

The Union League Club of Philadelphia has lately been considering the subject of National Education or as some timid-minded people are wont to phrase it National Aid to Education. The former term is significant--the latter is utterly meaningless unless it be to signify thereby a loose-jointed system for doing nothing at immense cost, such as is represented by some of the half-considered bills which are now pending before both Houses of Congress. Very much has been said by the Party now in power upon this subject, especially during the last two years. The Republican platform of 1860 expressly pledged the Party to active steps in this direction and nothing contained in that platform received such universal approval in all sections and from all classes as this new feature. The writer was upon the stump in twelve different states during that campaign and gave his almost undivided attention to that single provision. He found it everywhere received with approval. The President nominated at Chicago gave fully one-third of his inaugural address to the consideration of this subject. His successor also commended it warmly to the consideration of Congress in his first message to that body. Five bills are now pending in Congress upon the subject only one of which is worthy of a moment's consideration and that is not likely to receive it. This bill differs especially from all the others in that it proposes to make the disbursement of national funds designed to promote education directly to the schools themselves and not to cast the money broadcast into the treasuries of the different states to be frittered away in useless schemes or made the shuttle-cock of hungry politicians,

scheming for place and power. Its chief defect lies in the fact that the machinery for carrying its purpose into effect is unnecessarily and shamefully cumbrous and expensive. All the work for which it provided might be infinitely better done at one-tenth the cost. These are the promises which the Republican Party has made in regard to the most momentous question that has ever been presented to the American People, saving only the question of abolishing slavery. It has done absolutely nothing. It has sixteen more days of legislative power before it. Besides some of the regular appropriations it has the tariff to adjust and a River and Harbor log-rolling job to ~~perform~~ carry through which makes it folly to suppose that anything will be done upon the subject at this session. What then is the object and purpose of considering the subject at this time. We are told by the worthy gentlemen who have volunteered to take the subject in hand that the purpose is to create a public feeling at the North in favor of educating the ignorance at the South and a public sentiment at the South in favor of education. With respect to the first of these objects it is simply a work of supererogation. An overwhelming majority of the people of the North are all ready in favor of doing anything that can be done to enlighten the ignorance of the South. In a vote upon this issue alone I do not hesitate to affirm that a two-thirds majority of the electors of any Northern State would to-day favor expenditures twice as liberal as those contemplated by any <sup>bill</sup> ~~act~~ now pending before the National Legislature. So too with regard to the other result proposed to be effected by the gentlemen who have

Hitherto discussed this matter before the Club. I submit that the desire for education is far more general at the South than it is ordinarily supposed to be. In the first place we may cut off from the number of those who need to be inspired with a desire for knowledge the whole of that class who stand most in need of it--the colored people of the South. The colored man or woman who does not honestly desire that their children shall be taught all that possibly can acquire is so rare that he may almost be said to be yet undiscovered. To this we may add <sup>a very considerable portion</sup> ~~by far the~~ <sup>^</sup> ~~greater~~ class of the intelligent whites. Of these there are it is true a considerable number who while in believing in education for themselves are opposed to the education of the masses and to these must be added perhaps a majority of the ignorant lower classes of the whites who care nothing about education for themselves or anybody else. As an instance of the first of these classes I might cite a Southern writer--a young lady whose literary achievements are among the most creditable that her section has lately produced and whose business capacity has been exhibited in a singularly successful management of a plantation which is under her sole charge, who in writing to me not long since observed: "I solemnly believe that the two greatest evils of this country to-day are free schools and fences, meaning by the latter the legal requirement of a fence to protect a growing crop. Yet it is unquestionably true of the South as of the North that upon a free ballot and a fair count an overwhelming majority of the votes would be found in favor of National Aid to Common Schools."

Why then has nothing been done and what is there to be done to secure legislation upon this subject? For National Aid to Education as National action in any other respect depends upon legislative provision in its favor. Nothing has been done because no party has hitherto been fully satisfied that its success or failure in the next election depended upon its advocacy of this movement. Our government is one of majorities. Majorities are controlled by parties and parties act only upon the inspiration of expected success. Unless moved and dominated by an uncontrollable conviction in the minds of the rank and file of which they are composed in favor of some particular dogma. Parties follow always the lead of the people at a most respectful distance. They shy at new things like a blind horse travelling an unaccustomed horse. They never enter upon new fields of their own accord. They have to be pushed forward by a power that is either known or guessed at by the leader. Why then if this sentiment be in a majority both at the North and at the South has no party adopted it in earnest? Simply because the people never move of their own accord and never compel parties to move upon the simple conviction of right or preference. The people may be almost a unit upon a matter which may never become a subject of political action at all. Our American Conservatism consists not in veneration of what is or what has been but simply in letting every thing alone until the very last possible minute --the fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour. We move as a people in any political matter only when an overpowering necessity compels us to move. We let enough alone always. It is only

