

Martha Schofield

Pioneer Negro Educator

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Dedictory

To the men and women who braved the dangers and suffered the hardships of frontier life and bore with fortitude the pain of social ostracism and the sting of poison slander that through their work a lowly race might be educated, this work is respectfully dedicated by

THE AUTHOR.

FOREWORD

One of the benefits conferred by education is that of enlightening the mind on the subject of one's duty. Finding what is duty the manner of discharging it will suggest itself to the alert, the active, and those of industrious and intelligent discernment. Perhaps forever hidden would remain the necessity for certain tasks were it not for the inspiration idealists receive from education. This education, if proper and well rounded, also forces all who embrace it into the line of work promising the accomplishment of the greatest achievements—achievements such as in leaving footprints on the sands of time leave no mark of dishonor but such as really and truly do give new heart and new hope and new courage to the weaker brother.

That Martha Schofield was inspired by the highest motives that possibly could influence any one in choosing an occupation to be made a life-work is evidenced by the personal sacrifices she made in order to engage in it. The fortitude with which she bore the poison sting of slander, the cruel whip of character assassination and braved the threats of personal violence forcibly attests the sincerity actuating her in pursuing her chosen work. The results accomplished by the fifty years of earnest endeavor by her form a tribute to efficiency of women in administrative affairs that is seldom ever equaled by other human beings claiming greater strength by reason of sex. When the final history of the war between ignorance and enlightenment, between superstition and science, between vice and virtue shall have been written of the

colored race the foremost name among all will be—Martha
Schofield—Pioneer Negro Educator.

MATILDA A. EVANS, M. D.,
Columbia, S. C.

Martha Schofield

CHAPTER I.

THE HUNTED BEAST.

A woman apparently thirty years of age, of mulatto skin, fell limp into a chair in the kitchen of Mrs. Oliver Schofield of Darby, Bucks County, Pennsylvania about the year 1857, with blood hounds and the voices of angry men following close upon her heels through the tangled swamps from which she had just emerged.

“Who can thee be? Who can thee be?—and what does thee want here?” inquired excited Mrs. Schofield as she dropped the dish rag and rushed to the prostrate form in the chair, eager to render aid and comfort to the suffering and afflicted woman as well as to ascertain the cause of her abrupt, unannounced entrance into her home.

Out of breath from the long run made necessary to escape the dogs and the traps laid by experienced officers of the law who had been so diligently upon her trail for more than a week, that she had had time to stop and rest and take nourishment for only a few minutes at a time, Laura Duncan was unable at first to give any coherent account of herself. She managed, however, to make it known to the kind Quaker lady that she was an escaped slave and was endeavoring with all speed possible to reach the Canadian border and enter the world of freedom, which she had been informed existed under the British flag in the Dominion of Canada for all who might enter that country.

As causes moving her to take this drastic step in defiance of the law of her own land and the possibility of involving the liberty and

happiness of all who might be kind enough to assist her in the accomplishment of the task, she recited such evils as brought tears to the eyes of her enforced host. She exhibited a lash-scared back, a broken bone or two and a deep cut on the head that had since been healed without serious results only by the aid of a skillful surgeon.

But the physical suffering attested by these outward signs of the practice of brutality on the woman were but a fraction of the pain and torture which Miss Schofield knew was gnashing at her heart over the parting of herself and husband and children more than a month before, when at a public sale little Gabe, her ten year old son, and Jennie, the only daughter, and her husband, "Jim," were each sold to different masters in as many different States and carried away where she would never see or hear of any of them again.

"Martha" said Mrs. Schofield addressing her daughter, whose face was covered in an immaculate white apron that adorned her whole front, to hide the freely flowing tears that rushed from her eyes like water from the fountains, "do thee find thy father at once and tell him to come to the house as quickly as possible."

Then laying her arms around the body of the inconsolable wife and mother she spoke words of consolation and cheer, assuring her that God in his own way and wisdom would destroy the power of the government of human beings by the lash, would break the chains that bind the hand and foot and visit a just retribution on all those responsible for the sale of babies from the breasts of mothers. She begged and pleaded earnestly that Laura abandon the attempt to escape and entreated her to surrender to the officers and return to her master, but the slave, chafing under the influence of a life of

injustice and brutality, expressed a firmer determination than ever before, to continue on in her course and begged pitiably of her host that her presence in the home be not divulged. She threatened suicide if captured.

Mr. Schofield, himself, by this time had reached the house and instantly grasping the situation, requested of Mrs. Schofield a familiar old shawl and bonnet of hers. Dressed in these Laura, in company with Mr. Schofield, passed readily as Mary, his wife, among acquaintances of the latter, and successfully eluded all pursuit by the officers, who a half hour after her departure had ransacked the Schofield home from turret to foundation stone in search of the fleeing fugitive.

