

CHAPEL - May 10, 1927.

Robert H. Wright

I want to talk to you this morning on the subject of what to do with the knots,- what to do with the knots.

When I was a boy living out in the country on the farm one of my duties was to get kindling wood, and I found out that the knots were the best part of the tree for kindling wood; although it was a knot it was the best part, and so I developed more or less respect for knots, hard knots, those rich in the things that are necessary to make good kindling wood.

The other day, on Friday of last week, I had the pleasure of going through a pulp mill, a paper mill, a mill where they make the kind of paper that is used in all of the stores as wrapping paper. It was most interesting to me. I had read about making paper and had some idea about it. The gentleman who was showing us through asked me how much I knew about it and I told him that I knew practically all that had been written about it, but that I wanted to learn something more. He said, "I thought a school teacher could learn anything he wanted to learn by reading about it", and I answered, "We are just as human as you are. Our knowledge puts us in a position to know how to go and see and do and learn the things that we want to learn." He took us through the entire mill. We saw them making pulp and separating the knots from the pulp, taking out that part of the wood that will not make paper, and treating the rest of it. I learned something that I did not know; that is, the rapidity with which the machine works and the amount of water put in determine the weight of the paper. After we had gone through the mill and seen the whole process clean down to paper ready to be sold we came out of the mill, and there was a large pile of waste that had been thrown away. I suppose there was half enough to fill this entire room. I said, "Aren't you afraid this will catch fire and burn". The gentleman who was with us said, "It will not burn. It is too wet. We are waiting for a machine that has been invented, and we are going to run this waste through that machine and put it in condition to be put back into the mill and be made into paper. We call this the

knots". We picked some of it up and looked at it and saw that it was made up of hard pieces of wood that had not been converted into pulp.

They say in Denmark, "We fertilize our farms with brains." Lee Frank I believe it was, who put it that way. By educating their people they have taught them how to save and to grow everything that can be made on a farm in Denmark. They have made Denmark, in places almost barren, one of the rich places of the world, and it is all because the people of Denmark have used their heads to help solve their problems. This is what Frank meant when he said that they fertilize their farms with brains. He did not mean that they killed their horses and cows, etc., and used their brain tissue for fertilizer.

I put these two things together and thought it would be worth something to you and to me. We have organized the public school system in America with the idea of educating all the children, with the idea of bringing up in the world an educated citizenship. This is really at the bottom of the educational system. When this system was put into effect we had no idea of education other than that which prepares boys and girls for college, so all the schools were organized on the basis of preparing students to enter college to take the regular old line college classical work, and the result was that in America at least ninety percent of the people were thrown out as knots. In the paper mill they would not do that kind of educating. The problem which we are called upon to solve is this: Is the public school system organized to education all the children of all the people, and if so what do we mean by education?

Mike, who was an exceptionally good engineer, heard a man make a speech on universal education, giving the definition of education as that kind of training in school that helps a boy or a girl to use his/^{or her} training in his job. This engineer said to the speaker afterward, "What you mean by an educated man is a man who can do his job". The speaker said, "Yes, I believe you have summed it up in fewer words than I used".

We are beginning to get a concept of public education that is different from the old idea of carrying boys and girls to college. We are beginning to realize that the knots in the timber are just as valuable as that part that will easily go into the making of paper, and we are beginning to work on the problem of public education from

the view point of every boy and every girl who comes into the school. That may bring about a change in your concept of your duty as a public school teacher. If there is a boy or a girl in your school who has no interest in this particular subject are you going to turn him or her out of all the trade work because of this weakness in, I will say, mathematics? (If I were talking to a group of boys I should say grammar. They usually dislike grammar, but girls are more often weak in mathematics.) If this child is not strong in mathematics are you going to hold him in the grade year after year until he gets diggusted and drops out of school? Are you going to take that child and put him over there in the knot pile? I do not think we ought to do it.

** There is a record of a boy in the United States (He is a man now.) who was expelled from the grades three or four times. They would keep him for a short time in each of the schools he entered and he would do something mean, so they say. I do not believe it. They called him absolutely incorrigible and put him out. There happened to be in the city in which he lived a superintendent who had a big heart and loved people. He said, "John, is there anything in the public schools anywhere that you would like to study? If there is anything in the public schools that you want to do you may do it". The boy answered, "Yes, I want to study chemistry", and the superintendent said, "All right, you may study chemistry". He put the boy in the chemistry class of the high school and he was absolutely facinated with chemistry. Before that year was out that boy worked nearly a week at one time, sleeping in the laboratory because he was carrying on an experiment and wanted to attend to it when the time came. He worked his way on through school, studying chemistry and not the regular course. He did not give anybody any trougle. When he was ready to leave high school the superintendent asked him, "Now what do you want to do?", and he answered, "I want to go where I can get more chemistry. The superintendent took the matter up with a liberal-minded college president and got him admitted to the chemistry class. The last time I heard anything about this boy he was making more money than the superintendent or the college president as a first class chemist. This is one case where a knot that had been thrown out was picked up by a man who loved folks and run through the mill again.

Now, what we want to do in our school work is to mix brain with it so that we

can find another machine, as they do for the paper at Roanoke Rapids, and take the pile of knots and rework them and get out of them all that it is possible to get.

What are you going to do with that boy or that girl who comes to school to you, but does not fit into the regime? Do not kick him or her out, but find out what it is that that human being wants to do, and be human. Do that. If they cannot take the entire course we do not want to kick them out. They are human beings. You will find in the knot pile some who will make prominent citizens and good people.

** From All The Children of All The People - Smith