when swift and otherwise unavoidable peril threatens that we finally act. This was never so well illustrated as in the outset of the great rebellion. Unquestionably a vast majority of the people of the North desired the extinction of slavery. No doubt a fair majority entertained a positive conviction of its impolicy, injustice and unrighteousness. Yet it was not until even the dullest brain perceived that in no other manner could rebellion be overthrown, that these very people were willing that the hand of the nation should be laid upon the throat of slavery. No movement ever received the spontaneous, emphatic and effective approval of the masses of our people so as to compel the assent of parties and the action of majorities until it is clearly recognized as a necessity either of national existence or national prosperity.

Our friends who have presented this subject hitherto and nearly all of the interested directly or indirectly in <sup>the</sup>ely-  
 mesnary educational work at the south. They are connected with Church boards, educational societies or charitable institutions of learning and their views upon this subject are of necessity colored in no slight degree by their relations to such humanitarian work. They are missionaries striving earnestly in a good cause. They feel that education is a necessity to the ignorant man. They bring an imposing array of figures to show that the educated man is worth more to himself than the illiterate. They demonstrate for us that ignorance is the father of no little vice and crime. They establish beyond question that no more beneficent work was ever undertaken than the enlightenment of that

mass of ignorance which prevails at the South. All this is well. I honor them for the sentiment; I cordially endorse the work in which they are engaged, but to teach this doctrine to the people is only to carry coals to Newcastle. It is to convince those who are already converted. It is merely to confirm the opinion that four out of five men of the North already entertain. Something more than merely proving that the education of the Southern masses would be a good thing; a beneficent thing and in the ultimate a wise thing is necessary in order to induce the ~~masses~~ ~~of the North~~ ~~to~~ and demand that it shall be done; be done by the Nation and done now!. An overwhelming necessity must first ~~again~~ be shown. The People must be convinced not only that it is a good thing to do but that it is a perilous thing to leave undone.

Again. Our good friends <sup>who are</sup> ~~were~~ leaders in the Churches accustomed to view things from the moral standpoint only and who shrink in horror from what is termed the dirty pool of politics are constant in their declaration that this question of national aid to common-schools is not and must not become a political question. They desire to secure governmental action without employing the forces by which our government is controlled. They desire to introduce a sort of political millenium where the lion and the lamb shall quietly lie down together and the question shall be put from the speaker's desk and all shall answer with one accord Aye!. No good measure has yet prevailed after that fashion in our Republic. Even to establish common schools in the State of Pennsylvania required one of the fiercest struggles

ever known in her politics and was only secured in an evenly divided legislature by the action of one member who bartered his vote in the organization to give his State a free-school system. The better the cause the fiercer the struggle. For fifty years every politician declared that slavery was not and could not be a political issue. It was not until 1844 that ~~the~~ the advocates of abolition even dared attempt to make it such. Temperance fought upon the extra-political ground until its advocates found after years of failure that if they wished to obtain anything of value they must go into the arena where power is striven for and fight it out with their opponents. Every body is in favor of temperance and always has been. There was never any question as to drunkenness being an evil, but until parties were compelled to be for or against; until the advocates of temperance came with a formulated demand and the power to kill or make alive they were unable to try the experiment of legal ~~repression~~ restraint or legislative repression of that evil, so I say this question of National Education must become a political question before any effective legislation will be secured in regard thereto. One party of the other must take hold of it in dead earnest to save themselves from defeat or win victory from a formidable opponent before anything will be done worth considering towards this end. That it is not now a question upon which issue is joined between the two parties I freely admit; that it must become such in the near future I have not a particle doubt, but before it becomes such the people of the country must be convinced beyond a

shadow of doubt that it is a matter of immediate and imperative necessity.

Can this be shown? Already upon this subject I have written two volumes which I may say without boasting have been read by millions of the American people. I address myself to is consideration again with that peculiar pleasure with which one always recurs to a train of thought to which he has given the best years of his manhood after having been for a time diverted therefrom.

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