Reaching a zone safely out of reach of harm's way, the leader of the church of the Society Friends, deposited his burden, wishing her God-speed in her undertaking and placing in her hand one dollar in gold to assist her on her journey, turned his horse, after many days on the road, and made his way slowly back home, with a painful heart.

During the interval of her husband's departure and return, Mrs. Schofield was kept busy in the attempt to control the indignant and outraged feelings of Martha, who had gone to her mother dozens of times with the question of the justice and mercy of God and the wisdom and power of the government in permitting the fettering of four million bodies in chains and the trampling under foot by brutal might of all the sacred relations of wife, father and child.

"Ah, my daughter, 'tis not for thee to question the mysterious workings of God," she would reply, "in the Master's own time and way He will touch the auction block, the slave pen and the

whipping post, and in their place thee shall see what thy dear heart desires so much to see—happy homes and firesides, and school houses and books, where today thee only sees crime and cruelty and fear.”

“But mother,” Martha would protest, “for how much longer must the poor ignorant slaves endure the infinite outrages heaped upon them by reason of the barbarism of the slave-holding oligarchy? Have they not suffered enough already? Is it not time to close the door on the slave-holding class and render judgment as swift and implacable as death? Their cause was brought forth in iniquity and consummated in crime, and I for one believe God would only be served by our societies (the Society of Friends and the Abolitionist Society) hastening on the inevitable civil conflict, believed by most people as absolutely necessary in the settlement of the whole question of slavery.”

“My daughter, oh, my daughter, pray thee do not talk that way” said her mother in tones of profound anxiety; “does not the good book command thee not to kill? Eternal torment for thy portion if thou should commit murder, and to wish it to be done is father to the deed. Oh, my daughter! my daughter! thee frightens me!”

“Oh, no my mother, there’s no murder in my heart, I assure thee,” said Martha; “I only desire the government’s protection for every human being subject to its authority and I want that same authority to turn every auction block and slave pen into a school house even if its necessary to exact by bullet every drop of blood that has been spilled by the lash, in accomplishing this result. Thee must concede that the Bible also teaches us to exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I wish this to be done, Mother, only to make possible a happier and blessed existence here on this earth for a

lowly race, when all other means of accomplishing so desirable an end have been tried and proven in vain.”



CHAPTER II.

REVOLUTION AND WAR.

During the ten years intervening between the precipitate appearance of the runaway slave at the Schofield home and the coming to Edisto Island, South Carolina, of Miss Martha Schofield for the purpose of founding an industrial school for the colored race, the new form of liberty conceived by our fore-fathers and dedicated to the principle that all men are born free and equal, had been put to a severe test as to whether this new form of government could be put into practice. The great Civil War predicted by Martha as inevitable in the settlement of the problem of slavery broke out in all its fury in 1860-61 and was not only attended by the loss of hundreds of thousands of priceless lives, whose bodies filled countless hospitals of pain, and made gory the prairies and furrows of old fields, as they on the side of the South as well as they on the side of the North bled and died for the eternal right as each saw what was their duty; but the demoralization precipitated by this gigantic conflict, followed by the assassination of President Lincoln, the idol of the whole free-civilized world, was even more staggering in its influence on the lives and fortunes of those left to solve the problems created by the great revolution.

The waste of inconceivable sums of money through the awarding of contracts involving millions and millions of dollars by which fortunes, through little or no effort at all, were made in a single night was openly countenanced at Washington.

Superfluous wealth choked the nation at the North with its mighty grip and the riot of speculation, corruption and debauchery which followed, in the voting away of the public lands free of any charge to private corporations and the granting of subsidies of millions of dollars without any compensation whatever, laid such burdens upon the people that many of them until this day (1916) remain undischarged.

The paralysis experienced by the business interests as a result of this whirlwind of corruption resulted in the decline of the credit of the country to such an extent that the six per cent. bonds of the Republic dropped to about seventy-three cents on the dollar in the open market. But the disastrous financial calamity which the war produced is of no consequence in comparison with the moral degradation into which the country sank.

A few years before the panic of 1873 nearly everybody in the North and West, where conditions were prosperous in spite of the war, wanted to go to the cities where fortunes were waiting for them, and almost every farmer's son took an oath that he would never cultivate the soil. At the age of twenty-one they left the dreary and desolate farms in droves and rushed to the cities to become bookkeepers, doctors, lawyers, merchants and sewing machine agents, anything to escape the heavy work of the farm. Those with capital wanted to engage in something promising huge and quick returns and so these built railroads, established banks and insurance companies. Some speculated in stocks of Wall Street, while others gambled in grain in Chicago with the result that the riches of the whole country flowed to their coffers in immense volume, and in their carriages and palaces they pitied their poor brothers on the farm, who as earnestly envied them.

