

MEMPHIS DAILY AVALANCHE.

September 25, 1887

THE COLORED SCHOOLS AGAIN.

Prof. Sampson Replies To Some Strictures Upon Them.

He Sets Himself Right in the Mixed School Controversy -- The Progress of Pupils.

The Avalanche makes room at considerable cost of space for Prof. Sampson's reply to certain criticisms made upon him in its columns. The communication which follows ends the matter as far as this paper is concerned:

Editor Avalanche -- Please allow me to notice an article which appeared in your paper some days ago claiming to be written in the interest of the colored schools, but in fact written in sheer vindictiveness, through malignant intent, and in blind retaliation of some imaginary injustice in matters of the school and our board of commissioners. I was just leaving the city for Chattanooga when my attention was called to the article, and since my return I find this my first opportunity to reply.

I regret that Rev. Mr. Wilkins has allowed himself to become inveigled in a matter about which he seems to know so little. Being almost a total stranger among the people, one may wonder why he should seek notoriety at a sacrifice of truth and honor. But it is generally so that designing men choose to use the weaker ones whom they would beguile, in order to carry out that from which they would themselves shrink. I therefore accord him the attitude he has taken in the premises, and invoke the considerate judgment of the better people of this community, who entertain a just interest in all that concerns the city of Memphis.

Some time in the early part of the spring Rev. Mr. Wilkins called at my school, stopping at the outer door, and informed me that he had taken the liberty to announce through the papers that I would lead in a discussion at his church Friday evening of that week, advocating mixed schools. The intentional design was, as it seemed then, to have me render myself obnoxious to the citizens of this community with a view of subserving the scheming machinations of those in whose hands he had placed himself. I declined the invitation, and speaking to our teachers, remonstrated against the freedom with

Continuation: The Colored Schools Again Sept., 25, 1887

which my name was used in this connection. For this remonstrance I have incurred the displeasure of Rev. Mr. Wilkins, who, under the pretext of looking after the interest of our schools, vents his spleen against me.

From the very morning that Rev. Mr. Wilkins called on me in regard to the mixed school question I have had no talk with him touching his attack upon me in the Avalanche. And again, because I could not find it convenient to become a member of his church lyceum, I am informed that he bitterly complained that he would use his influence against all such fellows.

Now, I insist that Rev. Wilkins is not honest, is not sincere in the motives which he professes. If he were, accustomed as he is to newspaper controversy, he would show no disposition to abuse and misrepresent me. I have never known him to visit the school in which I am a teacher, and he has never, never sought from me any special information as to our work. He chooses not to know for himself through me but to rely upon the information of others. He has avoided in his article to give us credit for what has been accomplished in our schools, at the same time making me responsible for the entire management of the colored schools when he well knows that I am only in control of a single building. Grudgingly he withholds from us the merest good thing which we have done, reposing himself in monumental ignorance, as if our patrons and the public were blind to such double dealing.

But the truth or falsity of a proposition does not always depend upon the intention of its advocate. Even the order of cause and effect is frequently mistaken by forming conversely the sophism of confounding the two when they appear simultaneously or when they mutually produce each other. We very often accept agreeable falsehood to interpret the language of others to square with our own views, and reject truth according as it suits or does not suit our wishes.

In the comparison which he makes between the white and colored schools it may, therefore, be asked, is it fair, is it just? He disregards the cause of heredity; ignores the influence of environment; nullifies the processes of growth and development, and even shifts the duties and obligations belonging to the parent upon me.

The white children are today several centuries in the lead of the colored child, and to say nothing of their many

Continuation: The Colored Schools Again Sept., 25, 1887

home advantages and appointments they have inherited from their parents mental stamina, cultivated brain force, have learned to think and to study, and are required to prepare their lessons at home. Few of the less favored race have attained to the same degree this end. The essential need in the colored schools is sticktoitiveness, perserverance and self-application.

Certainly the native powers of the colored child are of a remarkably high order. God has endowed him with attributes of mind susceptible of the highest possible culture, but his faculties are not yet braced and spurred by like aspirations and powers. He sees no counting-rooms, no Merchants Exchange, nor business houses inviting him to hurry on. Our youths enter society sooner and their minds are diverted from hard study and mental labor.

The festival and the ball-room consume much valuable time that belongs to the school. Our entertainments and public amusements are more general and frequent and do much to divert attention from books. Our parlors are not yet supplied with splendid libraries and we are not in a true sense of reading people. We have not yet acquired a full knowledge of the value of education. We are not so uniform in our habits of life; we are irregular in our hours for retiring. Besides, we are poor, and when the weather is inclement we do not come out as readily as the whites. Under these depressing influences we find it impossible to secure that uniform and full attendance which is given the white schools. We cannot expect in our present starting to equal or outstrip those who themselves by gradual and sure discipline have gathered so well the elements of actual growth. The conditions of life admit of minds of all dimensions, and people of all nations, and whatever is to be supplied to us will come as they have come to other races. But does the Rev. Wilkins think to ingratiate himself into the graces of the white people by commending their schools, while he spits upon his own? Would he have them believe that the school board is not competent to know and determine upon the results? Does not such conduct betray the phase of a sycophancy that is simply ludicrous? that these characteristics of fawning so peculiar to some of our people should be thus practiced surreptitiousy.

