

THE PULPIT

The New Negro

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY HON. S. LAING WILLIAMS
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The rise of a man from a low estate to a high estate, from dependence to independence, from ignorance to intelligence and self-sufficiency, is always interesting, always important and always more or less disturbing. The immediate problem of this man is to get himself known, respected and believed in. He may be worthy, he may be aspiring, he may be competent for high service, but he is mistrusted and even hated because he is aspiring. It is a tremendously difficult thing for this new applicant for citizenship to gain the good will and confidence of a whole nation of people who are in undisputed power and control.

The difficulty is enhanced when this new man comes in the visage of Othello and in the condition of dependence.

The new man merely asks for standing room, yet he is crowded back. He asks to be heard and is silenced. He asks to be trusted and he is denied. He pleads to be tested by his intelligence and his honor as a man, and he is scorned. In short, he "asks for bread and is given a stone." His presence is a menace, his proffered service is ignored. Indeed, all the higher laws of God and man are set aside when this new man comes with his undisputed credentials of worth and sufficiency. Yet this new man, conscious of his worth, persists in his quest for recognition. He knows that what is right must eventually prevail.

No country can afford to deny the right of any man to be respected. Men of character and force are the chief assets of a nation. The greatest nations are those that have the highest uses for their best men. While this is true, yet the passion for keeping some men down is everywhere in evidence. This is so because the fixed opinion of men and things is hard to change. Give a man a bad name and it will pass current in spite of his innocence and his virtues.

In this great country of ours we freely judge and misjudge men according to our feelings. The worth of a man is not always a shield of protection against bad opinions of him. Whether we are liked or disliked, trusted or mistrusted, often depends upon such superficial things as race, color, intelligence, ignorance, poverty or wealth. The most unyielding of all separating causes between man and man is race prejudice. Race prejudice needs no definition. The sting of it, the mean force of it, and the cruelty of it are a part of our common experience. No race of men has been entirely free from opposition due to race prejudice, and the Negro race in America is conspicuously no exception to the rule.

For over two hundred years the force of race prejudice in this country has overridden justice, morality and religion in keeping our people below the level of men of white complexion. By a strange perversity of human nature our very uprising in intelligence, moral worth and economic efficiency has been regarded as a menace to American civilization.

There is nothing to be gained by reopening this dark chapter in our nation's history. If we have suffered many things because of our worthy aspirations to deserve well of the American people, the American people have also suffered by violating the laws of God and man in their effort to establish two

standards of righteousness, one black and one white. There are some things about which there can be no compromise. A righteous man is neither white nor black. He is simply a righteous man. To hate him because he is either white or black is wicked; to mistrust him is folly; to be afraid of him is cowardly. Somewhere and at some time or place in this great world of human beings such a man is needed and will find his place. It is sometimes said that the Negro race in America is on trial and it might be as fittingly added that the jury is packed and the verdict made up even before the evidence is heard. Hence the burden of our plea always is: hear the evidence. The evidence is more interesting than the possible verdict.

Some great things have been going on in this country of ours during the past forty years. Much of it is unseen, unknown and not believed, but is more or less distinctly felt in the social and economic life of the American people.

As a result of it all we have in this country today what may be fittingly called a "new Negro," and the race problem may be defined as the failure of the American people to recognize and know this new Negro. So hard and uncompromising has been the separation between the races that this new and well-equipped man of the hour has had no chance to reveal himself to those who still have in their minds types of the cotton field and log cabin Negro of fifty years ago. It seems to be human nature to dislike people we don't know. The Negro people of this country have moved on and up at such a wonderful pace that their splendid worth has dazzled the American people.

It is not too much to say that the average American knows more about the Japanese and Chinese, who are separated from them by almost impassable barriers of differences, than he does about the race that for over two hundred years has been helping to build up a great nation. It is a long and weary distance from Jamestown to Tuskegee, and the pathway is strewn with suffering and sadness, yet the journey has been made and all we ask of the American people is to turn around and at least recognize the size of our burden.

