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“African Free Schools in the United States,” *Freedom’s Journal, June 1, 1827*

NEW YORK, June 1

We recommend to the attentive perusal of our brethren, the Communication from our correspondent. He writes upon the subject which concerns our character as a people. The great increase of intemperance and its attendant evils, has called forth the exertions of the good and virtuous to stay its desolating progress; and we agree entirely with our correspondent, in thinking there can be no time more suitable for the formation of a Society for the prevention of Intemperance, than that glorious day which gives liberty and all its blessings, to a portion of our brethren, and renders them free and independent as the God of Nature formed them.

African Free Schools in the United States

Perhaps we cannot better exemplify the truth of our foregoing remarks, than by presenting our readers, to the best of our knowledge, with a list of African Free Schools. These facts will speak more eloquently than any remarks of ours, to the mind of the philanthropist. They at once shew, that many things at which men of *Common Minds* wonder, viewed in connexion with their causes; have nothing in them of any extraordinary nature. Can the husbandman, if his fields be neglected during the time of ploughing and sowing, expect a harvest? Can the mind of man, neglected during his youth, appear in after-life cultivated? It may be expedient to the premise, that we have thought it unnecessary to mention other places than those of note, where the coloured population is considerable. But to our list,

Portland, ME., with coloured population of nine hundred, provides once school, for the education of their children, under the care of a mistress. Better things are in progress.

Boston, Mass. With a coloured population of two thousand, provides (assisted by the liberal donation of the late Abiel Smith, Esq.) three schools for the instruction of their children, viz. two Primary, under the care of African female teachers, and a Grammar School under a master. As we have more than once referred to the donation of Mr. Smith, perhaps a better chance may not occur for gratifying the curiosity of our readers. (Abiel Smith, Esq. Of Boston, left by will, for the support of a school for African children, \$4,000 of three per cent. stock; thirty shares in the Newburyport Turnpike; thirty shares in the Second New Hampshire Turnpike; seventeen shares in the Kennebeck Bridge; five shares in the Bridge at Tiverton, R.I., and five in the Bathing House. Boston. – Notes to Dr. Harris’ sermon before the African Society.)

Salem, Mass. With a coloured population of four hundred, put a school into operation the last year, for th education of their children, but from causes unkown to us, closed it after six months.

New Haven, Conn., with a coloured population of eight hundred, provides two schools, during *three months* in the year, under the care of a master and mistress.

Providence, R.I., with a coloured population of fifteen hundred, and *Hartford, Conn.*, with five hundred provide none.

Philadelphia, with a coloured population of twenty thousand, provides *three* schools for the instruction of their children, under the care of four teachers.

New-York, with a coloured population of fifteen thousand, provides *two* schools for the instruction of their children, under the care of a master and mistress. Parents, we learn, who are able, are obliged to pay one dollar per quarter for each child.

We need not mention the names of any other places, as we know of no other schools. Seeing then, that the schools now in operation, for the education of our children, are so few and imperfect; ought *others* to wonder, that not many after arriving at manhood, are fitted to take a respectable stand in society. What are the advantages to be derived from an instruction in these schools, compared to those of a higher and more elevated nature? What are the incentives held out to a lad of colour? Are there higher schools to stimulate him to greater exertions? Is he placed, and considered, an equal with other boys in schools of the same rank? Do the committees of trustees, expect him to be as well grounded in the elementary branches? A little smattering, and a few words recommendatory from his teacher, are all they look for from a boy of colour. The very idea of his colour, is enough to elicit praise from his learned visitors, when the same exercise performed as well by another boy, would pass unnoticed, and be considered as a thing of course.

