

St. Croix Avis.

80TH YEAR.

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Graduation Oration

(F. J. H. S.)

"OUR DEBT"

By AXEL E. SCHADE

Officials of the Virgin Islands, parents, teachers, and all others who are gathered here tonight—we have met to recognize with fitting ceremony the nine years of special privileges we children of St. Croix have received from the municipality.

For nine years during ten months of each year we have gone to school. During that time teachers have worked with us trying to make us see the logic in the fact that two and two make four. We have studied spelling, geography, history the simplest laws of hygiene. We know that it is wrong to say *I* is and *you* was; Greatest of all we realize that what we have studied is just the smallest part of what there is still to learn.

Now that we have received this special privilege of going to school and receiving all the benefits of elementary schooling without the cost of one cent to us, we may ask, "Why is it that the United States government is anxious to give each child the chance to learn to read and write and think? Why is it that the amount appropriated to the education department in St. Croix is greater than the amount appropriated to any other public department?" In the United States statistics state that in the years 1911 and 12 the cost of the nation for each child enrolled in the public school was \$26 and the cost for each child in a high school was \$50. Since 1911 it is common knowledge that the cost of living has gone up.

The American principle which has in public education is briefly this: each

child in a democracy must be so trained that when he grows up he will be able to fulfill a citizen's duty in that democracy. We are educated not that we may get more money and more fun out of life, but that we may be able to give more to our country. Of course, when we serve our country we serve ourselves. Our schools try to teach us those subjects which will show us our relation to all other things in the world. Civics and history show us how men behave and how they should behave, and so does literature, mathematics and general science. Our school tries to train us how to think clearly, and how to act as becomes American citizens.

How does school train us? Well, have you read how experiment train rats to run through a maze.

A maze in this case is a cage with a number of corridors having false turns and paths which lead off to blind alleys. It is the problem of the rat to find his way through the maze, and then to learn this way so well that it becomes a habit with him to run through the maze without once turning off into a false path.

Rats acquire this knowledge of the maze and the habit of going straight through without a mistake by being turned loose again and again in the puzzle. Repetition or practice is the principle behind a rat's learning; and repetition—practice is the principle behind our learning.

In school we are made accustomed to the same conditions we shall find later on in life. We find in school, children of all kinds: children who have had many opportunities and children who have had none at all. However in school we are all given the same chance to show what we are made of. Greater than that, we are taught that when people are gathered together in a community responsibility rests upon each member.

In our school community we are taught and we practice the same principles which should govern our lives after we leave school. We are taught that the greatest good for the greatest number is the goal we should seek and that each of us is responsible for the happiness of all. For that reason it is a wrong to other children to make unnecessary noise in the school and disturb every one within hearing distance. It is wrong to come to school day after day with unprepared lessons, for then the whole class is kept back by one person's laziness. In our school clubs and school games we practice fairness and quick ac-

tion. In short just as the rat learns by repetition how to find his way through puzzle we learn by repetition how to conduct ourselves in that larger community outside of school called the world. And we receive this learning because the American theory is—train the child for good citizenship in a democracy.

Friends for nine years we have benefited by this theory, and now we are about to leave forever the schoolhouse. Some of us it is true, intend to continue with our studies, but for most of us this night means the end of that period in which school was our chief interest. We must practice in earnest now those principles of right living and right thinking which our teachers have tried to make habitual to us, and in doing so we must give back to St. Croix the full value of the gift she has given us.

We are all blessed with the burden of a tremendous debt to St. Croix. Blessed, say—First of all, because our school training has been good for nothing if it has not fostered our love for this island on which we have been born and raised. Second, because it is such an extraordinary debt. If we owe a man money, we must make ourselves the poorer in order to pay him; but when we pay our debt to St. Croix we ourselves profit, for we are part of St. Croix and her prosperity is our prosperity.

It is hard to believe but there are probable some of us here tonight who are thinking of leaving St. Croix. St. Croix is not what it used to be, "they mutter" We are going to a country where the streets are paved with gold and where the people do nothing but eat and sleep and spend a great deal of money.

to be concluded.

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