The New Negro is not a fictitious man. He is not a child of fortune—a man without a history—without an expanding soul and without a destiny. There have been two emancipations of the Negro race. The one was physical and was consummated in 1865, the other has been a continuous emancipation from slavish heritages of conditions and instincts, to a persistence and extent that few Americans can understand. The drastic and uncompromising laws of separations have made it impossible for the people in whose midst we live and move to feel the extent of this second emancipation. No recitals of mere facts and figures can tell the whole story of this wonderful self-emancipation. The test of a race's worth is the kind of men it is capable of producing. An Indian chief is merely stronger but not ethically better than the rest of his tribe. There are no distinguished Esquimaux. They are all on the low level of an ice-enduring existence. Out of such races no civilization develops, but its people are held everlastingly to the primal instincts of animalism.

The significant and compelling thing about the Negro race is that it has always shown a capacity for the highest and best things in our national life. As an illustration some facts and figures are significant. Emerson says somewhere that "it is inhuman not to believe in education, since amelioration is the law of life." Education has been the controlling passion of

the Negro race. Within forty years they have overcome quite sixty per cent of their illiteracy. Thousands of young colored men and women have won academic degrees in many of the best colleges and universities of America and Europe. The Negro that most Americans picture as mendicant, shiftless and unenterprising, now pays taxes on over \$300,000,000 worth of real estate. This race that is so greatly feared as a menace to Anglo-Saxon social morality has been busy since 1865 building churches, schools, colleges, hospitals, homes for the aged, some thirty banks, and taking a conspicuous part in all those movements that indicate an increase in civic virtue and individual morality. In other words, the man who forty-five years ago was a chattel has become in some instances a lawyer, a physician, a theologian, an artist, a poet, a journalist, a banker, a diplomat, a linguist, a soldier unafraid, an ardent patriot and a man who dares to have courage in the midst of discouragements. Who can afford not to respect men of this kind? Surely there must be some real soul, something heroic, in the man who can thus honorably give an account of himself. The chattel of the cotton field has become a gentleman in spirit and in fact. He is a self-made man and challenges the respect of all mankind. He asks to be respected for what he is and stands for in his new status and not for what the American people meanly think he is.

This new man has been wonderfully tested and has borne himself with heroic patience. He is a man of distinctly American spirit, in language, in religion, in democratic instincts, in enterprise, in his ethical impulses and patriotism, the most ardent of Americans, ready at all times to fight or work for our national security. He lives in the present, in spite of the people who think of him and treat him as a backward race.

Civilization has been defined as "the power of good men." Is this aphorism large enough to include men and women of African descent? Within two generations at least, five Negro men have added to the glory of American annals: Frederick Douglass, the orator; Booker T. Washington, the educator; Dunbar, the poet; DuBois, the sociologist; Tanner, the artist; Kelly Miller, the teacher, and Frank J. Grimke, the preacher. A race that can produce a group of men such as these in a single generation cannot be forever written down as a race without an interesting future.

This new Negro is an optimist in spite of the wrongs that he endures. Formerly he complained without hope; now he hopes without complaint. The American who cannot see and appreciate this new man is himself blind and need not be feared. No race that has the power to redeem itself can be kept in an inferior position. When you can pity the man who wantonly hates you, you have achieved the mastery over him and his tribe.

The race problem of today, in spite of the people who think, feel and act as if it were the same as it was in 1860, is a new problem and may be defined: What shall be the status of this educated, high-spirited, ambitious and deserving man of the Negro race or this new Negro? He knocks and knocks persistently at the door of opportunity. Shall it be opened? Justice and fair play say, yes; race prejudice, in the spirit of 1860, says no. The American Negro has become well accustomed to the American "No." In a sort of triumphant spirit, the noble Frederick Douglass used to say, when beset on all sides by evil forces in the dark days of the '60's: "I sometimes forget the color of my skin and remember that I am a man; I sometimes forget that I am hated of men and remember that I am loved of God." And so these black men of today,

in spite of the recurrent fury of race prejudice, keep their faith in God and the growing spirit of tolerance of all mankind. Bad laws may be written and enforced to prevent a good man from being an untested citizen, but we feel strong in the fact that before man made us citizens, great nature made us men, and the man behind the citizen is more important than a man-made citizen. Let us be tested by what we deserve and the problem is solved. Let us not make the mistake of believing it is possible to compel any class of freemen in this Republic "to keep his place." A man's place in this country should be wherever he himself can make it.

