

Cora Wilson Stewart—Shall Kentucky Be Longer Deprived of Her Services?

Some years ago a woman was a candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction of Rowan County, one of the few public positions which under the Kentucky law women can fill. Fortunately for that county, fortunately for Kentucky, fortunately for the cause of education in the United States, she was elected. Today Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart is better known in educational circles of the United States than any other Kentuckian. She has done original, constructive work that has received the commendation of the committee on education of the National House of Representatives, and has attracted the attention of educators in every state, marking as it does a new departure in popular education.

When Mrs. Stewart was elected County Superintendent of Rowan County that county ranked among the lowest in the State, measured by the literacy of its citizens. She inaugurated "Moonlight Schools," offering to the residents of Rowan County, of every age, the opportunity to study at night. By the power of her personality, by the force of her enthusiasm, she created a sentiment that resulted in the attendance of all the citizens. Today Rowan County ranks at the very top of the list of Kentucky counties, and there are few, if any, counties in the United States in which the percentage of illiteracy is so small. There are today but four natives of Rowan County old enough to read and to write, who are unable to read and write.

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Mrs. Stewart's services have not been confined to Rowan County; she has been a vital and vibrant force in the educational movement in Kentucky. To her in large measure is due the splendid work done by the women of Kentucky, which has resulted in the passage of the present school law which marked a far step in advance of the archaic law that had been on the statute books for half a century.

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Wednesday Mrs. Stewart spoke before the committee of the whole of the Kentucky Legislature, advocating the creation of an Illiteracy Commission. According to the accounts in the newspapers she was tendered a unanimous vote of thanks by the House and Senate, and the remarkable tribute was paid to her of having the regular order of business suspended and the bill creating the Illiteracy Commission put upon its passage, and passed by a unanimous vote.

It is also stated in the newspapers that Representative S. M. Saufley, the editor of the Interior Journal, announced that he will in the columns of his paper advocate the nomination of Mrs. Stewart for State Superintendent of Public Instruction at the next State election. Few young men have appeared in Kentucky politics in recent years who give promise of higher service than Mr. Saufley. He has demonstrated his ability, and proven his worth. We have known him a number of years, and know only good of him. He rarely makes a mistake. His statement that he will advocate Mrs. Stewart's nomination is an idle compliment. But as the law is today Mrs. Stewart cannot be elected Superintendent of Public Instruction; she cannot even express at the polls through the ballot her conviction what man will best serve the State in that office; she cannot even be appointed a member of the Board of Trustees of State University; she is ranked politically with criminals, idiots and minors. Unless the Legislature passes the act introduced by John G. Miller, Jr., which has been reported favorably by the Committee on Suffrage, of which Mr. Saufley is a member, and the voters of the State give to women the ballot, Mrs. Stewart and the other women of Kentucky who have served Kentucky nobly cannot participate in the election of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or of any other State officer.

It is not so great a deprivation to Mrs. Stewart and her co-workers as it is to the State of Kentucky that it cannot have the full benefit of their ability, knowledge and enthusiasm. Mrs. Stewart would make an ideal Superintendent of Public Instruction, and it would be a wise act for the Democratic party to nominate her. We submit to the Democrats in the Legislature the suggestion that a ticket on which Mrs. Stewart was a nominee, nominated by a party that had given to women the right to vote, would be invincible in the State of Kentucky. We submit further to all the members of the Legislature that it is a short-sighted policy that keeps Kentucky from having the full benefit of the services of those women of whom Mrs. Stewart is a type; who are in largest measure responsible for the enactment of the new school law, for the creation of a Forestry Commission, of a Tuberculosis Commission, of the crystallization into law of the demand for a Juvenile Court, for the inauguration of the war against blindness; that it is all Kentucky that suffers because such women cannot vote, cannot serve on the Board of Trustees of State University, cannot hold such an office as Superintendent of Public Instruction. Cannot every man in the Legislature who wants, and is working to bring about better conditions, realize that Kentucky needs full aid of the women of the State?