

DAMYANKEES IN NEGRO SCHOOLS

BY SUE NORTH

EVEN before the Civil War had ended, a newer type of Yankee army had begun to occupy the South. It was garbed, not in blue uniform, but to a large degree in the voluminous skirts and prim necklines of characters out of Louisa May Alcott, and it was dedicated, not to the storming of Richmond, but to an earnest meddling with the mores of the conquered people. Consequently, its activities were in some ways more irritating than those of the Army of the Potomac. Yet this army, though greatly diminished in numbers, has never been withdrawn. One might have supposed that it would have been ousted along with the carpet-baggers in 1877 when the Federal troops were finally recalled; but it was not. To this day the Yankee teachers are a fixture in thirty or more Negro colleges of the South, to say nothing of numerous lesser Negro schools. It is in order to inquire how they have survived and what they are doing there now.

Schools for the freedmen were established throughout the South nearly as fast as the territories were occupied, by the military commanders themselves, and by philanthropic organizations from the North. The American Missionary Association, which was to play a large part in financing Negro institutions, had opened a school for General Ben Butler's so-called "contrabands of war" at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, as early as September, 1861. Numerous denominational missionary so-

cieties, Presbyterian, Baptist, Friends, Methodist, followed suit elsewhere in the South.

In 1863 General Nathaniel P. Banks opened schools for the Negroes in Louisiana, and at the close of the War the Freedmen's Bureau took the responsibility of setting up a school superintendent in each state to co-operate with and supervise both the embryonic public-school systems and the multitudinous little institutions, both admirable and futile, which Northern missionary zeal was causing to spring up everywhere. This supervision continued until 1870, when the Freedmen's Bureau abandoned its educational work. That its work had been on the whole helpful and well-done is attested by the fact that Southerners have since complained that it was withdrawn too soon. But by that year the Reconstruction governments, with all their corruptions, had established at least the theoretical beginnings of universal education, and the foundations had been laid for those institutions which have developed into the major Negro colleges and universities of today.

The task of educating the Negroes, pitifully eager to be taught in those early and revolutionary days of Reconstruction, when a world of joyous, illimitable opportunity seemed to be opening to them, attracted hundreds of teachers from the North. Some of them, according to Southern witnesses, were ill-balanced and even rascally fanatics, bent, not on reconciliation, but on

stirring up the Negro against the Southern white, who, in consequence, eased them and some of their better-intentioned fellows out of the community as speedily as the withdrawal of military force allowed. More of them were essentially harmless novelty seekers who stuck it out for a year or so and then returned North to write gushing little books of quaint adventure. But the burden of evidence indicates that a large proportion were serious men and women of adaptability and common sense for whose presence Southern white and Negro alike were in the long run the richer.

Even so there was from the Southern point of view an annoying air of nobility about the best of them, a pronounced tendency to regard themselves as emissaries of light sent into the regions of ignorance and barbarism. To suggest, as Southerners have done, that they had come to make the South safe for Republicans would be unjust to the genuine humanitarian spirit of the majority. And yet in a more subtle, less direct way it was true, at least at first. The slaveowners had led a rebellion which had only just been suppressed at vast cost and with prodigious bloodshed. It seemed unreasonable to believe that they could ever again be entrusted with a responsible position in the Union. "We must treat them as Western farmers do the stumps in their clearings," said a speaker before the National Teachers Association in 1865, "work around them and let them rot out." And the working-around and rotting-out process was to be achieved by educating the late slaves to replace their late masters as loyal citizens.

That the South itself was fundamentally opposed to educating the Negroes was another general Northern belief, and indeed there was enough of such feeling to

warrant this supposition. Whether the Southerners would have made any general and immediate attempt to educate the Negro had not the North taken that responsibility from them is certainly questionable. For one thing, the idea of free public schools had only just begun to enter the South before the War, and for another, the South, economically prostrate, would not easily have taken on the task. Northern help was direly needed.

