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VIEW OF THE NEGRO
QUESTION.



BY J. B. GAMBRELL, D. D.

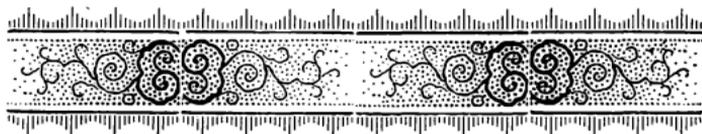


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A View of the Negro Question.

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The condition of the negroes in the United States is anomalous. Several millions of people distinct in race, and in all that can differentiate a people are with us and yet scarcely of us. They are here through no volition of their own and through no fault of their own. They have been the occasion, but not the cause, of much trouble to the white race which, throughout all the history, of the negroes in America, have used them to further greed or ambition.

From the beginning of his history in this country, the negro's attitude has been meekly pathetic. Torn from his kindred in Africa by Northern slave-dealers and transplanted to these shores, he at once adjusted himself to his new condition of slavery, not without feeling, but without resistance. Transferred from northern to more southern climates to gratify the greed of buyer and seller, he came without rebellion, and learned to love his southern home, and his southern "white folks." Emancipated as a war measure, he followed the Scriptures, using his liberty rather than abiding in slavery. Enfranchised as a party measure, he was willing to vote under the direction of his party leaders. Overborn by the consolidated power of his white neighbors, he has foreborn to vote without riot or bloodshed, except in rare in-

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stances. Paul, the foremost apostle of the Christian faith, said he had *learned* in whatever state he was to be content. The negroes never had to learn that great lesson. Patient, long-suffering, meek, they appeal mightily to all right hearted people, and all the more, because, with all their faults, they have never withheld their love from those who have given them any cause to love them. I speak my honest convictions when I say that the negro's history in America is far more creditable to the black man than it is to the white man.

The question is often asked, "Can anything be made out of this weak and impressible race?" The question has God dishonoring infidelity at the bottom of it. The Creator never made a man to be less than a man. The possibilities of a worthy manhood have been implanted in every man. And besides, every one acquainted with the negro character knows, that, whatever be their views about many things, they are solidly and reliably settled on religion and education. There are no infidels among them, they all believe in education; and they mightily believe in the Bible. With them the word of God, as they understand it, is the end of all controversy. Hence as a rule, they are Baptists.

Now religion—the religion of the Bible, and education, are the civilizers of the world. They have given the Anglo-Saxon race its pre-eminence among the races of the earth. They will elevate the African race in due time, if faithfully used.

Nor are we without marked evidences of the power of these two great forces to elevate the negroes. Witness the thousands of churches and the hundred of thousands of members in America. These are not perfect churches; but they are as good as the church at Corinth was when Paul wrote his letters to that church. They are as scriptural, and more so, than many of our wealthy, cultured city churches which have forsaken Christ and gone after the world.

Misdirected zeal is not worse than no zeal at all; and superstition is not worse than cold indifference. Fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, are not more to be deplored than covetousness which is idolatry and is as the sin of witchcraft.

The progress of the negro under the tutelage of slavery and especially under the more difficult tutelage of freedom is a sublime prophesy of the future good of the race. There is progress all along the line: in self-management, in education, in personal and church life. Many of their preachers have developed great power and the number of capable teachers among them is increasing at a rapid rate. I believe that no one who will acquaint himself with the facts, can take anything but a hopeful view of the future of these people.