But the lap of luxury in which these citizens were being nursed was doomed to become thread-bare as, indeed, it did do, and always will do, when the world's advance is checked by the want of assistance and co-operation of all classes of laborers. The railroad and insurance presidents became bankrupts and their companies went into the hands of receivers by the score. Large numbers of young men who imagined they had entirely too much education to be wasted on the farm and flocked to the cities in incredible numbers became in time, either absconders and fugitives from justice, or plain tramps and hobos, a demonstrative force to prove the saying, that the only really solvent people, the only independent people, are the tillers of the soil.

At the South which had been reduced to the most degraded type of poverty there were no such opportunities for the accumulation of wealth as existed at the North and in the West. The few railroads that before the war intersected this section had been torn up by the necessities of war and needed rebuilding, but there was no money to be had anywhere with which to do the work. All the strongest blood and brain had been either slain in battle or rendered incapacitated for the tasks which the new order of conditions had forced upon the country. Aside from the loss of millions and millions of dollars as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves the South was forced also to bear the burden of an exorbitant tax on all crops produced, especially the cotton tax.

The agitation set up by many of the acts of Reconstruction, impeachment proceedings against President Johnson and the foment and strife engendered by the rule of the military authorities opposed by the Ku Klux Klan, all served, to keep for years longer than necessary, the bleeding and prostrate South securely on its back, a helpless beggar at the mercy, in many instances of an army

of unscrupulous and grafting office-seekers. Under such conditions it was impossible to obtain credit anywhere for the most necessary things of life and as there was almost nothing of any value produced, the greatest hardships and suffering, if not actual misery, was endured by the people of the South.

Scores of persons gave up in despair and died. Cow peas, corn bread and molasses of such quality as only a few years before would have been considered unfit food for the slaves formed the sole diet, for the first few years after the war, of delicate and cultured women. Little children often went to bed crying from hunger. An element of the Negro population, rendered conspicuously brutal and vicious by service in the army, stole and threatened even blacker crimes, just as the game of war has affected the morality of all races of men throughout the history of recorded warfare.

CHAPTER III.

PIONEER EDUCATOR ARRIVES.

Into the midst of these terrible times which made weak the souls and hearts of the strongest of men, came Miss Martha Schofield, the first of the pioneers to push into the distracted South to labor, to suffer, and if need be, to die for the millions of ignorant, irresponsible Negroes. Their education, along industrial lines, she made her life-work—crowning it on the 77th day of her birth, February 1, 1916, by passing from earth to heaven. But she left to show that she did something on earth a school and campus comprising an area of two entire blocks in the beautiful City of Aiken, S. C., on which she had erected eight buildings.

The school farm, adequate for all farm demonstration work, consists of about 400 acres. The funds by which all this valuable property was acquired was raised by Miss Schofield herself, through the fluent use of her trenchant pen, which she knew how to wield as few women have ever learned to do. Everything contracted for in the interest of the school was paid for in cash as Miss Schofield, in all her fifty years of administration, never contracted the outlay of money without first having provided the means with which to meet claims. She enjoyed the good-will and friendship of men and women of wealth and influence throughout the country, especially of the old Abolitionists, who supported her institution generously as long as they lived and possessed the means with which to do so.

The Schofield School at Aiken has sent out into the world many young men and women who have gone back among their own

people accomplished teachers, ministers, physicians, farmers and artisans, leading the colored race of the South to the highest appreciation of what Martha Schofield's motto for life was—"Thoroughness," thoroughness not only in books and the industrial arts, but in thought and action as well. No doubt the success which attended the efforts of the graduates of this School is due, in the main, to the strict regard for efficiency with which this great woman inspired every student coming under her influence.

When we contemplate the wide-spread influence which the life and work of Martha Schofield has exerted on the education of the people of the South, the white as well as the colored, words become inadequate to pay proper tribute to her; to justly express the appreciation felt by those having knowledge of her achievements.

There is not a colored school in the entire South that has not acknowledged the wisdom of this Divinely endowed leader and instructor by establishing an industrial department. Recognizing the imperative importance of this sort of instruction almost all the schools and colleges for whites emphasize it by giving it first place in their curriculums. Clemson, for white men and Rock Hill Normal and Industrial Institute for young white women were established long after Miss Schofield brought home to the people of the South the crying necessity of preparing our boys and girls of all races for the actual duties met with in every day home life. The vision which she herself had of a thorough preparation for the humbler tasks lighted the intellectual skies of the whole South after years of success by her in the education of the weaker race. This fact is made more prominent by the action of many of the States in incorporating industrial courses in the common schools.

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