Yet there were Southern leaders who recognized that the Negroes must be trained for the responsibilities of freedom and a number of independent educational movements inaugurated, especially in the black belts of Mississippi and Alabama, where the Negroes outnumbered the whites. What is more, it was the despised and distrusted planter class which undertook these movements. The Negroes themselves of Selma, Alabama, appealed to their former masters to educate them, saying that they would rather be taught by their friends than by strangers from the North and promising to support schools if they were provided. This plea resulted eventually in a school taught by the pastor of the local white Presbyterian church and his wife. Similar schools were opened elsewhere in these states. Some of them, it is true, were created partly for the purpose of counteracting the political teachings of the invading Yankees. A school for "the children of colored Democrats" in Yazoo, Mississippi, attracted the unfavorable attention of a radical Republican editor in Ohio, who virtuously denounced this attempt to influence the Negro vote through education. "The treachery and villainy of those rebels stands without parallel in the history of man," he thundered from the editorial columns of the *Wilmington Aid to Progress*.

Nor were white Southerners, especially disabled Confederate soldiers and impoverished Confederate widows, altogether averse to accepting positions in Negro schools opened from Virginia to Texas under the auspices of the Freedmen's Bureau. Some of them, to be sure, were forced by the bitter antagonism of their own communities to resign, but many were able to continue their work unmolested. It is a matter of fact that, until very recently, the hotbed of the Confederacy, Charleston, S. C., employed white teachers in its colored public schools.

II

Opposition to the Yankee teachers grew with the corruptions and excesses of the Reconstruction and carpetbag governments, for which they as a class are not justly chargeable. The tragedy of the South, colored and white, was, not that the Negro was too quickly educated, but that he was too easily persuaded by beguiling politicians, who wanted to use him to keep the South in subjection, to prefer the quick results of playing politics to the slow process of education. But that this fact should be generally understood in the unhappy confusion of the day was hardly to be expected. Yankee teacher and Yankee carpetbagger were alike reviled.

Some of the bitterest opposition to the Northern teachers, however, came, not from the deep South, the heart of the Confederacy, but from the more or less loyal border states where the large white laboring class feared the competition of the freedmen. Citizens of Maryland were emphatic in demanding that only Negroes be allowed to teach Negroes. Kentucky and Tennessee, to judge from the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, were

even more irreconcilable in their opposition than Georgia. Communities that had remained loyal to the Union announced that they had no room for Northern teachers, burned their schoolhouses, frequently insulted and occasionally mobbed them, and in general drove the badgered missionaries to implore military protection of the Freedmen's Bureau. Negroes in such places were scornfully told by their white neighbors that all the Yankees wanted of them was their money.

In New Orleans the city school system was for a time invaded by Northerners when many of the Southern teachers were debarred by their inability to take the test oath, swearing that they had not aided the Confederacy. A lively little bloodless war arose from the fact that teachers of Union and Secessionist sentiment were working in the same buildings. The Northern ladies made a point of adorning their rooms with the stars and stripes, expounded Union sentiments, and taught their pupils to sing *Hail, Columbia* and *John Brown's Body*.

Their Southern friends omitted the songs and the sentiments and encouraged their students to organize clubs of such dubious names as "Stonewall Jackson's Boys." The situation lasted about a year, after which the Yankees were ousted in spite of official protests. Elsewhere in the state their lot was as various as the communities to which they were assigned. Welcomed into the homes of planters in some sections, in others they were jeered at, their schoolrooms invaded by rowdies who scribbled obscenities on the blackboards.

The favorite form of resistance, however, was simply ostracism and a refusal to board the Yankees, who were sometimes ignominiously ousted from hotels and boardinghouses, as soon as their mis-

sion became known, and forced to go home or put up in Negro quarters. In most parts of Texas, according to the Freedmen's Bureau, only the loyal German population would take in the Northern ladies. Under such conditions it was natural that the more successful of the schools established by Northern enterprise should become boarding schools where teachers and pupils could live according to their own views in little worlds independent of the community.

Had opposition to the Northerners been universal, however, they could not have remained after the overturning of the carpetbag governments. But universal it was not, even at the worst, and it tended to decline as the teachers themselves learned to take a more realistic view of their work.

