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The American Negro Academy

Occasional Papers, No. 3.

**CIVILIZATION THE PRIMAL NEED OF
THE RACE,**

The Inaugural Address,

—BY—

ALEXANDER CRUMMELL,

MARCH 5, 1897.

—AND—

**THE ATTITUDE OF THE AMERICAN
MIND TOWARD
THE NEGRO INTELLECT,**

First Annual Address,

DEC. 28, 1897,

—BY—

ALEXANDER CRUMMELL,
President of the American Negro Academy.

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CIVILIZATION, THE PRIMAL NEED OF THE RACE.

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GENTLEMEN:—

There is no need, I apprehend, that I should undertake to impress you with a sense either of the need or of the importance of our assemblage here to-day. The fact of your coming here is, of itself, the clearest evidence of your warm acquiescence in the summons to this meeting, and of your cordial interest in the objects which it purposes to consider.

Nothing has surprised and gratified me so much as the anxiousness of many minds for the movement which we are on the eve of beginning. In the letters which our Secretary, Mr. Cromwell, has received, and which will be read to us, we are struck by the fact that one cultured man here and another there,—several minds in different localities,—tell him that this is just the thing they have desired, and have been looking for.

I congratulate you, therefore, gentlemen, on the opportuneness of your assemblage here. I felicitate you on the superior and lofty aims which have drawn you together. And, in behalf of your compeers, resident here in the city of Washington, I welcome you to the city and to the important deliberations to which our organization invites you.

Just here, let me call your attention to the uniqueness and specialty of this conference. It is unlike any other which has ever taken place in the history of the Negro, on the American Continent. There have been, since the landing of the first black cargo of slaves at Jamestown, Va., in 1619, numerous conventions of men of our race. There have been Religious Assemblies, Political Conferences, suffrage meetings, educational conventions. But *our* meeting is for a purpose which, while inclusive, in some respects, of these various concerns, is for an object more distinct and positive than any of them.

What then, it may be asked, is the special undertaking we have before us, in this Academy? My answer is the civilization of the Negro race in the United States, by the scientific

processes of literature, art, and philosophy, through the agency of the cultured men of this same Negro race. And here, let me say, that the special race problem of the Negro in the United States is his civilization.

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I doubt if there is a man in this presence who has a higher conception of Negro capacity than your speaker; and this of itself, precludes the idea, on my part, of race disparagement. But, it seems manifest to me that, as a race in this land, we have no art; we have no science; we have no philosophy; we have no scholarship. Individuals we have in each of these lines; but mere individuality cannot be recognized as the aggregation of a family, a nation, or a race; or as the interpretation of any of them. And until we attain the role of civilization, we cannot stand up and hold our place in the world of culture and enlightenment. And the forfeiture of such a place means, despite, inferiority, repulsion, drudgery, poverty, and ultimate death! Now gentlemen, for the creation of a complete and rounded man, you need the impress and the moulding of the highest arts. But how much more so for the realizing of a true and lofty *race* of men. What is true of a man is deeply true of a people. The special need in such a case is the force and application of the highest arts; not mere mechanism; not mere machinery; not mere handicraft; not the mere grasp on material things; not mere temporal ambitions. These are but incidents; important indeed, but pertaining mainly to man's material needs, and to the feeding of the body. And the incidental in life is incapable of feeding the living soul. For "man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And civilization is the *secondary* word of God, given for the nourishment of humanity.

To make *men* you need civilization; and what I mean by civilization is the action of exalted forces, both of God and man. For manhood is the most majestic thing in God's creation; and hence the demand for the very highest art in the shaping and moulding of human souls.

What is the great difficulty with the black race, in this era, in this land? It is that both within their ranks, and external to themselves, by large schools of thought interested in them, material ideas in divers forms are made prominent, as the master-need of the race, and as the surest way to success. Men are constantly dogmatizing theories of sense and matter as the salvable hope of the race. Some of our leaders and teachers boldly declare, now, that *property* is the source of power; and then, that *money* is the thing which commands respect. At one time it is *official position* which is the masterful influence in the elevation of the race; at another, men are disposed to fall back upon *blood* and *lineage*, as the root (source) of power and progress.

