

Chapel March 1, 1927
President Wright

Raw

This morning I want to call your attention to at least one matter that is going on in the General Assembly. It seems to me that at last our legislative body has taken up what to me is the most fundamental question that has confronted them during this whole session. They have at last started a real movement in the legislature to give all of the children in our state an equal educational opportunity for the school term of the Constitutional limit, and to do that at an equal burden on all of the people of the state.

You ought to read the daily newspapers each day, and keep up with what is going on in this present General Assembly. I do not know just what they are going to do, and they do not know, but they are at least attempting to see to it that for the Constitutional term in North Carolina ~~that~~ the children of North Carolina shall be given an equal educational opportunity. There is a movement, and it is a very strong movement to make an appropriation of four million dollars for the Equalizing Fund so as to help that county that pays \$1.40 tax bring its school system up to that county that has to pay only 27¢ tax, and the movement is to equalize the taxes in all of the counties, and to appoint a commission to put the value on property so as to make it uniform throughout the state, that is, in all of the one hundred counties of the state, and to put the school tax on property in proportion to its real worth; in other words, have a state board of assessors to assess the property for this particular tax, not for the county taxes. The counties may assess their property in any way they want to, but have a uniform assessment for this school tax so when it comes to the question of school taxes, the people will pay the same proportion throughout the state. That is a good movement. It means to give the children an equal opportunity, and to cause the property owners to pay exactly the same proportion, then to give what is needed to help the county with small values bring its schools up to the schools in the county of much wealth. That money will come out of the four million dollars known as the Equalizing Fund. That

is the proposition that is before the legislature now, and they are working on it faithfully. They are even advocating and probably will pass a five million dollar equalizing fund. I hope they will do it, because to me that is the biggest thing they can do.

They have held up the Permanent Improvement Bill and have taken in its stead what is known as the Maintenance Appropriation Bill and making that the first issue, and I think they are right in that, because this Equalizing Fund will go in that Maintenance Appropriation Bill. I am certainly delighted to see that they are taking this turn. I don't know what they are going to do, but at least the children of North Carolina have some friends in the legislature and that is always encouraging.

I have been talking to you about some tendencies in a republic, and while we are on this subject of education it might be interesting for us to stop and think for just a minute together this morning about a tendency that is nationwide with reference to the public schools and to the colleges. The children in America are required to go to school. I believe every state in the Union, I am not quite sure of this statement, but I believe every state in the Union has a compulsory education law, certainly almost all of them have. That means that a child is required by law to go to school, not necessarily to the public school; a parent may send his child to a church school or to a private school, but the child must go to school, is required to go to school. I wonder how much that compulsory education law has to do with the fact that boys and girls, the youth of the country, are striving to get into college in such large numbers. The increase in the last twenty-five years is simply phenomenal. It is almost incredible how much larger per cent of the boys and girls of America are trying to get in college today than were trying to get in twenty-five years ago, and I am wondering if this compulsory education law hasn't had a great deal to do with it. I hope it has. I believe it has. I have never heard any one express this opinion, so it is original. It is

mine, but you can have it and use it in any way you wish to. If a child is brought up with a law that says he must go to school, don't you see how that within itself will make the child feel that going to school is a very, very important thing. The state of North Carolina makes my father send me to school, whether he wants to or not, and if he doesn't send me to school, some one will come around and get papa and take him to the Court House and say to him, "We will see to it that you send that boy to school, or you will pay us for it." The boy sees that, the girl sees that. The state is saying to the children of America, "Education is one of the big things of your life", and let a child come up through the grades and into high school with that concept, ~~it is a good thing, it is a very important thing~~ and he is going to feel that it is very important for him to get an education. That is a good thing. It is one of the reactions to a law that was not enacted for that purpose at all, but was enacted because a democracy is not safe if it is in the hands of illiterate people. Every thinking man and thinking woman in America realizes that the safety of a democracy is dependent upon the intelligence of its citizenship. A democracy rests upon the people and for a democracy to be intelligent the people must be educated, and that is the reason for this compulsory education law, but it also gives to youth a great realization of the importance in his life of getting the best preparation for mature years possible. I believe it is having a great deal to do with the number who want to go go to school. I don't think it is altogether due to that. I think the children of today are smarter than their parents were, ^{I hope mine are} and I ^{were} hope you are smarter than your fathers and mothers, but I hope you won't act like you think you are. I believe every generation is smarter than the preceding generation, ~~and~~ I believe the great world conflict has given the youth of today a realization of the importance of being well prepared for the responsibilities that are soon to rest upon them. I believe the boys and girls in America realize that we are not living in the same world we were living in ten years ago, the requirements of today are much greater upon the youth of today, than the requirements of yesterday were upon the youth of that day. And the requirements of tomorrow will be greater

upon the youth of tomorrow than the requirements are upon the youth of today. I believe the people realize that. I think it is one of the most hopeful signs. In fact, I think it is right there that we are going to save the democracy that we live in, and make it a safe place for people to live. I believe it is right there in that educational problem that we are going to solve our social, our industrial, our commercial, yes, all of our problems. I believe they are going to be solved through the proper education of the youth of today, and it certainly is encouraging to see how the youth of today is responding and begging for the opportunity to go to school. We are building colleges all over America, and building them more rapidly than we ever have before, and still they are too small. We haven't enough. We are going to keep right on building them until every boy and every girl in America has the opportunity to make the most possible out of his life.

It is because of all this that I feel so much encouraged to see the legislature taking the turn it is taking with a determined fight to see that the children of today throughout the whole state of North Carolina shall be given an equal opportunity, - the child in the poor county with the child in the rich county. If that comes, then all the rest of our educational problems will soon solve themselves.