At first their instruction had been criticized as being too literary, too impractical. They prided themselves that their colored pupils, who still had small notion of how to make their way in the new world, were apt in solving geometric abstractions and in construing Virgil. After all, that was only the prevailing conception of an education for anyone in those days. It was partly out of the necessity for meeting more directly the practical needs of the freedmen that the modern idea of industrial education began to rise. Samuel Chapman Armstrong's plan at Hampton Institute for teaching the dignity of skilled manual labor was warmly applauded in the South and began an important trend in Negro education that lasted several decades. Almost alone of Negro colleges of the day, Howard University at Washington remained a liberal arts and professional college.

Feeling was also improved by the fact that Northern philanthropy ceased to make the Negro the sole object of solici-

tude and began to assist white education in the more impoverished sections of the South. In 1870 the agent of the Peabody Education Fund had refused an application for funds, on the part of the radical governor of Louisiana, on the grounds that the colored children alone were getting the benefit of state appropriations, since the whites refused to attend the mixed schools, and that consequently it was the whites who needed special help as the underprivileged group. And in 1888 the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Church expressed the broadening of its field by changing its name to the Freedmen's Aid and Southern Education Society.

But probably a still more important factor in the coming of a friendlier feeling was the fact that the Northern teachers were being supplanted by their own colored pupils as rapidly as the latter could be trained. Whereas in 1865 and 1866 the elementary schools were almost wholly taught by Northern whites, three years later half of the 1871 teachers under the direction of the Freedmen's Bureau were colored. This was a part of the policy of General O. O. Howard, who to that end had established a colored normal school in each Southern state. It was also the policy of the Methodist Society, whose eleven colleges today remain largely under the control of white trustees, but whose faculties, with few exceptions, are almost wholly colored.

All of this was in accord with the South's own policy, which she has carried out in the systems of public education bequeathed her by the Reconstruction governments: white educators for white schools and Negro educators for Negro schools. The twenty-two Negro colleges and normal schools now under state control (many of them established with the

help of substantial government grants in 1890) have all-Negro faculties. And this is true of the interesting group of independent Negro colleges, of which no less than seventeen exist, supported, administered, taught, and attended by Negroes.

Nevertheless, there are still thirty or more Negro colleges in the South where white teachers and administrators are employed, and in many of them they predominate. This is true of several of the nine best-known Negro colleges, such as Fisk, Hampton, Atlanta, and Lincoln, which operate independently of denominational or state control and are the largest of all. In most of them the administration has recently shown a disposition to increase the proportion of colored instructors, and yet it is at present highly doubtful if the process will go so far as to supplant the white teachers entirely in the course of the present century, if at all.

III

Yet why should the process not be carried out to what might appear its logical conclusion? Excellent though many of the Northern teachers may be, a few of them nationally known educators, it is no longer true as it was three score years ago that competent colored teachers cannot be found to replace them. And what is very much to the point, these colored teachers, for whom the field of opportunity is so much more limited, need the jobs more than do most of their white colleagues. What excuse, then, have the latter for staying on?

The question is seldom raised in this day by the white Southerners, at least not openly. In spite of the fact that they are well aware that most of the Northern teachers entertain theories of interracial relationships opposed to their own insist-

ence upon co-ordinate cultures of black and white, overt manifestations of hostility have been nearly nonexistent since the brief outbreak of Ku Klux Klanism in the twenties. Perhaps the general situation is that they regard their Yankee friends with much the same covertly humorous forbearance one would accord an otherwise sane friend who spent his Sabbaths among the Holy Rollers. But the fact is that the immediate communities of these schools welcome the white teachers, damyankees though they be, into their clubs and churches, and prominent members consent to serve on the boards of trustees and contribute to the endowment of the mixed-faculty colleges.

This change of heart is partly due to the sincere appreciation of many thoughtful Southerners of the contribution the once-reviled Northern teacher has made, not only to the Negro, but to the South. It is due also to the conciliatory attitude on the part of the teachers, who as a class have long since ceased to invade the South with chips on their shoulders. Deeply as they may deplore race discrimination South and North, most of them are aware that it is psychologically all wrong for an outsider to attempt to impose his own standards on a community. On the campus they enjoy their own little oasis of free and easy interracial friendships, but abroad in the town, if they don't exactly do as the Romans do, most of them at least try to avoid giving the Romans any unnecessary offense.