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Blind men! For they fail to see that neither property, nor money, nor station, nor office, nor lineage, are fixed factors, in so large a thing as the destiny of man; that they are not vitalizing qualities in the changeless hopes of humanity. The greatness of peoples springs from their ability to grasp the grand conceptions of being. It is the absorption of a people, of a nation, of a race, in large majestic and abiding things which lifts them up to the skies. These once apprehended, all the minor details of life follow in their proper places, and spread abroad in the details and the comfort of practicality. But until these gifts of a lofty civilization are secured, men are sure to remain low, debased and grovelling.

It was the apprehension of this great truth which led Melancthon, 400 years ago, to declare—"Unless we have the scientific mind we shall surely revert again to barbarism." He was a scholar and a classic, a theologian and a philosopher. With probably the exception of Erasmus, he was the most erudite man of his age. He was the greatest Grecian of his day. He was rich "with the spoils of time." And so running down the annals of the ages, he discovered the majestic fact, which Coleridge has put in two simple lines:—

"We may not hope from outward things to win
The passion and the life whose fountains are within;"

which Wordsworth, in grand style, has declared,

"By the soul only the nations shall be free."

But what is this other than the utterance of Melancthon,—"Without the scientific mind, barbarism." This is the teaching of history. For 2,000 years, Europe has been governed, in all its developments, by Socrates, and Aristotle, and Plato, and Euclid. These were the great idealists; and as such, they were the great progenitors of all modern civilization, the majestic agents of God for the civil upbuilding of men and nations. For civilization is, in its origins, ideals; and hence, in the loftiest men, it bursts forth, producing letters, literature, science, philosophy, poetry, sculpture, architecture, yea, all the arts; and brings them with all their gifts, and lays them in the lap of religion, as the essential condition of their vital permanance and their continuity.

But civilization never seeks permanent abidence upon the heights of Olympus. She is human, and seeks all human needs. And so she descends, re-creating new civilizations; uplifting the crudeness of laws, giving scientific precision to morals and religion, stimulating enterprise, extending commerce, creating manufactures, expanding mechanism and mechanical inventions; producing revolutions and reforms; humanizing labor; meeting the minutest human needs, even to the manufacturing needles for the industry of seamstresses and for the commonest uses of human fingers. All these are the fruits of civilization.

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Who are to be the agents to lift up this people of ours to the grand plane of civilization? Who

are to bring them up to the height of noble thought, grand civility, a chaste and elevating culture, refinement, and the impulses of irrepressible progress? It is to be done by the scholars and thinkers, who have secured the vision which penetrates the center of nature, and sweeps the circles of historic enlightenment; and who have got insight into the life of things, and learned the art by which men touch the springs of action.

For to transform and stimulate the souls of a race or a people is a work of intelligence. It is a work which demands the clear induction of world-wide facts, and the perception of their application to new circumstances. It is a work which will require the most skillful resources, and the use of the scientific spirit.

But every man in a race cannot be a philosopher: nay, but few men in any land, in any age, can grasp ideal truth. Scientific ideas however must be apprehended, else there can be no progress, no elevation.

Just here arises the need of the trained and scholarly men of a race to employ their knowledge and culture and teaching and to guide both the opinions and habits of the crude masses. The masses, nowhere are, or can be, learned or scientific. The scholar is exceptional, just the same as a great admiral like Nelson is, or a grand soldier like Cæsar or Napoleon. But the leader, the creative and organizing mind, is the master-need in all the societies of man. But, if they are not inspired with the notion of leadership and duty, then with all their Latin and Greek and science they are but pedants, trimmers, opportunists. For all true and lofty scholarship is weighty with the burdens and responsibilities of life and humanity.

But these reformers must not be mere scholars. They must needs be both scholars and philanthropists. For this, indeed, has it been in all the history of men. In all the great revolutions, and in all great reforms which have transpired, scholars have been conspicuous; in the re-construction of society, in formulating laws, in producing great emancipations, in the revival of letters, in the advancement of science, in the renaissance of art, in the destruction of gross superstitions and in the restoration of true and enlightened religion.

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And what is the spirit with which they are to come to this work? My answer is, that *disinterestedness* must animate their motives and their acts. Whatever rivalries and dissensions may divide man in the social or political world, let generosity govern *us*. Let us emulate one another in the prompt recognition of rare genius, or uncommon talent. Let there be no tardy acknowledgment of worth in *our* world of intellect. If we are fortunate enough, to see, of a sudden, a clever mathematician of our class, a brilliant poet, a youthful, but promising scientist or philosopher, let us rush forward, and hail his coming with no hesitant admiration, with no reluctant praise.

