

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S LOGICAL SUCCESSOR

An Elevator Man Who Plans to Carry the Tuskegee Plan Into Oklahoma.

EMLOYED as night elevator man in one of the smaller but best-known hotels of Washington, D. C., is a negro whose self-education and mental development is such that many white persons of position and influence at the Capital look upon him as the logical successor of Booker T. Washington in the uplifting of the negro race. Black in color as the proverbial "ace of spades," and having all the facial characteristics of the true African negro, those who have become interested in him and have studied him describe him as possessing "a black man's skull filled with a white man's brains."

This individual, Willis N. Huggins by name, of whom the country may hear a good deal within the next few years in connection with educational matters, was born at Selma, Ala., on Feb. 7, 1883, being one of twelve children. His father and mother were slaves in North Carolina until the end of the war. His father learned the trade of carpenter and also studied for the ministry. To-day he is one of the best-known Baptist ministers in Central Alabama. He tried hard to educate his children, but poverty made this impossible. Willis thereupon determined to educate himself and in the face of great obstacles was graduated in 1904 as valedictorian of his class from the Alabama Baptist Colored University.

His family needing his support, he acted as bookkeeper for a physician at Selma. Later he acted as messenger for one of the officials of the Southern Railway in the same city. In January, 1909, he passed the Alabama State teachers' examination, and taught school at Plantersville, Ala., in a church which his father built, and of which he became pastor. Becoming impressed with what his father had accomplished first with his hands and then with his brain, he decided to prepare himself for his life's work in the field of industrial education. He therefore went to Washington in September, 1909, for the purpose of taking a two-year course at the Armstrong Manual Training School, established by Gen. S. C. Armstrong, U. S. A., founder of the famous Hampton Institute for colored persons. He is to finish his preparatory work in the Armstrong school next June, and the Faculty there has recommended him to Columbia University for a scholarship in the School of Industrial Arts. Should he obtain it and graduate it is his intention to teach manual training in the State schools of Oklahoma, believing that industrial education will bring about the greatest development of the colored race.

While attending the Armstrong school during the day he continues his studies between elevator calls at night, reading Euclid and similar works meanwhile as relaxation. Always respectful, never forgetting that he is a servitor, and never seeking to presume on the fact that he has "forgotten" more about many educational subjects than some educated white men and women know, he goes about his work quietly and does it thoroughly, at so time seeking to "show off" his mental ability to guests of the hotel or others.

When questioned, however, about his views on the subject of education as a means of uplifting the colored race his answers are such as to cause quiet astonishment that such ideas, showing as they do deep reflection and study, should emanate from such a source. The surprise is intensified when it becomes known that he has addressed public meetings at which such persons as President Taft, Associate Justice Harlan of the United States Supreme Court, and former Register of the Treasury W. T. Vernon were present.

A few evenings ago I questioned this remarkable colored man between his elevator calls, purposely choosing a time when he might be taken off his guard and thus have no opportunity to prepare his views in advance, possibly through the secret aid of some friend who might coach him. I asked him for his views on industrial education and what it means to his race. With excellent diction and speaking as if a college professor, he said:

"It may seem useless, perhaps, to attempt to set forth new ideas on the subject of industrial education. Unfortunately, a great many people of my race—and not a few white ones—have a wrong conception of what manual training, industrial education, technical instruction, really is. They construe it to mean something that arrests mental development. The people of any race, as the white, for instance, for whom the problem of existence has, to a great extent, been solved by their ancestors or through other fortunate circumstances, may seek avocational training, but for that great majority who are forced to toil with their hands their education should be practical, covering, in the main, the duties they will probably be called upon to perform.

"Whatever the education be that is given to the masses of a people, it must be sufficient to raise their intelligence and their earning capacity at one and the same time. Men must remain men; they must not be changed into mere automatons. The problem of existence is the 'wolf at the door' of the masses, and since this question is so seriously affecting my own people it becomes evident that if the negro race is to continue to exist its workers must become as diligent, as efficient, and as punctual in the discharge of their duties as are those of the white race.

