

"Speech by S.L. Oberholtzer to the National Council of Women of the United States, Assembled in Washington, DC, Feb 24, 1891".

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SCHOOL SAVINGS-BANKS.

S. L. OBERHOLTZER. The subject of School Savings-Banks is one of national interest, because as we develop in thrift and individuality the wealth and strength of the nation increase. No man can live for himself alone, though we confess half the world is experimenting in that line. The roughness, flaws, or polish of each individual leave impress on the lives with which they come in contact.

Inclination and genius are inherited, but character and fortune are made. Too little thoughtful care has been given to American children, considering the expectation we accord them. If we would have pure, well-rounded, thrifty, and economic people, thought and affection must stand hand in hand by the cradle, and into the awakening intellects the best seed, according to the harvests we would reap, must be sown.

That ours is not a harvest, but a seeding-time, we have been slow to realize. The world has its epochs. Radical changes are not the work of a day, but the perfection of the efforts of a generation. The confusion of impatience with labor, the ambition to hasten an end which can be worked out only in the ripeness of time from the convergence of millions of beginnings, has been from the date of creation the reformers' besetting sin. If we could but remember that while figuring as individuals we are still things, a part of God's eternal plan, and be simply willing to move continually forward, trusting the results — which we know must somehow, someday, be according to their deserts — wholly to him, the creative power of our advance would be greater and worthier.

Coming down to the practicability of daily life, we want our children to have more content and less contention than we have had; we want them to have more leisure for higher mental and moral achievements; to

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be lifted above the mere level of the bread-and-butter question, and to be familiar with the relation of money to wealth.

Simple, natural, and easy instruction tending to this end we find in the School Savings-Banks. They are in wide use in Europe, and are clearly proven to be one of the best educational factors of the age. They train the population to habits of thrift, individuality, and self-dependence before the unconcern and wastefulness which often attend the probationary years of youth develop into an emptiness which is unsatisfying and

unprofitable. They are preventive to the small practices which lead to vice. They reduce visibly crime, pauperism, and intemperance.

France has twenty-three thousand three hundred and seventy-five School Savings-Banks, under patronage of the government. Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, England, Hungary, and the Netherlands have them in common use. A close estimate of the money to the credit of the pupils in Europe to-day is seven million five hundred thousand dollars. The institution of the economic system in the various countries was effected at different dates since 1834 by educators of whom it is not my present purpose to treat. Miss Agnes Lambert has done much for the work in England. Madame Carnot, wife of President Carnot, of France, exemplified her forethought and wisdom on the Christmas of 1889, by giving to four hundred of the poorest school-children of Paris ten francs and a bank-book. Philanthropists at intervals since 1876 have mentioned the subject in the United States. Mr. T. S. Merrill introduced it into the public schools of Beloit, Wisconsin, in 1877, on a simple plan which yielded excellent results.

In the winter of 1879 and '80, Captain R. H. Pratte, of the Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, established a savings system for the Indians, the result of his judgment, he explains, that in teaching the Indians the use of money it was necessary to have the money, and to teach them to save it and be economical. It was of prime importance to do so practically and not theoretically. Therefore he instituted a system of paying students a very small sum for their work, providing each one with a bank-book, and encouraged them to make deposits. Captain Pratte's method was far-seeing. His Indian pupils have now six thousand dollars to their credit; and those who have left, with training finished, have taken as much more in cash, trunks, and equipments to their Western homes. This knowledge of economics cannot but be of intrinsic value to the remnant of the race who owned the country before money was the one great factor of exchange.

We have no further record of School Savings-Banks until 1885, when Mr. J. H. Thiry, an Americanized Frenchman, introduced them into the schools of Long Island City, New York. As School Commissioner, Mr. Thiry has coached the system along so beautifully that it is a steady, leading light on the way to thrift. Conversant with school-savings

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methods in Europe, he formulated from their best features a simple and comprehensive code for the United States.

The School Savings-Banks card is copyrighted, but a grant to use it is freely given to promoters of the cause, with a proviso that statistics of the work be regularly reported. This arrangement insures harmony of action and exact record. By tabulated list of September, 1890, we have Savings-Banks in 158 schools, 20,975 pupil depositors, with \$69,957.76 to their credit. An average of one-third of the scholars are depositors. Since the compilation of this table, 62 schools have taken up the system, making the number now using it 220.

Perhaps no movement as reformatory in its trend has met more universal favor. Its advance here has been principally during the last year through the influence of a few educators and economists who noted the perfection of the system and desired to spread its benefits.

The Report of the National Bureau of Education for 1890 contains a comprehensive article on the subject by Mr. Thiry, and he has had printed, and given out generously, his excellent "Rules and Regulations." In answer to frequent demands from several States and Territories, I have recently prepared for general distribution slips entitled "School Savings-Banks" and "How to Institute School Savings-Banks."

The administration of the system occupies about fifteen minutes and interferes with no regular school duty. At roll-call on Monday morning the children report their savings, taking the amount with their Savings-Bank card to the teacher, who with a figure credits the amount opposite given date on the card and in her roll-book. The card, which is folded, has a space opposite the date of each Monday in the school year. It is always kept by the pupil as memorandum and receipt. On the face of the card is the name of the pupil, the school, and the teacher. On the back are the regulations. The money is deposited in a Savings-Bank as a General School Fund, until the individual amounts entitle the little depositors to bank-books. The bank-books are given to the children, to take to their homes monthly. Family interest is thus aroused, and in several instances parents have curtailed needless expenses and opened Savings-Banks accounts for themselves, thus learning lessons of thrift from their children.

The youthful depositors are naturally thoughtful in the growth of their individual estates. Frugality and industry are inculcated; liberality rendered possible; the boys and the girls, when they leave school, have the nucleus of fortune in acquired thrift and a snug sum of one or two hundred dollars in bank.

There is a flavor of equality in this economic education; the boy and the girl start out into a broader life with equal capital and equal knowledge of its accumulative power, with the individuality and personal self-dependence

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such training necessarily engenders. Definite knowledge of money's worth insures wiser living. The bars of property and sex grow less distinct. The nation broadens correspondingly.

"Ebrybody monstus glad tu hab a penny ob der own," said an old negro lately to me in Georgia, when he explained that he wanted for nothing during slavery time. "I nebar ask massa fur nothen but what he gib, but, missie, ebrybody monstus glad tu hab a penny ob der own." That is just the way with men, women, and children all over the land to-day, "dey be monstus glad tu hab a penny ob der own."

The innate desire for independence indigenous to American soil is as broad as the country; North, South, East, and West, from the palatial home to the negro cabin, comes the cry for individual development and individual possession.

The fostering of personal responsibility as an ennobling force is of great social and national value.

The general establishment of School Savings-Banks in the United States will promote many helpful humanitarian interests and conflict with none. It will bring about an equalization of means and power, enabling our children to cope more successfully with the future and remedy some of the evils which oppress our heterogeneous people.