It is only thus, gentlemen, that we can bring forth, stimulate, and uplift all the latent genius, garnered up, in the by-places and sequestered corners of this neglected Race.

It is only thus we can nullify and break down the conspiracy which would fain limit and narrow the range of Negro talent in this caste-tainted country. It is only thus, we can secure that recognition of genius and scholarship in the republic of letters, which is the rightful prerogative of every race of men. It is only thus we can spread abroad and widely disseminate that culture and enlightenment which shall permeate and leaven the entire social and domestic life of our people and so give that civilization which is the nearest ally of religion.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE AMERICAN MIND TOWARD THE NEGRO INTELLECT.

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For the first time in the history of this nation the colored people of America have undertaken the difficult task, of stimulating and fostering the genius of their race as a distinct and definite purpose. Other and many gatherings have been made, during our own two and a half centuries' residence on this continent, for educational purposes; but ours is the first which endeavors to rise up to the plane of culture.

For my own part I have no misgivings either with respect to the legitimacy, the timeliness, or the prospective success of our venture. The race in the brief period of a generation, has been so fruitful in intellectual product, that the time has come for a coalescence of powers, and for reciprocity alike in effort and appreciation. I congratulate you, therefore, on this your first anniversary. To me it is, I confess, a matter of rejoicing that we have, as a people, reached a point where we have a class of men who will come together for purposes, so pure, so elevating, so beneficent, as the cultivation of mind, with the view of meeting the uses and the needs of our benighted people.

I feel that if this meeting were the end of this Academy; if I could see that it would die this

very day, I would nevertheless, cry out—"All hail!" even if I had to join in with the salutation—"farewell forever!" For, first of all, you have done, during the year, that which was never done so completely before,—a work which has already told upon the American mind; and next you have awakened in the Race an ambition which, in some form, is sure to reproduce both mental and artistic organization in the future.

The cultured classes of our country have never interested themselves to stimulate the desires or aspirations of the mind of our race. They have left us terribly alone. Such stimulation, must, therefore, in the very nature of things, come from ourselves.

Let us state here a simple, personal incident, which will well serve to illustrate a history.

I entered, sometime ago, the parlor of a distinguished southern clergyman. A kinsman was standing at his mantel, writing. The clergyman spoke to his relative—"Cousin, let me introduce to you the Rev. C., a clergyman of our Church," His cousin turned and looked down at me; but as soon as he saw my black face, he turned away with disgust, and paid no more attention to me than if I were a dog.

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Now, this porcine gentleman, would have been perfectly courteous, if I had gone into his parlor as a cook, or a waiter, or a bootblack. But my profession, as a clergyman, suggested the idea of letters and cultivation; and the contemptible snob at once forgot his manners, and put aside the common decency of his class.

Now, in this, you can see the attitude of the American mind toward the Negro intellect. A reference to this attitude seems necessary, if we would take in, properly, the present condition of Negro culture.

It presents a most singular phenomenon. Here was a people laden with the spoils of the centuries, bringing with them into this new land the culture of great empires; and, withal, claiming the exalted name and grand heritage of Christians. By their own voluntary act they placed right beside them a large population of another race of people, seized as captives, and brought to their plantations from a distant continent. This other race was an unlettered, unenlightened, and a pagan people.

What was the attitude taken by this master race toward their benighted bondsmen? It was not simply that of indifference or neglect. There was nothing negative about it.

They began, at the first, a systematic ignoring of the fact of intellect in this abased people. They undertook the process of darkening their minds.

"Put out the light, and then, put out the light!" was their cry for centuries. Paganizing themselves, they sought a deeper paganizing of their serfs than the original paganism that these had brought from Africa. There was no legal artifice conceivable which was not resorted to, to blindfold their souls from the light of letters; and the church, in not a few cases, was the prime offender.[1]

Then the legislatures of the several states enacted laws and Statutes, closing the pages of every book printed to the eyes of Negroes; barring the doors of every school-room against them! And this was the systematized method of the intellect of the South, to stamp out the brains of the Negro!

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It was done, too, with the knowledge that the Negro had brain power. There was *then*, no denial that the Negro had intellect. That denial was an after thought. Besides, legislatures never pass laws forbidding the education of pigs, dogs, and horses. They pass such laws against the intellect of *men*.