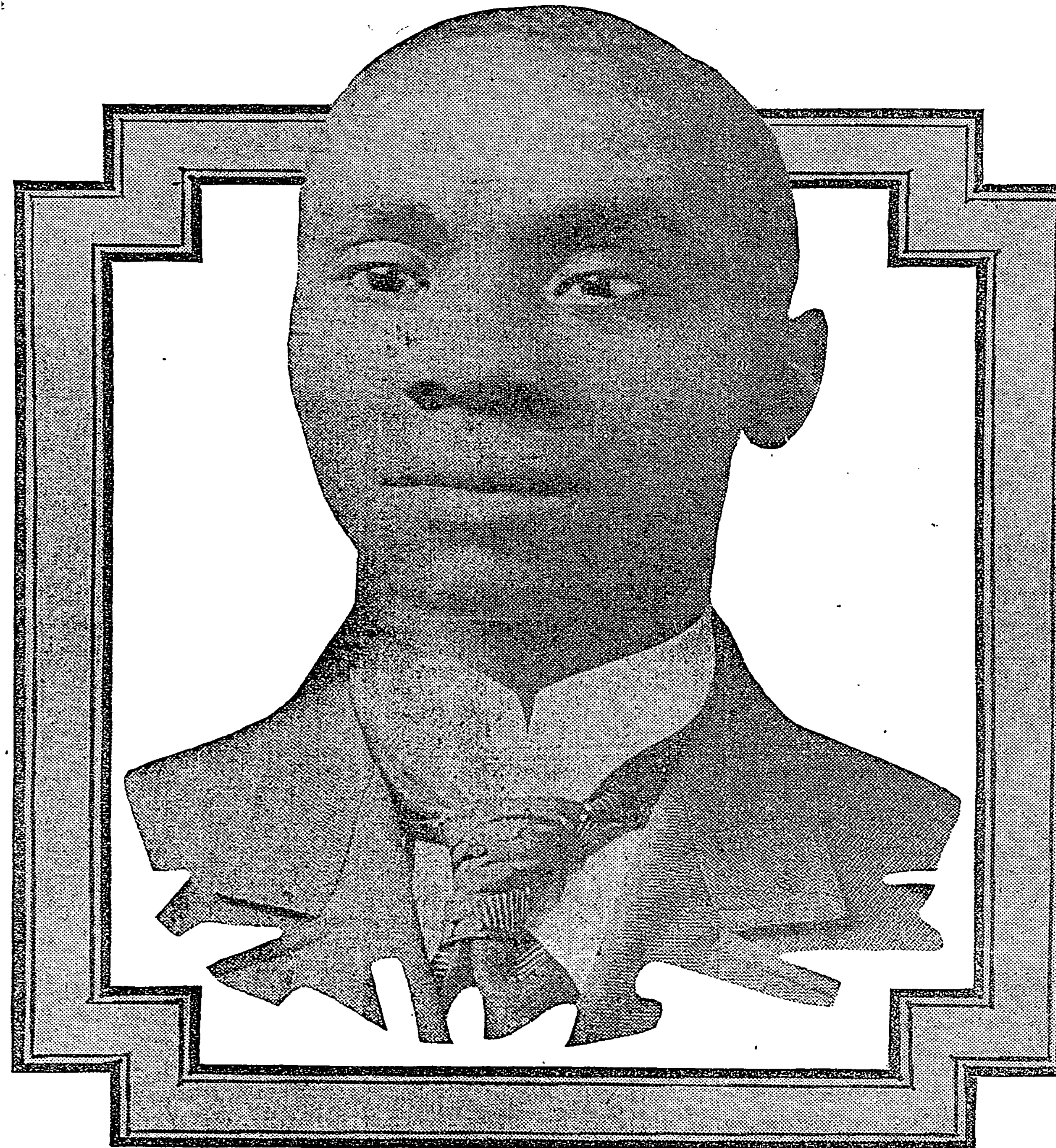
"The colored people, like any other, need men, real men, of broad culture and signal ability to stand at the helm and direct them in the course which will give them their rights and privileges and lead them to the goal of true manhood and efficiency. It would be disastrous to restrict the source from which such men may come. On the other hand, that great mass of people who must perforce be followers are to be considered and something done to increase their intelligence and ability to make themselves self-supporting.

"Now, I believe that training in the industries, whether in the household, the shop, or on the farm, creates a constant rise in the intelligence of the masses, of whatever race they may be. It is through this method that the individual sees that his hands are meant to be of greater use than as mere appendages to his body. He learns that they are intended to transform and utilize the world about him for his own benefit and that of mankind also."

