

7. In working with other people, be impersonal. If you keep thinking about your own dignity, you are bound to have your feelings hurt.

8. Keep cool. Prejudice thrives in a warm climate.

---

## TOO MUCH OF NOTHING!

BY OLLIE STEWART

ANOTHER day of judgment has passed! Another long line of capped and gowned figures has bidden adieu to their dear Alma Maters! And as I viewed the procession I was extremely sad; for two years ago I marched in just such a line. Now, on my second anniversary, I am prompted to inquire: Are these who are now marching to be as I was and am? Have they too received *too much of nothing*?

Are they to meet what I have met, and suffer as I have suffered; will their illusions vanish in thin air; and their religion, (if they have any) disappear in a like manner; will they doubt and finally renounce what they have spent years and much money to learn; and saddest of all, will they be called upon to do many things, and assume grave responsibilities which their colleges forgot to mention?

Forgive me if I seem dogmatic, but I am persuaded that many college authorities would be shamed and even horrified if they could know how futile and cumbersome and valueless the greater part of their teaching becomes as soon as a student leaves school. I prefer to believe that this is true because the average pedagogue has failed to realize the far-reaching results of his instructions, and the grave responsibility that is his. I prefer to believe this rather than to feel that college teachers are intentionally crippling those intrusted to their care.

Yet the facts are as they are. Scarcely ten percent of Negro college graduates are equipped to cope with live and vital problems that confront them when they leave the campus! Their perspective is warped; their vision is cloudy; their philosophy is erroneous; and, until they unburden themselves of most of their schooling, they find themselves unable to compete with many who have never seen the inside of a school. The Race expects leaders from the college-trained group, but a gold-stamped diploma, a head filled with platitudes and postulates, and the philosophy of the Nordics, will never make one a leader or a credit to his group. Most Negro colleges are not fulfilling

their obligations to their students. "Why?" I hear you ask. This is the reason—the main one of many:

Colleges do not know their students! The faculty minds and the student minds are on different planes—and have no points of contact! My school did not know me—it does not know its present student body. No one feels the student's pulse to ascertain whether his blood be hot or cold. No one tells him of the reception that awaits him outside the school gate.

The average professor knows that some of his students are tall, some fat, some well-dressed, and that some are members of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. But he does not know—nor does he try to find out—what will be the lot of his tall student or his fat student when he is graduated into the melting pot. He does not tell the lowly, struggling pupil how to become an exalted alumnus, nor make an effort to gain the confidences of the groping young genius in the embryonic stage. It must follow then that the professor cannot point out ways and means—because *he does not know the students' objectives!*

But surely, many will protest, colleges are teaching the youth many cultural accomplishments! That is true. But take the case of approximately one hundred young men who left college at the same time that I did whom I have met. We decided to shun the refuge of so many of the timid and faint-hearted—teaching school—and cast our lots in fields that appealed to us. Immediately we found the going rather worse than rough. . . . and we took whatever work was offered, for even a college man must eat and be clothed.

We scrubbed floors and polished brass; we washed dishes; made hundreds of beds; we carried heavy luggage and ate bad food; but we never forgot our first conjugation verbs! We quoted theorems while the sweat streamed from our brows; we argued over Kant's imperatives, and Spinoza's pantheism; we could recite chapters from the Bible from memory; but we had to live by the knowledge we accumulated day by day! Our culture was something that could be used only when we had time for abstract conversation, or when we were too tired to indulge in physical amusements. It had no practical value in getting us jobs or in keeping them!

We were saturated with knowledge and philosophy—but we had to deny it in an employment office. Eventually, we shall get rid of it—it is doing us no good in the conflict of realities! We are disappointed. We thought (as we had been taught) that men would appreciate our cultured intellects—but so far, no one has asked us to discuss the Second Punic War. We were forced to hide our lights under a basket, for several concerns refused to

consider us when we admitted (with pride, of course) that we were college men.

What shall we say then—are colleges to be abolished because they are not fulfilling the aims for which they were established? I say no! I say it most emphatically! And the same is true of the men of whom I have just spoken. But we do plead for a renaissance! we who are already in the ring beg for fresh combatants with wide awake minds, a practical philosophy, and an understanding of our peculiar situation in American life.

If Negro colleges can produce such graduates in the future they will survive and be supported by a loyal, staunch alumni group. If they continue their present crippling policies, they cannot long endure. They fall short in that they do not dig deep enough, and become well enough acquainted with the ambitions and aspirations of those who give their names and pay their money to the registrar. They cover us with a lovely smear of culture; but what is beneath that veneer, where lies the part which is the measure of a man, they leave buried with a prayer. We are being sent into the world top-heavy! We have no support for our axioms! We have too much of nothing!