The work for the future ought to be pressed along the lines already established, only with increasing earnestness, and more thorough harmony of action. I venture to insist that the time has come when there ought to be closer co-opera-

tion between brethren South and North in this work. The negroes are a charge on the Christians of the whole country. No one section is responsible for their being here or for their present condition. It would be utterly wrong for the North to leave the burden on the South. And the North has not done so. At great cost schools have been established throughout the country for the special training of preachers and teachers. These schools have done much and will do vastly more in their line. But what might they accomplish if they had the practical support of Southern Baptists. It is no part of my purpose now to inquire into the difficulties in the way of a closer and more practical co-operation between Northern and Southern Baptists in work for the colored people. Nor would I intimate who is to blame for any lack of co-operation. My purpose is to urge the advantage of it. Being on the field and thoroughly acquainted with the situation and with many of the people who should attend these schools, we could be of untold benefit to them and to ourselves, too, in the long run, by helping the best colored people to secure proper equipment for leadership. We might greatly encourage and help the teachers in their arduous and oft discouraging work. We might, also, encourage those women who ought to labor with us in the gospel, but now labor apart from us. I understand the difficulties, but believe that they are such as ought not to hinder earnest souls of a common faith, and laboring for a great end from helpful co-operation. The moment we

come fully into the spirit of Jesus, all social and political questions will take care of themselves, and the way will be made smooth before our feet. If we could all, on both sides, have that Apostolic spirit, that would "give none offence" in things not essential, we would be at once in an open sea of enlarged success.

Without discounting to the least degree the organized work for the freedmen, whether done by one Board or another—especially that done by the Home Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, which has accomplished a work greater by far than any other—I want to insist that our obligations to the negroes can never be discharged at second hand. Our daily personal contact with them gives us our greatest opportunities and imposes our weightiest obligations. They are in our homes, in our places of business, whichever way we turn we look into their faces. Weak they are, ignorant they are, pathetically confiding they are; but all these things ought to appeal to our noblest nature. And let us remember that these same black faces will meet us before the throne of Him who died for them and for us. In the providence of God, they are put in constant touch with us. We must answer for their souls to the extent of our ability to help them. Whatever may be said of their sinfulness and low condition is so much said for our personal efforts for their good. Let the example of Him who was rich, but became poor for us, plead with our souls for the lowly people within our gates. There is no time for

idle scorning while people are perishing within arm's reach of us.

There is need of multitudes of home missionaries. Christian women who will within their homes teach the ignorant colored women how to live, how to order their homes, how to care for their children. And these lessons can be enforced by examples set constantly before their eyes. If the teaching is seconded, not only by example, but by timely and sympathetic help, so much the better. I am so convinced that the main part of the work of helping the colored people must come along the multitudinous ways of personal contact and by unorganized personal effort, that I feel constrained to linger on this part of the subject. It was by this means that hundreds of thousands of the negroes entered upon their liberty Christians. I shall never forget a powerful address made by a colored brother at a temperance meeting. With an eloquence born of an over-mastering sense of the peril of his race, he said: "Don't leave us to the bad people. We are yet weak. We learned our vices from you, and, if you will treat us kindly, we will sit at your feet and learn virtues." That eloquent tongue is silent in the grave, and I send out the appeal which for these years has been ringing in my soul with an ever deepening meaning and pathos.

It is the very essence of Christian philosophy that in helping others we help ourselves. This work of saving the colored people, taken hold of by our churches and people every where, in the

spirit of our divine Master, would bring into our lives and into the churches the power and sweetness to which so many are becoming strangers. It would be a move in the direction of restoring Apostolic Christianity in spirit to the closing years of the nineteenth century. It seems to me that nothing is more needed among us than a great humbling passion for the souls of the lowly and outcast, like that which made Jesus the companion of publicans and sinners.

In the inimitable story of Mr. Nobody, we are told that the rich man bitterly upbraided the poor and ignorant man, because the plague, beginning in the low quarter of the city had gone up to the other end of the city and carried away the loved ones of the wealthy man. "If you had lived right, kept your homes clean, there would have been no plague," said the great one. "Yes," said Mr. Nobody, "I reckon that is so, I don't know much, but somehow it seems to me, that if you all who know so much and have so much had come among us in time and showed us how to do and had helped us, that would have been the best way."

The lesson is plain. We save ourselves by saving others. Christianize and elevate the negroes and our children will get the benefit. The better life will come into our homes to bless them. And more, in time of trial not far distant when the Christian institutions of America are to be tested fully by the onslaught of Romanized foreigners, we will have allies in those whose benefactors we have been.