"Is it not true that colored men and women are themselves chiefly to blame for the fact that they are being supplanted throughout the country generally as servants in similar capacities by whites because of the fact that the latter are more thorough and efficient generally?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly," replied Huggins. "In certain cities throughout the United States, notably in New York, some institutions, hotels for instance, maintain 'schools' to train white servants—usually their own employees. These will in time supplant colored servants. Everywhere may be seen instances where colored domestics are being discarded and white men and women installed.

"Right here in Washington object lessons of this kind may be seen, where several of the most prominent hotels have done away with colored waiters and cooks



WILLIS N. HUGGINS.

and replaced them with trained white men, because they are trained to do their work more efficiently and are willing to labor on a higher level. Several other large hotels here, now existing or soon to be built, intend making the same changes. In barber shops, too, the employment of white instead of colored men is quite general, because white men, realizing the needs of the times, are willing to fit themselves to meet such demands, while many of my race unfortunately are not, being unwilling to read the clearly apparent handwriting on the industrial wall.

"This condition, while but a 'straw,' clearly shows the coming of even keener competition between the white and colored races. In order to meet this condition the men and women of my race who seek to fill domestic and similar positions must accept manual training if they are to meet the standard of efficiency demanded in these days, and if they are to avoid being crowded to the wall by the white people. The training of men and women in self-support and productivity leads them to realize their relative value to the world at large, for a well-developed mind, working in harmony with skilled hands, is the sum and substance of a useful citizen.

"That the entire world is moving rapidly forward along broad educational lines is apparent on every hand. The East is

entering upon the greatest educational era of its history. China is chopping down the deeply rooted tree of traditional learning. Its vast educational system, built upon the writings of Mencius and Confucius, is gradually giving way to all that is best and progressive in Western civilization.

"We in the United States have achieved much success in the past largely because of our industrial resources and industrial energy. Since we have gained such great material prosperity the people are demanding a new education. Primary, secondary, collegiate, and university education we have had in abundance, but the defect in this old order of education is its utter inability to correlate the lives of boys and girls to their environment.

"Industrial education, therefore, I assert, is destined to become the foundation of all our future progress, because it acquaints the youth with himself and develops all his powers. To make the most of all that the world offers is to adopt that system of education which is in harmony with the prevailing spirit of the age. The evil of our present system is its tendency to unfit our youth for life or life's work.

"Those who think as I do propose a system of education that will make the youth love all forms of honest toil. That

system is industrial. We plan no revolutionary upset; we would not remove the old order of things without serious reflection. On the other hand we have no spirit of vindictiveness, no unwarranted hostility to ancient ideas. We have not brewed up a special education for a special people; we have not made the negro youth a special victim to be hunted down and forced to swallow this alleged nauseating drug called 'industrial education'; we do not wish every black boy and girl to line up in solid phalanx with saw and hammer, with bread roller and scissors. We know that life is more than meat and the body more than raiment, but we do advocate this system because we see that a nation of drones and unskilled laborers cannot hope to hold its own in the midst of a progressive scientific age, and that a person who does not teach his child to work and does not teach that child that it is no disgrace to do any form of honest toil makes that child a burden to the State and a possible future companion of thieves.

"Among the qualities the negro race most needs in the life of to-day are thoroughness and broad-mindedness. We worship at the shrine of the superficial; we are too fond of sham and show; we deride, as 'old-fogyish,' the devout paths to prosperity that other races have trod. The strong races of to-day have not be-

Described as Possessor of "a Black Man's Skull Filled with a White Man's Brains."

come strong by omitting vital processes in race building. Can our own race hope to become strong by a shorter route than reason and nature dictate? The fact is, we must value productiveness and creative genius more and the traditional learning of monks and ecclesiastics less.

"The age of scholasticism has passed, and a new order of things is before us. Can negroes be accused of advocating a special education for our youth when Carnegie and Drexel, Armour and Pratt, having caught the spirit of this age, have given of their millions to conserve industrial efficiency to the white youth? Can we be accused of advocating a special education for a special people when England to-day has a \$8,000,000 industrial school, spending \$500,000 annually to sustain it? Hardly an English town to-day is without its peculiar industrial school catering to local interests.

"When Germany broke loose from her tribal feuds and went forth to assume her place among the powers of the world, she gave to her people vocational training. Since then it has become hardly possible to pick up a manufactured article that does not bear the words 'made in Germany.' Rousseau saw the coming of this 'new education,' and his slogan was 'back to nature.' He knew that a lofty and enduring education must meet the needs of the white people and he embodied these principles in his writings. Read his 'Emile' and see why Froebel, Herbart, and Pestolozzi built upon his plan. Thus the system we advocate is not merely to have the child produce tables and tabourets, pies and pinafores, but to lead his native ability out in every possible line of human endeavor.