However, there was then, at the very beginning of the slave trade, everywhere, in Europe, the glintings forth of talent in great Negro geniuses,—in Spain, and Portugal, in France and Holland and England;[2] and Phillis Wheatley and Banneker and Chavis and Peters, were in evidence on American soil.

It is manifest, therefore, that the objective point in all this legislation was INTELLECT,—the intellect of the Negro! It was an effort to becloud and stamp out the intellect of the Negro!

The *first* phase of this attitude reached over from about 1700 to 1820:—and as the result, almost Egyptian darkness fell upon the mind of the race, throughout the whole land.

Following came a more infamous policy. It was the denial of intellectuality in the Negro; the assertion that he was not a human being, that he did not belong to the human race. This covered the period from 1820 to 1835, when Gliddon and Nott and others, published their so-called physiological work, to prove that the Negro was of a different species from the white man.

A distinguished illustration of this ignoble sentiment can be given. In the year 1833 or 4 the speaker was an errand boy in the Anti-slavery office in New York City.

On a certain occasion he heard a conversation between the Secretary and two eminent lawyers from Boston,—Samuel E. Sewell and David Lee Child. They had been to Washington on some legal business. While at the Capitol they happened to dine in the company of the great John C. Calhoun, then senator from South Carolina. It was a period of great ferment upon the question of Slavery, States' Rights, and Nullification; and consequently the Negro

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was the topic of conversation at the table. One of the utterances of Mr. Calhoun was to this effect—"That if he could find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax, he would then believe that the Negro was a human being and should be treated as a man."

Just think of the crude asininity of even a great man! Mr. Calhoun went to "Yale" to study the Greek Syntax, and graduated there. His son went to Yale to study the Greek Syntax, and graduated there. His grandson, in recent years, went to Yale, to learn the Greek Syntax, and graduated there. Schools and Colleges were necessary for the Calhouns, and all other white men to learn the Greek syntax.

And yet this great man knew that there was not a school, nor a college in which a black boy could learn his A. B. C's. He knew that the law in all the Southern States forbade Negro instruction under the severest penalties. How then was the Negro to learn the Greek syntax? How then was he to evidence to Mr. Calhoun his human nature? Why, it is manifest that Mr. Calhoun expected the Greek syntax to grow in *Negro brains*, by spontaneous generation!

Mr. Calhoun was then, as much as any other American, an exponent of the nation's mind upon this point. Antagonistic as they were upon *other* subjects, upon the rejection of the Negro intellect they were a unit. And this, measurably, is the attitude of the American mind today:—measurably, I say, for thanks to the Almighty, it is not universally so.

There has always been a school of philanthropists in this land who have always recognized mind in the Negro; and while recognizing the limitations which *individual* capacity demanded, claimed that for the RACE, there was no such thing possible for its elevation save the widest, largest, highest, improvement. Such were our friends and patrons in New England in New York, Pennsylvania, a few among the Scotch Presbyterians and the "Friends" in grand old North Carolina; a great company among the Congregationalists of the East, nobly represented down to the present, by the "American Missionary Society," which tolerates no stint for the Negro intellect in its grand solitudes. But these were exceptional.

Down to the year 1825, I know of no Academy or College which would open its doors to a Negro.[3] In the South it was a matter of absolute legal disability. In the North, it was the ostracism of universal caste-sentiment. The theological schools of the land, and of all names, shut their doors against the black man. An eminent friend of mine, the noble, fervent, gentlemanly Rev. Theodore S. Wright, then a Presbyterian licentiate, was taking private lessons in theology, at Princeton; and for this offense was kicked out of one of its halls.

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In the year 1832 Miss Prudence Crandall opened a private school for the education of colored girls; and it set the whole State of Connecticut in a flame. Miss Crandall was mobbed, and the school was broken up.

The year following, the trustees of Canaan Academy in New Hampshire opened its doors to Negro youths; and this act set the people of that state on fire. The farmers of the region assembled with 90 yoke of oxen, dragged the Academy into a swamp, and a few weeks afterward drove the black youths from the town.

