime. If I am asked how, in the absence of the obliteration of prejudice, this class can be lessened, I would say have them taught to develop moral courage, persistency, patience and a determination to evolve opportunities by the exhibition of special merit, which, after all, will win in the end.

As to the other and by far the larger class, who may be called "voluntary idlers"—to this class belong the thousands of our young men who crowd our street corners, fill the dens of infamy and vice and bring the race into disrepute. Among this class there are bright minds and an amount of natural ability which, if used in the proper direction, would be creditable. How to deal with this class of idlers, how to transform them from idleness to industry, how to make them useful citizens, contributing their share to the welfare of the State instead of being burdens, is, I admit, a task fraught with much difficulty. But the difficulty and the length of time consumed in the work will be well rewarded by the success which will attend it.

Nothing will go further to lessen this class than to teach them the alphabet of correct living. They must be taught to know that no one has a right to live upon the energy and labor of another if he is able to work; that as we are all consumers, so, also, must we all be producers; that idleness is a moral crime of the deepest dye, and that it leads to crime and punishment at the hands of the law; that thrift, industry, honesty and perseverance are the elements of good citizenship and entitle the possessor of them to the respect and confidence of the community in which he lives. By instilling these principles into the minds of this class, no matter how difficult it is to do it or how long it takes to do it, we shall find that 10 or 20 years will show good results.

The great objection raised to labor in the South in the sawmills, cotton factories and other industries arises from a form of idleness and a failure to properly appreciate the good results of permanent industry. The objection is not that the labor is inefficient, not that the laborers are not industrious while at work, but that the "slightest social function" causes them to remain away from work while they spend all the money they have made the previous week, and that, too, without any regard to the importance of their being present at the time they unceremoniously leave. This is a form of idleness and can be corrected by instilling into their minds the inevitable consequences of their conduct, viz.: loss of employment, poverty and crime.

The Maryland Agricultural and Industrial Institute for Colored Youth proposes to deal with this question of idleness among the masses of our people in this State, and it feels that if with the moral and material support of the leading citizens of the State, regardless of race, it can by patient and devoted efforts succeed in lessening the ranks of idlers and criminals of our city and State and increase the number of thrifty, industrious and honest citizens, it will have rendered a great service not only to the race but to the State.

The splendid farm of 85 acres which the institution will occupy in Howard county, near Laurel, furnishes abundant opportunities for the execution of the plans of the promoters.

An inspecting party, consisting of about 50 leading colored citizens, newspaper representatives and others, will visit the property on Monday next. Rev. Ernest Lyon, who is the president of the Institute, is determined that the institution shall open in September or October, and that the work shall be pushed forward with vigor.

HARRY S. CUMMINGS.