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Edited with an Introduction by
David W. Blight
Amherst College
and
Robert Gooding-Williams
Amherst College

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In his failure to realize and impress this last point, Mr. Washington is especially to be criticised. His doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators; when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs.

The South ought to be led, by candid and honest criticism, to assert her better self and do her full duty to the race she has cruelly wronged and is still wronging. The North—her co-partner in guilt—cannot save her conscience by plastering it with gold. We cannot settle this problem by diplomacy and suaveness, by "policy" alone. If worse come to worst, can the moral fibre of this country survive the slow throttling and murder of nine millions of men?

The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,—a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader. So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him, rejoicing in his honors and glorying in the strength of this Joshua\(^{40}\) called of God and of man to lead the headless host. But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."\(^{43}\)

Once upon a time I taught school in the hills of Tennessee, where the broad dark vale of the Mississippi begins to roll and crumple to greet the Alleghanies. I was a Fisk student then, and all Fisk men thought that Tennessee—beyond the Veil—was theirs alone, and in vacation time they sauntered forth in lusty bands to meet the county school-commissioners. Young and happy, I too went, and I shall not soon forget that summer, seventeen years ago.\(^2\)

First, there was a Teachers’ Institute at the county-seat; and there distinguished guests of the superintendent taught the teachers fractions and spelling and other mysteries,—white teachers in the morning, Negroes at night. A picnic now and then, and a supper, and the rough world was softened by laughter and song. I remember how—But I wander.

There came a day when all the teachers left the Institute and began the hunt for schools. I learn from hearsay (for my mother was mortally afraid of fire-arms) that the hunting of ducks and bears and men is won-
derfully interesting, but I am sure that the man who has never hunted a
country school has something to learn of the pleasures of the chase. I see
now the white, hot roads lazily rise and fall and wind before me under
the burning July sun; I feel the deep weariness of heart and limb, as ten,
eight, six miles stretch relentlessly ahead; I feel my heart sink heavily as
I hear again and again, "Got a teacher? Yes." So I walked on and on—
horses were too expensive—until I had wandered beyond railways,
beyond stage lines, to a land of "varmint" and rattlesnakes, where the
coming of a stranger was an event, and men lived and died in the shadow
of one blue hill.

Sprinkled over hill and dale lay cabins and farmhouses, shut out from
the world by the forests and the rolling hills toward the east. There I
found at last a little school. Josie told me of it; she was a thin, homely
girl of twenty, with a dark-brown face and thick, hard hair. I had crossed
the stream at Watertown, and rested under the great willows; then I had
gone to the little cabin in the lot where Josie was resting on her way to
town. The gaunt farmer made me welcome, and Josie, hearing my
errand, told me anxiously that they wanted a school over the hill; that
but once since the war had a teacher been there; that she herself longed
to learn—and thus she ran on, talking fast and loud, with much earnest-
ness and energy.

Next morning I crossed the tall round hill, lingered to look at the blue
and yellow mountains stretching toward the Carolinas, then plunged
into the wood, and came out at Josie's home. It was a dull frame cottage
with four rooms, perched just below the brow of the hill, amid peach-
trees. The father was a quiet, simple soul, calmly ignorant, with no
touch of vulgarity. The mother was different,—strong, bustling, and
energetic, with a quick, restless tongue, and an ambition to live "like
folks." There was a crowd of children. Two boys had gone away. There
remained two growing girls; a shy midget of eight; John, tall, awkward,
and eighteen; Jim, younger, quicker, and better looking; and two babies
of indefinite age. Then there was Josie herself. She seemed to be the
centre of the family: always busy at service, or at home, or berry-picking;
a little nervous and inclined to scold, like her mother, yet faithful, too,
like her father. She had about her a certain fineness, the shadow of an
unconscious moral heroism that would willingly give all of life to make
life broader, deeper, and fuller for her and hers. I saw much of this fam-
ily afterwards, and grew to love them for their honest efforts to be
decent and comfortable, and for their knowledge of their own ignorance.
There was with them no affectation. The mother would scold the father
for being so "easy"; Josie would roughly berate the boys for careless-
ness; and all knew that it was a hard thing to dig a living out of a rocky
side-hill.

I secured the school. I remember the day I rode horseback out to
the commissioner's house with a pleasant young white fellow who
wanted the white school. The road ran down the bed of a stream; the
sun laughed and the water jingled, and we rode on. "Come in," said the
 commissioner,—"come in. Have a seat. Yes, that certificate will do.
Stay to dinner. What do you want a month?" "Oh," thought I, "this is
lucky"; but even then fell the awful shadow of the Veil, for they ate first,
then I—alone.