These instances will suffice. They evidence the general statement, *i. e.* that the American mind has refused to foster and to cultivate the Negro intellect. Join to this a kindred fact, of which there is the fullest evidence. Impelled, at times, by pity, a modicum of schooling and training has been given the Negro; but even this, almost universally, with reluctance, with cold criticism, with microscopic scrutiny, with icy reservation, and at times, with ludicrous limitations.

Cheapness characterizes almost all the donations of the American people to the Negro:—Cheapness, in all the past, has been the regimen provided for the Negro in every line of his intellectual, as well as his lower life. And so, cheapness is to be the rule in the future, as well for his higher, as for his lower life:—cheap wages and cheap food, cheap and rotten huts; cheap and dilapidated schools; cheap and stinted weeks of schooling; cheap meeting houses for worship; cheap and ignorant ministers; cheap theological training; and now, cheap learning, culture and civilization!

Noble exceptions are found in the grand literary circles in which Mr. Howells moves—manifest in his generous editing of our own Paul Dunbar's poems. But this generosity is not general, even in the world of American letters.

You can easily see this in the attempt, now-a-days, to side-track the Negro intellect, and to place it under limitations never laid upon any other class.

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The elevation of the Negro has been a moot question for a generation past. But even to-day what do we find the general reliance of the American mind in determining this question? Almost universally the resort is to material agencies! The ordinary, and sometimes the *extraordinary* American is unable to see that the struggle of a degraded people for elevation is, in its very nature, a warfare, and that its main weapon is the cultivated and scientific mind.

Ask the great men of the land how this Negro problem is to be solved, and then listen to the answers that come from divers classes of our white fellow-citizens. The merchants and traders of our great cities tell us—"The Negro must be taught to work;" and they will pour out their moneys by thousands to train him to toil. The clergy in large numbers, cry out

—“Industrialism is the only hope of the Negro;” for this is the bed-rock, in their opinion, of Negro evangelization! “Send him to Manual Labor Schools,” cries out another set of philanthropists. “Hic haec, hoc,” is going to prove the ruin of the Negro” says the Rev. Steele, an erudite Southern Savan. “You must begin at the bottom with the Negro,” says another eminent authority—as though the Negro had been living in the clouds, and had never reached the bottom. Says the Honorable George T. Barnes, of Georgia—“The kind of education the Negro should receive should not be very refined nor classical, but adapted to his present condition:” as though there is to be no future for the Negro.

And so you see that even now, late in the 19th century, in this land of learning and science, the creed is—“Thus far and no farther”, *i. e.* for the American black man.

One would suppose from the universal demand for the mere industrialism for this race of ours, that the Negro had been going daily to dinner parties, eating terrapin and indulging in champagne; and returning home at night, sleeping on beds of eiderdown; breakfasting in the morning in his bed, and then having his valet to clothe him daily in purple and fine linen—all these 250 years of his sojourn in this land. And then, just now, the American people, tired of all this Negro luxury, was calling him, for the first time, to blister his hands with the hoe, and to learn to supply his needs by sweatful toil in the cotton fields.

Listen a moment, to the wisdom of a great theologian, and withal as great philanthropist, the Rev. Dr. Wayland, of Philadelphia. Speaking, not long since, of the “Higher Education” of the colored people of the South, he said “that this subject concerned about 8,000,000 of our fellow-citizens, among whom are probably 1,500,000 voters. The education suited to these people is that which should be suited to white people under the same circumstances. These people are bearing the impress which was left on them by two centuries of slavery and several centuries of barbarism. This education must begin at the bottom. It must first of all produce the power of self-support to assist them to better their condition. It should teach them good citizenship and should build them up morally. It should be, first, a good English education. They should be imbued with the knowledge of the Bible. They should have an industrial education. An industrial education leads to self-support and to the elevation of their condition. Industry is itself largely an education, intellectually and morally, and, above all, an education of character. Thus we should make these people self-dependent. This education will do away with pupils being taught Latin and Greek, while they do not know the rudiments of English.”

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Just notice the cautious, restrictive, limiting nature of this advice! Observe the lack of largeness, freedom and generosity in it. Dr. Wayland, I am sure, has never specialized just such a regimen for the poor Italians, Hungarians or Irish, who swarm, in lowly degradation, in immigrant ships to our shores. No! for them he wants, all Americans want, the widest, largest culture of the land; the instant opening, not simply of the common schools; and then an easy passage to the bar, the legislature, and even the judgeships of the nation. And they oft times get there.