We suspect, it is unnecessary to mention, that much depends upon the teacher, as well as the pupil. We are so skeptical, that we cannot believe, that almost *any one* is qualified to keep a school for our children. Enemies may declaim upon their dullness and stupidity; but we would respectfully enquire, had they not had dull and stupid instructors; who, if placed in any other than a coloured school would hardly be considered as earning *their salt*: but we must be silent, as any one who possesses a few qualifications (unnecessary to be here named) is, in the general estimation, fit to keep a school for us. We protest against such silence; and shew our sincerity, shall continually raise our feeble voice against the unequal advantages for education enjoyed by our children: and though upon the community at large, this may have little effect; yet we trust, there will be found, some 'unjust judges' who wearied with us may strive in real earnest to do something for their education.

Let our children and youth be but once convinced, that as much is expected from them as from other boys of the same standing; let the elementary branches most essential to the business of after-life, be well fixed in their young minds; (neglecting exercises not of immediate practical use for a later period;) let public committees and trustees visit their respective schools more frequently, and examine more thoroughly; and see that teachers

do not keep their pupils unprofitably employed, or exercised upon the same rules in Arithmetic and Grammar, or upon the same map in Geography for a *show-off* against the visitation day, which may not take place more than once or twice a year. Let these *necessaria* be done, and, no good result from their operation; and then shall we be convinced that really we are of a *different species* and not variety, and that the Creator has, in his providence, designed us for “hewers of wood” and “drawers of water,” and “beasts of burden,” for our fairer brethren.

Writers, old and young, are fond of exclaiming, that “there is a wide difference in point of intellect between the African and the European. It is in vain to plead the degraded condition of the Negro—had not nature dealt out her gifts to him with a sparing hand, we should not have remained so long without evidence of her liberality. There are some thousands of free blacks in America, but no one has ever given the least indication of an elevated mind.” Taking it for granted, that the above refers more immediately to the United States, we call upon the advocate of the system to point us to one *individual* who has enjoyed to the full extent all the privileges of his fairer brethren. Though there are thousands of free people of colour in this country, yet to them the seats of knowledge have ever been as the temple of Janus in a time of peace. We will not enumerate the causes of their exclusion. They are well known. In South America and Hayti where the man of colour is seen in all the dignity of man, freed from the prejudices, and endowed with the rights, and enjoying all the privileges of citizenship, we behold him not a whit inferior to any of his fairer brethren. Conscious of his dignity, he acts and feels himself a man. It is much easier for men to declaim, that things in their narrow conception of them, do not happen, than to investigate and maturely weigh the causes, which strike the man of cultivated taste as the only existing difficulty. The human mind fits itself to its situation, and to the demands which are made upon its energies. Debased and lowered beneath the standard of men, what incentives have we for action? No matter what his merits, not matter what his claims, not matter what his character, the man of colour sees himself and friends treated as the most contemptible vagrants and all for what? Because nature has stained him somewhat darker than common.

Conscious of the unequal advantages enjoyed by our children, we feel indignant against those who are continually vituperating us for the ignorance and degradation of our people. Let the most intelligent people on earth be enslaved for ages—let them be deprived of all means of acquiring knowledge—let their very name be considered a byword through the land—and we venture to assert, that we should behold beings, as ignorant, degraded, and dead to every noble feeling, as our brethren. But well wishers as we are for the dissemination of knowledge, we never desire such to be the contemptible situation of any people. Were wishes of any avail, ours would be the enlightening of all nations—the spread of true principles of liberty and equality.

Notwithstanding all the evils under which we labour, did our brethren but feel the importance of a good education being bestowed among every member of society, how different would be the after-years of many of our children! Duly enlightened and qualified to perform the duties of a citizen (though denied the opportunity) their whole life might reflect credit upon our community; and serve to extinguish many prejudices

which arise from our ignorance, depravity, and want or propriety. The world of a certainty is daily growing more enlightened, and we must advance also, if we wish not to remain where our fathers did before us.

Having exposed, in our feeble manner, the great deficiency at present existing as it regards to schools for the education of our children and youth; we invoke the aid of all the friends of humanity in all quarters of this extensive country, to come forward and use their endeavours, for the establishment of schools for our too-long neglected people.

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