Continuation: The Colored Schools Again Sept., 25, 1887

I am asked: "Why have the colored people no high school? For several years we have had what is known as the higher grades, the same as are taught in the colored schools of Knoxville, Nashville, Chattanooga, Kansas City and other places. I have visited the schools of these cities and I have ascertained that these schools have not in some respects accomplished results commensurate with out own. Far back, as far as thirty years ago, colored people were being educated in the State of Kentucky. Enoch Seales taught them in Lexington and William Gibson taught them in Louisville, while Berea College stood with open doors to receive them. But these cities have not exceeded their opportunities. Rev. Wilkins knows that he is actuated from a feeling of malignity; he knows that he is dishonest and malicious in his heartless design to strike Memphis and her colored teachers from the roll of successful competition with other cities. Pupils of my own training are today employed as teachers in some of the first cities in Kentucky, especially Louisville.

Mr. G.G. Marcus, one of our most acceptable teachers in our city schools, is a splendid example of perseverance and determination. After completing the grammar grade he at once entered upon the study of the higher grades. He remained in school and accomplished what he has, like others might have done.

Alexander Ferguson, Ellis Isabel and Jefferson Martin completed the grammar grade and stood high above the others as scholars. Scores have done the same, as may be seen from reports at the office of the board of education. Some of these are engaged in the work of teaching, not only in Tennessee and adjoining states, but in almost every state in the South. This I know from letters of correspondence. And it can be attested by white citizens of our city who have had them in their service, that some of them have shown themselves adapts in making collections and keeping book accounts. Recently three of our pupils, having completed the grades, entered institutes abroad and ranked first in their classes.

Wilberforce, Rust and Roger Williams gave testimonials of this fact. Two at Roger Williams, led their classes soon after leaving us and one took the prize of the class. There in a competitive examination in our city made the highest per cent., and received state scholarships granted by the

Continuation: The Colored Schools Again Sept., 25, 1887

legislature. Still my assailant chooses to remain in sublime ignorance of anything done by our pupils. He would overshadow the faithful few of our dear pupils with a cloud of despair and rob them of their hard-earned honors. During the past scholastic year two young ladies, Miss Abbie Weir and Miss Lucile Washington, nearly completing these high school or higher grades, being obliged to quit school that they might be a means of help to their parents, presented themselves for examination to a place in the city schools. They obtained creditable certificates and have been elected as teachers. How sinister in motive that a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a stranger in our midst should rush into public print to say to the people that which is contrary to all truth, that the pupils of my school have been tramping round and round for sixteen years in the lower grades. How exasperating the intent to fabricate the falsehood that our pupils have been kept in one room from four to eight years, when it is well known that we are continually making promotions at every turn of the session!

Rev. Wilkins lifts the mask and reveals the true intent of his heart when he slanders me with the imputation that I am controlled by a dirty ring; that at the instance "of political leeches I have prepared papers for ignorant applicants," will he name them? Will he show to the public that he is practising no deception, but that he means what he says? I demand that he name a single person for whom I have prepared papers. But the import and meaning of Rev. Wilkin's action in this matter culminate in the recent election of teachers. This is the cause of his article. And for this he lends his influence to punish me in retaliation for the mischief which others, through their own indiscretion, have brought upon themselves. Goaded to desperation, he joins in a tirade of abuse against our teachers, and brands them as empty-headed and conceited fops. Why does he choose to do this? Will he answer? Our young men age gentlemanly and polite to all, and do not merit the application of such epithets. And because the printer, perchance, attaches to one of their names the title, "Professor," it shows a very little mind to berate them for a thing so trivial, we had heretofore believed Rev. Wilkins too magnanimous and just to even wrong meanest and humblest being, although we have been told that he is insincere and indiscreet. But in his letter he has shown an inordinate weakness to serve those whom he would please at any cost.

No fair minded person can read with care the article of Rev. Wilkins without discovering the glaring duplicity of

Continuation: The Colored Schools Again Sept., 25, 1887

his supposed covered attack.

Every just and intelligent parent whose children have been attending the public schools, recognizes and will acknowledge the benefits and blessings which they have afforded. Our schools are doing well. The work of negro education, supervised by an able board, goes bravely on, and though unacknowledged by malicious and designing men, it shall win its way to grand ends. Palsied be the hand that writes otherwise than in the interest of truth and justice. May an all-seeing God stay the encroachments of that element of the colored people, who live to feed their insatiable gall, prey upon the passions of the unsuspecting, keep up a jar in the community only to gratifying the innate self-love and a corrupt evil nature.

Respectfully,

B.K. Sampson.