But how different the policy with the Negro. *He* must have “an education which begins at the bottom.” “He should have an industrial education,” &c. His education must, first of all, produce the power of self-support, &c.

Now, all this thought of Dr. Wayland is all true. But, my friends, it is all false, too; and for the simple reason that it is only half truth. Dr. Wayland seems unable to rise above the plane of burden-bearing for the Negro. He seems unable to gauge the idea of the Negro becoming a thinker. He seems to forget that a race of thoughtless toilers are destined to be forever a race of senseless *boys*; for only beings who think are men.

How pitiable it is to see a great good man be-fuddled by a half truth. For to allege “Industrialism” to be the grand agency in the elevation of a race of already degraded labourers, is as much a mere platitude as to say, “they must eat and drink and sleep;” for man cannot live without these habits. But they never civilize man; and *civilization* is the objective point in the movement for Negro elevation. Labor, just like eating and drinking, is one of the inevitabilities of life; one of its positive necessities. And the Negro has had it for centuries; but it has never given him manhood. It does not *now*, in wide areas of population, lift him up to moral and social elevation. Hence the need of a new factor in his life. The Negro needs light: light thrown in upon all the circumstances of his life. The light of civilization.

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Dr. Wayland fails to see two or three important things in this Negro problem:—

(a) That the Negro has no need to go to a manual labor school.^[4] He has been for two hundred years and more, the greatest laborer in the land. He is a laborer *now*; and he must always be a laborer, or he must die. But:

(b) Unfortunately for the Negro, he has been so wretchedly ignorant that he has never known the value of his sweat and toil. He has been forced into being an unthinking labor-machine. And this he is, to a large degree, to-day under freedom.

(c) Now the great need of the Negro, in our day and time, is intelligent impatience at the exploitation of his labor, on the one hand; on the other hand courage to demand a larger share of the wealth which his toil creates for others.

It is not a mere negative proposition that settles this question. It is not that the Negro does not need the hoe, the plane, the plough, and the anvil. It is the positive affirmation that the Negro needs the light of cultivation; needs it to be thrown in upon all his toil, upon his whole life and its environments.

What he needs is CIVILIZATION. He needs the increase of his higher wants, of his mental and spiritual needs. *This*, mere animal labor has never given him, and never can give him. But it will come to him, as an individual, and as a class, just in proportion as the higher culture comes to his leaders and teachers, and so gets into his schools, academies and colleges; and then enters his pulpits; and so filters down into his families and his homes; and the Negro learns that he is no longer to be a serf, but that he is to bare his strong brawny arm as a laborer; *not* to make the white man a Croesus, but to make himself a man. He is always to be a laborer; but now, in these days of freedom and the schools, he is to be a laborer with intelligence, enlightenment and manly ambitions.

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But, when his culture fits him for something more than a field hand or a mechanic, he is to have an open door set wide before him! And that culture, according to his capacity, he must claim as his rightful heritage, as a man:—not stunted training, not a caste education, not a Negro curriculum.

The Negro Race in this land must repudiate this absurd notion which is stealing on the American mind. The Race must declare that it is not to be put into a single groove; and for the simple reason (1) that *man* was made by his Maker to traverse the whole circle of existence, above as well as below; and that universality is the kernel of all true civilization, of all race elevation. And (2) that the Negro mind, imprisoned for nigh three hundred years, needs breadth and freedom, largeness, altitude, and elasticity; not stint nor rigidity, nor contractedness.

But the “Gradgrinds” are in evidence on all sides, telling us that the colleges and scholarships given us since emancipation, are all a mistake; and that the whole system must be reversed. The conviction is widespread that the Negro has no business in the higher walks of scholarship; that, for instance, Prof. Scarborough has no right to labor in philology; Professor Kelly Miller in mathematics; Professor Du Bois, in history; Dr. Bowen, in theology; Professor Turner, in science; nor Mr. Tanner in art. There is no repugnance to the Negro buffoon, and the Negro scullion; but so soon as the Negro stands forth as an intellectual being, this toad of American prejudice, as at the touch of Ithuriel’s spear, starts up a devil!

It is this attitude, this repellent, this forbidding attitude of the American mind, which forces the Negro in this land, to both recognize and to foster the talent and capacity of his own race, and to strive to put that capacity and talent to use for the race. I have detailed the dark and dreadful attempt to stamp that intellect out of existence. It is not only a past, it is also, modified indeed, a present fact; and out of it springs the need of just such an organization as the Negro Academy.