The schoolhouse was a log hut, where Colonel Wheeler used to shel-
ter his corn. It sat in a lot behind a rail fence and thorn bushes, near the
sweetest of springs. There was an entrance where a door once was, and
within, a massive rickety fireplace; great chunks between the logs served
as windows. Furniture was scarce. A pale blackboard crouched in the cor-
ner. My desk was made of three boards, reinforced at critical points, and
my chair, borrowed from the landlady, had to be returned every night.
Seats for the children,—these puzzled me much. I was haunted by a New
England vision of neat little desks and chairs, but, alas! the reality was
rough plank benches without backs, and at times without legs. They had
the one virtue of making naps dangerous,—possibly fatal, for the floor
was not to be trusted.1

It was a hot morning late in July when the school opened. I trembled
when I heard the patter of little feet down the dusty road, and saw the
growing row of dark solemn faces and bright eager eyes facing me. First
came Josie and her brothers and sisters. The longing to know, to be a
student in the great school at Nashville, hovered like a star above this
child-woman amid her work and worry, and she studied doggedly. There
were the Dowells from their farm over toward Alexandria,—Fanny, with
her smooth black face and wondering eyes; Martha, brown and dull; the
pretty girl-wife of a brother, and the younger brood.

There were the Burkes,—two brown and yellow lads, and a tiny
haughty-eyed girl. Fat Reuben's little chubby girl came, with golden face
and old-gold hair, faithful and solemn. 'Tennie was on hand early,—a
jolly, ugly, good-hearted girl, who slyly dipped snuff and looked after her
little bow-legged brother. When her mother could spare her, Tilly
came,—a midnight beauty, with starry eyes and tapering limbs; and her
brother, correspondingly homely. And then the big boys,—the hulking
Lawrences; the lazy Neills, unfathered sons of mother and daughter;
Hickman, with a stoop in his shoulders; and the rest.

There they sat, nearly thirty of them, on the rough benches, their faces
shading from a pale cream to a deep brown, the little feet bare and swinging, the eyes full of expectation, with here and there a twinkle of mischief, and the hands grasping Webster's blue-back spelling-book. I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvellous. We read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world beyond the hill. At times the school would dwindle away, and I would start out. I would visit Mun Eddings, who lived in two very dirty rooms, and ask why little Lugene, whose flaming face seemed ever ablaze with the dark-red hair uncombed, was absent all last week, or why I missed so often the inimitable rags of Mack and Ed. Then the father, who worked Colonel Wheeler's farm on shares, would tell me how the crops needed the boys; and the thin, slovenly mother, whose face was pretty when washed, assured me that Lugene must mind the baby. "But we'll start them again next week." When the Lawrence stopped, I knew that the doubts of the old folks about book-learning had conquered again, and so, toiling up the hill, and getting as far into the cabin as possible, I put Cicero "pro Archia Poeta" into the simplest English with local applications, and usually convinced them—for a week or so.

On Friday nights I often went home with some of the children,—sometimes to Doc Burke's farm. He was a great, loud, thin Black, ever working, and trying to buy the seventy-five acres of hill and dale where he lived; but people said that he would surely fail, and the "white folks would get it all." His wife was a magnificent Amazon, with saffron face and shining hair, uncorseted and barefooted, and the children were strong and beautiful. They lived in a one-and-a-half-room cabin in the hollow of the farm, near the spring. The front room was full of great fat white beds, scrupulously neat; and there were bad chromos on the walls, and a tired centre-table. In the tiny back kitchen I was often invited to "take out and help" myself to fried chicken and wheat biscuit, "meat" and corn pone, string-beans and berries. At first I used to be a little alarmed at the approach of bedtime in the one lone bedroom, but embarrassment was very deftly avoided. First, all the children nodded and slept, and were stowed away in one great pile of goose feathers; next, the mother and the father discreetly slipped away to the kitchen while I went to bed; then, blowing out the dim light, they retired in the dark. In the morning all were up and away before I thought of awaking. Across the road, where fat Reuben lived, they all went outdoors while the teacher retired, because they did not boast the luxury of a kitchen.