But this feat of attempting to live in amity with two subtly opposed forces calls for a rare degree of wisdom and common sense. It is not surprising that efforts to please the community have sometimes resulted in offending the students.

As to the latter, they are as far removed

from the newly emancipated slaves whom the stiffly starched Yankee schoolma'ams took in tow as the present Harvard man is from the young Puritan scholar of the days when Harvard was being piously founded; and they present as infinite a variety of the species collegiate as any modern-university student body. Some of them, coming from the deep South, have never had occasion to hold a friendly conversation with a white person before, and in consequence view their white teachers at first with some awe and much wary curiosity. A few, on the contrary, come from white communities of the North for the express purpose of scraping an acquaintance with their own race. Some from the Bible belt are of a devout simplicity and get the shock of their lives when they catch one of their nice, white lady teachers in the act of lighting a cigarette. Some are sophisticates of colored social circles and as much given to the practice of small snobberies as any Park Avenue socialite. Lovely quadroon girls have been known to break their ambitious parents' hearts in the course of their college careers by falling headlong in love with black-skinned classmates.

Being very much of the younger generation, the students are an alert, inquiring lot, not necessarily skeptical, but eager to try out new ideas, half-baked or otherwise, seldom afraid to speak out in meeting to challenge with friendly candor the pronouncements of the faculty. Indeed, Northern teachers who head South expecting a docile acceptance of every word from their exalted Nordic lips are due for some invigorating shocks.

It is inevitable that this attitude leads the students to challenge their own institutions, especially those which have inherited a somewhat stuffy atmosphere of repressive discipline from the post-Civil

War missionary years. The youngsters demand such innovations as the right to dance, play cards, and smoke. In the post-World War years when the much-discussed younger generation of all colors was at its most aggressive, such demands led to an epidemic of student strikes and lesser agitations at such venerable and respectable institutions as Fisk, Howard, and Hampton.

IV

However troublesome such episodes have been, they are on the whole a healthy sign of growth; they have indirectly resulted in a definite liberalizing of many Negro colleges in a steady attempt to bring them up to the standards of the great universities, scholastically, and to introduce a freer discipline, though it must be added that there is plenty of room for improvement in both respects. The unfortunate side of the matter is that the racial element is likely to become involved sooner or later; malcontents tend to ascribe unpopular administrative acts to prejudice, and, echoing the Kentucky whites of Reconstruction days, accuse their white teachers of being more interested in their pay envelopes than in their students.

But to make too much of this situation would be misleading and unfair to the pleasant spirit that more ordinarily prevails at these colleges of mixed faculties. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the new generation of Negro students is pretty well matched with a new generation of younger white teachers who are usually in the most ardent sympathy with revolts against repressions of all kinds. They vehemently decline to view themselves as missionaries, benefactors, or social workers engaged in uplift; consequently there is rarely any taint of con-

descension in their attitude. Their unself-conscious, wholehearted co-operation with their colored colleagues, the enduring interracial friendships that they form on the campus furnish perhaps the best answer to the query which some of them forlornly ask themselves, "What right have I to this job?" And the answer grows out of a quiet, but implacable, opposition to the folkways of the Southern com-

munity with which they have learned to get along so well. Their excuse for staying is that if they should leave, the process of racial segregation would be complete; there would remain in the South no equal ground upon which the races can meet to dine and play bridge, work and quarrel and gossip together, and, all in all, behave toward each other like normal human beings.



ADDRESS TO SIRENS

BY EARL DANIELS

WHERE *now your song?*
 Too long you have been stilled,
 Or we have willed
 To stop our ears with wax
 And not to hear;

Sharpen the note;
 Up through each throbbing throat
 Let ancient music
 Clearly rise
 And sweetly fall.
 Call . . . call us . . . call once more
 Across waves which have
 Grown lax,
 Until the air,
 Drunken with delight,

Shall shine again as when
 Odysseus' bark,
 With rhythmic oar
 And full-spread sail,
 Cut sharp across the far horizon's mark
 To be seen no more.

We remain here.
 But why should we fear
 A skull-spread coast, and bones of men
 Who have long been dead?
 O give us song!
 Too long you have been still
 Against our will.
 Now,
 Give us song!