Now, gentlemen and friends, seeing that the American mind in the general, revolts from Negro genius, the Negro himself is duty bound to see to the cultivation and the fostering of his own race-capacity. This is the chief purpose of this Academy. *Our* special mission is the encouragement of the genius and talent in our own race. Wherever we see great Negro ability it is our office to light upon it not tardily, not hesitatingly; but warmly, ungrudgingly, enthusiastically, for the honor of our race, and for the stimulating self-sacrifice in upbuilding the race. Fortunately for us, as a people, this year has given us more than ordinary opportunity for such recognition. Never before, in American history, has there been such a large discovery of talent and genius among us.

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Early in the year there was published by one of our members, a volume of papers and addresses, of more than usual excellence. You know gentlemen, that, not seldom, we have books and pamphlets from the press which, like most of our newspapers, are beneath the dignity of criticism. In language, in style, in grammar and in thought they are often crude and ignorant and vulgar. Not so with “*Talks for the Times*” by Prof. Crogman, of Clark University. It is a book with largess of high and noble common sense; pure and classical in style; with a large fund of devoted racialism; and replete everywhere with elevated thoughts. Almost simultaneously with the publication of Professor Crogman’s book, came the thoughtful and spicy narrative of Rev. Matthew Anderson of Philadelphia. The title of this volume is “*Presbyterianism; its relation to the Negro*” but the title cannot serve as a revelation of the racy and spirited story of events in the career of its author. The book abounds with stirring incidents, strong remonstrance, clear and lucid argument, powerful reasonings, the keenest satire; while, withal, it sets forth the wide needs of the Race, and gives one of the strongest vindications of its character and its capacity.[5]

Soon after this came the first publication of our Academy. And you all know the deep interest excited by the two papers, the first issue of this Society. They have attracted interest and inquiry where the mere declamatory effusions, or, the so-called eloquent harangues of aimless talkers and political wire-pullers would fall like snowflakes upon the waters. The papers of Prof. Kelly Miller and Prof. Du Bois have reached the circles of scholars and thinkers in this country. So consummate was the handling of Hoffman’s “Race Traits and Tendencies” by Prof. Miller, that we may say that it was the most scientific defense of the Negro ever made in this country by a man of our own blood: accurate, pointed, painstaking, and I claim conclusive.

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The treatise of Prof. Du Bois upon the "Conservation of Race" separated itself, in tone and coloring, from the ordinary effusions of literary work in this land. It rose to the dignity of philosophical insight and deep historical inference. He gave us, in a most lucid and original method, and in a condensed form, the long settled conclusions of Ethnologists and Anthropologists upon the question of Race.

This treatise moreover, furnished but a limited measure of our indebtedness to his pen and brain. Only a brief time before our assembly last year, Prof. Du Bois had given a large contribution to the literature of the nation as well as to the genius of the race. At that time he had published a work which will, without doubt, stand permanently, as authority upon its special theme. "*The Suppression of the Slave Trade*" is, without doubt, the one unique and special authority upon that subject, in print. It is difficult to conceive the possible creation of a similar work, so accurate and painstaking, so full of research, so orderly in historical statement, so rational in its conclusions. It is the simple truth, and at the same time the highest praise, the statement of one Review, that "Prof. Du Bois has exhausted his subject." This work is a step forward in the literature of the Race, and a stimulant to studious and aspiring minds among us.

One further reference, that is, to the realm of Art.

The year '97 will henceforth be worthy of note in our history. As a race, we have, this year, reached a high point in intellectual growth and expression.

In poetry and painting, as well as in letters and thought, the Negro has made, this year, a character.

On my return home in October, I met an eminent scientific gentleman; and one of the first remarks he made to me was—"Well, Dr. Crummell, we Americans have been well taken down in Paris, this year. Why," he said, "the prize in painting was taken by a colored young man, a Mr. Tanner from America. Do you know him?" The reference was to Mr. Tanner's "Raising of Lazarus," a painting purchased by the French Government, for the famous Luxembourg Gallery. This is an exceptional honor, rarely bestowed upon any American Artist. Well may we all be proud of this, and with this we may join the idea that Tanner, instead of having a hoe in his hand, or digging in a trench, as the faddists on industrialism would fain persuade us, has found his right place at the easel with artists.

