TIME

EDUCATION

Adult Illiterates

The census-takers of 1920 to the people of America: "Can you read and write?"

Five million men and women of America: "We cannot!"

Besides the 5,000,000 honest illiterates, there were 5,000,000 "proud" or "dishonest" ones, who refused to admit their deficiency.* Researches carefully back-tracked the Federal statistics into States and localities, there also discovering about 10,000,000 near-illiterates—a grand total of 20,000,000 ignorami. This is: more than half the population of France, more than all the Mexicans in the world, more than all the inhabitants of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and Scotland combined.

Cora Wilson Stewart, Chairman of the Illiteracy Commission of the National Education Association: "It does not take a vivid imagination to see the potentialities of this vast illiterate population. . . .

"There are some communities where illiterate men have no chance for education unless they go to the penitentiary or join the Army. . . . No provision was made in any state school system for the education of adults—no plan existed prior to 1911 for redeeming illiterates. . . . It was generally understood that when one grew up illiterate he was to remain so. . . . The school age was from 6 to 20 and no one over that age was supposed to enter. . . .

"The barrier of age to educational opportunity must crumble just as the barriers of race, sex, class and religion have given way. . . .

"The University of Michigan recently graduated an Iowa judge at the age of 62. Columbia University graduated a grandmother aged 71 and Kansas University graduated a man of 81 at its last commencement. . . . The three R's are comparatively easy subjects for the adult mind and none are too old to grasp them. . . .

"If there should be one Booker T. Washington, Edison or Lincoln among them, although it cost $20,000,000 to bring him out, it would be well worth the price."

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* According to statistics furnished by the Illiteracy Commission of the National Education Association.