I liked to stay with the Dowells, for they had four rooms and plenty of good country fare. Uncle Bird had a small, rough farm, all woods and hills, miles from the big road; but he was full of tales,—he preached now and then,—and with his children, berries, horses, and wheat he was happy and prosperous. Often, to keep the peace, I must go where life was less lovely; for instance, 'Tidy's mother was incorrigibly dirty, Reuben's larder was limited seriously, and herbs of untamed insects wandered over the Eddinges' beds. Best of all I loved to go to Josie's, and sit on the porch, eating peaches, while the mother bustled and talked: how Josie had bought the sewing-machine; how Josie worked at service in winter, but that four dollars a month was "mighty little" wages; how Josie longed to go away to school, but that it "looked like" they never could get far enough ahead to let her; how the crops failed and the well was yet unfinished; and, finally, how "mean" some of the white folks were.

For two summers I lived in this little world; it was dull and humdrum. The girls looked at the hill in wistful longing, and the boys fretted and haunted Alexandria. Alexandria was "town,"—a straggling, lazy village of houses, churches, and shops, and an aristocracy of Toms, Dicks, and Captains. Cuddled on the hill to the north was the village of the colored folks, who lived in three- or four-room unpainted cottages, some neat and homelike, and some dirty. The dwellings were scattered rather aimlessly, but they centred about the twin temples of the hamlet, the Methodist, and the Hard-Shell Baptist churches. These, in turn, leaned gingerly on a sad-colored schoolhouse. Hither my little world wended its crooked way on Sunday to meet other worlds, and gossip, and wonder, and make the weekly sacrifice with frenzied priest at the altar of the "old-time religion." Then the soft melody and mighty cadences of Negro song fluttered and thundered.

I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoken in various languages. Those whose eyes twenty-five and more years before had seen "the glory of the coming of the Lord," saw in every present hindrance or help a dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in His own good time. The mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering. Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado.
were, however, some — such as Josie, Jim, and Ben — to whom War, Hell, and Slavery were but childhood tales, whose young appetites had been whetted to an edge by school and story and half-awakened thought. Ill could they be content, born without and beyond the World. And their weak wings beat against their barriers, — barriers of caste, of youth, of life; at last, in dangerous moments, against everything that opposed even a whim.

The ten years that follow youth, the years when first the realization comes that life is leading somewhere — these were the years that passed after I left my little school. When they were past, I came by chance once more to the walls of Fisk University, to the halls of the chapel of melody. As I lingered there in the joy and pain of meeting old school-friends, there swept over me a sudden longing to pass again beyond the blue hill, and to see the homes and the school of other days, and to learn how life had gone with my school-children; and I went.

Josie was dead, and the gray-haired mother said simply, "We've had a heap of trouble since you've been away." I had feared for Jim. With a cultured parentage and a social caste to uphold him, he might have made a venturesome merchant or a West Point cadet. But here he was, angry with life and reckless; and when Farmer Durham charged him with stealing wheat, the old man had to ride fast to escape the stones which the furious fool hurled after him. They told Jim to run away; but he would not run, and the constable came that afternoon. It grieved Josie, and great awkward John walked nine miles every day to see his little brother through the bars of Lebanon jail. At last the two came back together in the dark night. The mother cooked supper, and Josie emptied her purse, and the boys stole away. Josie grew thin and silent, yet worked the more. The hill became steep for the quiet old father, and with the boys away there was little to do in the valley. Josie helped them to sell the old farm, and they moved nearer town. Brother Dennis, the carpenter, built a new house with six rooms; Josie toiled a year in Nashville, and brought back ninety dollars to furnish the house and change it to a home.

When the spring came, and the birds twittered, and the stream ran proud and full, little sister Lizzie, bold and thoughtless, flushed with the passion of youth, bestowed herself on the tempter, and brought home a nameless child. Josie shivered and worked on, with the vision of school-days all fled, with a face wan and tired, — worked until, on a summer's day, some one married another; then Josie crept to her mother like a hurt child, and slept — and sleeps.

I paused to scent the breeze as I entered the valley. The Lawrences have gone, — father and son forever, — and the other son lazily digs in the earth to live. A new widow rents out their cabin to fat Reuben. Reuben is a Baptist preacher now, but I fear as lazy as ever, though his cabin has three rooms; and little Ella has grown into a bouncing woman, and is ploughing corn on the hot hillside. There are babies a-plenty, and one half-witted girl. Across the valley is a house I did not know before, and there I found, rocking one baby and expecting another, one of my school girls, a daughter of Uncle Bird Dowell. She looked somewhat worried with her new duties, but soon bristled into pride over her neat cabin and the tale of her thrifty husband, the horse and cow, and the farm they were planning to buy.