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Not less distinguished in the world of letters is the brilliant career of our poet-friend and co-laborer, Mr. Paul Dunbar. It was my great privilege last summer to witness his triumph, on more than one occasion, in that grand metropolis of Letters and Literature, the city of London; as well as to hear of the high value set upon his work, by some of the first scholars and literati of England. Mr. Dunbar has had his poems republished in London by Chapman & Co.; and now has as high a reputation abroad as he has here in America, where his luminous genius has broken down the bars, and with himself, raised the intellectual character of his race in the world's consideration.

These cheering occurrences, these demonstrations of capacity, give us the greatest encouragement in the large work which is before this Academy. Let us enter upon that work, this year, with high hopes, with large purposes, and with calm and earnest persistence. I trust that we shall bear in remembrance that the work we have undertaken is our special function; that it is a work which calls for cool thought, for laborious and tireless painstaking, and for clear discrimination; that it promises nowhere wide popularity, or, exuberant eclat; that very much of its ardent work is to be carried on in the shade; that none of its desired results will spring from spontaneity; that its most prominent features are the demands of duty to a needy people; and that its noblest rewards will be the satisfaction which will spring from having answered a great responsibility, and having met the higher needs of a benighted and struggling Race.

Footnotes:

[1] *Baptism*, for well nigh a century, was denied Negro slaves in the colonies, for fear it carried emancipation with it. Legislation on Education began at a subsequent date. In 1740 it was enacted in SOUTH CAROLINA: "Whereas, the having slaves taught to write or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconvenience, Be it enacted, That all and every person or persons whatsoever who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a Scribe in any manner of writing, hereafter taught to write; every such person or persons shall forever, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of £100 current money."

The next step, in South Carolina, was aimed against mental instruction of *every kind*, in reading and writing.

A similar law was passed in Savannah, Georgia. In 1711, in the Colony of Maryland, a

special enactment was passed to bar freedom by baptism and in 1715, in South Carolina! See "*Stroud's Slave Laws.*"

[2] At the time when France was on the eve of plunging deeply into the slave trade and of ruining her colonies by the curse of Slavery, the ABBE GREGOIRE stepped forth in vindication of the Negro, and published his celebrated work—"The Literature of Negroes." In this work he gives the names and narrates the achievements of the distinguished Negroes, writers, scholars, painters, philosophers, priests and Roman prelates, in Spain, Portugal, France, England, Holland, Italy and Turkey who had risen to eminence in the 15th century.

Not long after BLUMENBACH declared that "entire and large provinces of Europe might be named, in which it would be difficult to meet with such good writers, poets, philosophers, and correspondents of the French Academy; and that moreover there is no savage people, who have distinguished themselves by such examples of perfectibility and capacity for scientific cultivation: and consequently that none can approach more nearly to the polished nations of the globe than the Negro."

[3] "Oberlin College" in Ohio was the first opening its doors to the Negro in 1836.

[4] "I am not so old as some of my young friends may suspect, but I am too old to go into the business of 'carrying coals to Newcastle.' * * * * The colored citizen of the U. S. has already graduated with respectable standing from a course of 250 years in the University of the old-time type of Manual labor. The South of to-day is what we see it largely because the colored men and women at least during the past 250 years, have not been lazy 'cumberers of the ground,' but the grand army of laborers that has wrestled with nature and led these 16 States out of the woods thus far on the highroad to material prosperity. It is not especially necessary that the 2,000,000 of our colored children and youth in the southern common schools should be warned against laziness, and what has always and everywhere come of that since the foundation of the world."

The Rev. A. D. Mayo, M. A., LL. D.
Address before State Teachers' Association (Colored)
Birmingham, Ala.

[5] I owe Mr. Anderson an apology for omitting this references to his book on the delivery of this address. It was prepared while its author was in a foreign land; but had passed entirely from his memory in the preparation of this address.

Transcriber's Notes:

Other than the corrections noted by hover information, printer's spelling and hyphenation usage have been retained.

An unmatched quotation mark has been left as presented in the original text ("Hic haec, hoc," is going to prove the ruin of the Negro" says the Rev. Steele, an erudite Southern Savan.).

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CIVILIZATION THE PRIMAL NEED OF
THE RACE, AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE AMERICAN MIND TOWARD THE NEGRO
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