"True worth and efficiency know no color or clime. The youth of the negro race is crying for the bread of real knowledge, but in place of this bread they are receiving stones, stones of useless literature, stones of dead languages, stones of sophistry and plagiarism, that have ever been the sport and amusement of ancient schoolmen.

"When the youth issues forth with his degree and fails to find commensurate employment he falls back on that ever-increasing army of the derelict, thus becoming a menace to order and to society. It is not very alarming, then, for a college President to say that ignorance and immorality are the direct results of our inadequate system of education. The academy to-day leads the youth to feel that his chances for becoming President of the United States are greater than were those of Washington, Lincoln, or Grant, forgetting to teach that conditions now are very different from conditions in those days, and even though collegiate preparation is in a measure potent, it is not sufficient to crush the machine politics of to-day.

"The academy further teaches that to become President of a bank or of a corporation or to achieve great things in the professions is about all that life stands for. In fact, the academy teaches the youth of to-day many things, but it does fall to teach him that most important and most vital thing—how to do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

"The urgent duty of my race to-day is to teach our youth more of how to become self-sustaining and less of what is going on in the immensity of the solar system. We must teach more about Frederick Douglass, of B. K. Bruce, of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, of Benjamin Banneker, of Phillis Wheatley, and of Sojourner Truth, and less about Homer, Alcibiades, Xenophon, and the mythical gods of Greece and of Rome, for while we are losing sleep over the wanderings of the stars and comets and other phenomena that we cannot alter or amend we are utterly neglecting to meet the needs of everyday life."

"How much influence will the present force of industrial training exert upon the future well-being of this country?" I asked.

"That the most sanguine educator is unable to say," replied this champion of manual training. "It is reasonable, however, to assume that the coming of this intelligent working class, in both the white and negro races, each being able to produce as well as to consume, will bring forth a spirit of tolerance which will be a long step in the direction of kindlier relations between the citizens of this country, and the beginning of an era when all will work for the common good.

"There was a time when men believed that 'might makes right,' and, acting on this principle, battles were waged and millions of persons went to untimely graves. The undercurrent of the social and commercial life to-day is primarily the same, but we are waging a different sort of war. Competition and efficiency are the great implements of warfare, and the field of battle to-day is the field of industry. Whether we combat in the realm of commerce or manufacture, of transportation or the trades, it requires the same kind of pluck, the same degree of valor, the same quality of energy, to win in the business world. Knowledge that can be exemplified by the hand is the medium through which to prepare the masses to compete in the struggle for existence."

"Then do you advocate the doctrine of the survival of the fittest?"

"I hesitate to apply that doctrine to the human race, and yet casual reflection upon the social and economic tendencies of to-day confirms this principle of organized life. To work for human uplift, to be a factor in bringing about the survival of those that may be, by some, termed the most unfitted, is a grand theme for any man. In our highly developed modern state it behooves the men of all races to get together and work to make the unfit fit to survive.

"We conserve our forests and waterfalls; we calculate the value of every pound of coal and every drop of rain; we saw the decaying limb from the oak tree to preserve its life and perpetuate its growth; we boast of our stock yards economy, that no part of the animal's there killed are wasted, and yet we throw the whole man into the garbage palls of society if he has but one fault or if he falls in one obligation to the law.

"Mankind will not be kind to man until institutions exist in which human sympathy heals broken consciences and shattered ambitions, as well as institutions for the healing of sick bodies and broken limbs."

"What is the negro of America to-day doing for the negro of the days to come?" I asked.

"The negro of this country is now laying up for his posterity the invaluable stimulus of broad, practical education and a clearer idea of man's mission on earth. When the American negro of the future shall grasp and apply the legacy of to-day and place himself beside the white race, one of the mightiest missions of civilization will have been accomplished, the broadest system of philanthropy will have yielded its fruitage, and the grandest dreams of charity will have been realized in this final recognition of the brotherhood of man."

As this negro philosopher concluded the bell in the hotel elevator rang, announcing the late return of a party of theatre-goers, and he left to resume his post.

"From the sublime to the ridiculous?" Not at all. What better practical illustration of a philosopher (even though his skin be black) practicing what he preaches—the usefulness and dignity of honest toil?