I had a very definite aim when I entered college. I still have that aim—but it now has to overcome a four-year setback. I knew what I wanted to do, but no one told me how to go about doing it. The campus atmosphere was such that I was timid about confiding my longings in the ears of my instructors. At one college which I attended for a term, there was such a host of rules and regulations on chapel attendance, prayer meetings, wearing of coats in hot weather, and social restrictions that the students had no time to study. One was too busy remembering to observe some stupid bulletin-board edict!

Coercion and discouraging rebukes seem to be the order of the day in most Negro colleges. Thought abortion is the crime practised on the campus of every school whose graduates it has been my sorrowful fortune to converse with. That which is needed most is choked in its infancy. A student with a vision is rarely allowed to remain within college precincts! "He is dangerous—we cannot allow him to roam at large," seems to be the by-word when those in authority scent the first suggestion of a Thought in a student's mind. "Amen," chant all the professors in unison, with bowed heads. And the next morning, the thinking student is missing from the breakfast table.

I trust that a dear friend of mine will pardon me for quoting him here—but I must. "The philosophy of the dominant group can never be the true philosophy of the subordinate group. It cannot work the same for both!"

Many Negro colleges are propagating the philosophy that has placed and kept the white man in the ascendancy. This same doctrine has kept the colored Americans at the back door and in the kitchen sink! It has also kept us in the background when rulers of thought and leaders of world movements congregate. If we continue to swallow this sugar-coated poison, all hope for us is lost.

*Negro students need a new creed!* They need a creed that will lead the way to racial solidarity, man-to-man equality, and economic independence! And I believe that it is the duty of the Negro college to produce and to emphasize such a creed. This duty they are not performing.

Who has not heard about the new Negro? Many books are being written about him; lectures are broadcast concerning his debut. He is supposed to represent the new and most recent trend in Negro life and culture. He comes usually from the college group. I have met him!

He talks with a new accent, he walks with a new stride, he goes to a new million-dollar college, he spends new money—but his thoughts and his philosophy are old . . . and white . . . ancient and fair, as the Anglo-Saxon who gave them to him, with blue eyes and flaxen hair!

Those thoughts keep him from earning a decent living. We are losing ground every single day economically. Yet those who are supposed to prepare us for life apparently see no need of a change! Must the heavens cave in upon us before we look up? Capable and intellectual Negro teachers, who could point out the way if they chose, surround themselves with an impenetrable armor of angles, progressions, and proverbs, as if to say, "God's in His heaven and all's right with the world." All is not right with the Negro world! Text-book teaching alone cannot fit a student for present day living conditions. The old order is prepared to yield place to the new—but there is no new in sight!

I wonder how many heads of Negro colleges, when they receive a gift of money from some philanthropist, ask for jobs for their graduates in the stores and factories of these men. If you heave a man overboard in mid-ocean and have not taught him to swim, nor provided a life preserver for him until he can learn to keep afloat, you must expect him to drown. Unless, of course, a whale should miraculously happen along. But there are no miraculous whales in the world of trade and finance for the Negro youth today. Jonah's day is far removed. Schools must teach their students to swim—or watch them drown!

In a poll of my classmates, a few days before graduation day, I discovered that 85% of them intended to teach! They



apparently realized that they could do nothing else. They shrank from the prospect that faced them. On the other hand they were certainly not trained and equipped to make good teachers. But if they had known how to go about reaching other objectives, they would not have allowed themselves to be forced into the "vicious circle." For poor teachers must reflect themselves in their students.

In short, the situation resolves itself to this pitiful condition: The vast amounts of money and time spent for college education by Negroes should produce young men and women more prepared to meet what they will surely face the day after Commencement.

Some one may ask if the student is not to blame when he makes a bad showing; a natural question. But we fail to see how he could be. He admits his unpreparedness for life when he enrolls with the registrar. He places himself at the mercy of the instructors in his chosen institution. He slaves during vacation times, and often between classes to relieve his strained financial condition. He is loyal, bears no slights upon the name of his school, makes it a part of him, and gives the best that is in him because he expects something in return.

Does this not place an obligation upon the school? It seems to me that it does. If so, then the school must share in the success or failure of the graduate. The student should find himself before leaving school. When he does not, the responsibility must rest upon the school's doorstep. The rule must work both ways. Fisk University claims a share in the glory that the fame of Roland Hayes' artistry has produced; every school is proud to sing the praises of its successful sons and daughters; it should, therefore, take the blame for those whom it does not inspire.

Thus we have attempted to present the impressions that have been forced upon us during the two years spent outside college walls. Many will not agree with anything said, but from the black-gowned lines, which go forth at Commencement time every year, we do not doubt but that our feeble discourse will find hearty endorsement.

Another day of judgment has passed. We have welcomed the newcomers, and pitied them at the same time. We know that they have an abundance of knowledge. We have welcomed them because we need them and the stimulus that their unshattered illusions will give us . . . . But we pity them because we know in advance that their knowledge is musty, moth-eaten, heavy, unwieldy, ineffective, impractical. *THEY HAVE TOO MUCH OF NOTHING!*