My log schoolhouse was gone. In its place stood Progress; and Progress, I understand, is necessarily ugly. The crazy foundation stones still marked the former site of my poor little cabin, and not far away, on six weary boulders, perched a jaunty board house, perhaps twenty by thirty feet, with three windows and a door that locked. Some of the window-glass was broken, and part of an old iron stove lay mournfully under the house. I peeped through the window half reverently, and found things that were more familiar. The blackboard had grown by about two feet, and the seats were still without backs. The county owns the lot now, I hear, and every year there is a session of school. As I sat by the spring and looked on the Old and the New I felt glad, very glad, and yet —

After two long drinks I started on. There was the great double log-house on the corner. I remembered the broken, blighted family that used to live there. The strong, hard face of the mother, with its wilderness of hair, rose before me. She had driven her husband away, and while I taught school a strange man lived there, big and jovial, and people talked. I felt sure that Ben and 'Tilly would come to naught from such a home. But this is an odd world; for Ben is a busy farmer in Smith County, "doing well, too," they say, and he had cared for little 'Tilly until last spring, when a lover married her. A hard life the lad had led, toiling for meat, and laughed at because he was homely and crooked. There was Sam Carlon, an impudent old skinflint, who had definite notions about "niggers," and hired Ben a summer and would not pay him. Then the hungry boy gathered his sacks together, and in broad daylight went into Carlon's corn; and when the hard-fisted farmer set upon him, the angry boy flew at him like a beast. Doc Burke saved a murder and a lynching that day.

The story reminded me again of the Burkes, and an impatience seized
me to know who won in the battle, Doc or the seventy-five acres. For it
is a hard thing to make a farm out of nothing, even in fifteen years. So I
hurried on, thinking of the Burkes. They used to have a certain magnifi-
cent barbarism about them that I liked. They were never vulgar, never
immoral, but rather rough and primitive, with an unconventionality that
spent itself in loud guffaws, slaps on the back, and naps in the corner. I
hurried by the cottage of the misbegotten Neill boys. It was empty, and they
were grown into fat, lazy farm-boys. I saw the home of the Hickmans,
but Albert, with his stooping shoulders, had passed from the world. Then
I came to the Burkes' gate and peered through; the inclosure looked
rough and untrimmed, and yet there were the same fences around the
old farm save to the left, where lay twenty-five other acres. And lo! the
cabin in the hollow had climbed the hill and swollen to a half-finished six-
room cottage.

The Burkes held a hundred acres, but they were still in debt. Indeed,
the gaunt father who toiled night and day would scarcely be happy out
of debt, being so used to it. Some day he must stop, for his massive frame
is showing decline. The mother wore shoes, but the lion-like physique
of other days was broken. The children had grown up. Rob, the image of
his father, was loud and rough with laughter. Birdie, my school boy of
six, had grown to a picture of maiden beauty, tall and tawny. "Edgar is
gone," said the mother, with head half bowed,—"gone to work in
Nashville; he and his father couldn't agree."

Little Doc, the boy born since the time of my school, took me horse-
back down the creek next morning toward Farmer Dowell's. The road
and the stream were battling for mastery, and the stream had the better
of it. We splashed and waded, and the merry boy, perched behind me,
chattered and laughed. He showed me where Simon Thompson had
bought a bit of ground and a home; but his daughter Lana, a plump,
brown, slow girl, was not there. She had married a man and a farm twenty
miles away. We wound on down the stream till we came to a gate that I
did not recognize, but the boy insisted that it was "Uncle Bird's." The farm
was fat with the growing crop. In that little valley was a strange stillness
as I rode up; for death and marriage had stolen youth and left age and
childhood there. We sat and talked that night after the chores were done.
Uncle Bird was grayer, and his eyes did not see so well, but he was still
jovial. We talked of the acres bought,—one hundred and twenty-five,—
of the new guest-chamber added, o:Martha's marrying. Then we talked
of death: Fanny and Fred were gone; a shadow hung over the other
daughter, and when it lifted she was to go to Nashville to school. At last

we spoke of the neighbors, and as night fell, Uncle Bird told me how, on
a night like that, "Thenie came wandering back to her home over yon-
der, to escape the blows of her husband. And next morning she died in
the home that her little bow-legged brother, working and saving, had
bought for their widowed mother.

My journey was done, and behind me lay hill and dale, and Life and
Death. How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced
Josie lies? How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat?
How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real! And
all this life and love and strife and failure,—is it the twilight of nightfall
or the flush of some faint-dawning day?

Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car.