Every colored man or woman in this country who has come into prominence because of his or her worth has done so in defiance of all the evil forces that for two hundred years have insisted that this is a "white man's country." The Negro people have performed a great service by proving that you cannot found a great civilization on complexion alone. It is scarcely worthy a great nation of people to be afraid and become hysterical for fear of losing their social exclusiveness. While this new Negro is struggling upward through cruel repression to become a God-fearing and man-loving citizen of the world of mankind, our white friends are continuously haunted by the unworthy bugbear of "social equality." This new Negro asks for nothing that he dares not deserve and it is inhuman to expect him to be satisfied with less. If the right to vote, if the right to pay taxes, if the right to defend our position as American citizens and deserve the good opinion of the Lincolns and the Sumners of the past make for social equality, the fault must be theirs who feel so insecure in their social status. Certainly the tide of progress of one race of people must not be kept back until some other race can make itself socially impregnable. In the name of this social equality mania more sins have been committed by our white friends than can be expiated in a century of good will. To the new Negro this social equality terror is both amusing and exasperating. His character, his culture, his good sense and fine manners are an offense and a menace to people who are so sure of their unapproachable superiority. Certainly there must be something fundamentally wrong with the man or woman who becomes meanly afraid because I can read and appreciate Emerson and Herbert Spencer, and can be stirred by an ambition to serve well my country. Ah, my friends, there is a wrong in all this that goes to the heart of our national honor. It discounts our religion, it cheapens our patriotism and casts a shadow of falsehood over our pretended national greatness.

Some forty years ago the people of this country became so alarmed over the multitude of freedmen at the close of the Civil War that they established a Freedmen's Bureau to aid the freedmen in their transition from slavery to freedom. That was a great service and was inspired by true love of humanity. The ignorant, uncivilized and empty-handed man of 1865 has become a man of culture, a man of force and a man of independence. We shall have to look to this new man to complete the great work of reconstruction. In other words, the new Negro people have a race problem on their hands which is both interesting and far-reaching in its consequences, and that is to teach white Americans how possible it is to be both just and respectable towards this expanding race of ours without their loss of anything worth having.

We must save the American people from the debilitating effects of the fears they have that our increase of intelligence and independence mean their own loss of social prestige. Let me enjoy all the rights I de-

serve—who will suffer? To this end let us be confident as to these things:

(1) The rise of the Negro people in intelligence, in social efficiency, in self-pride, in the power to add its share toward the wealth and social uplift of the nation must not be hindered or prevented by race prejudice.

(2) Injustice, race hatred, discriminations in the matter of fundamental rights will never solve the race problem.

(3) The fear of social equality has become a national fetish. It is a fear that was born in the dark days of slavery out of a guilty conscience, and is today fostered and nourished by people who have not yet been touched by the expanding thought of this new era of national growth.

(4) In the conflict between race prejudice and the Negro's advancement I am satisfied that whatever is fundamentally right will finally triumph.

(5) A state built on the foolish fear of social equality will remain where it began, and will make no history worth reading.

This new Negro only asks and fights for a chance. He sees about him men from all Europe and Asia. Every shop, factory, office and honor is open to this man from across the sea. The descendants of the man who fought under Jackson at New Orleans, with Perry on Lake Erie, who triumphantly died at Fort Wagner, who helped Custer in the West to make room for the Norwegians and Swedes, who planted our conquering flag at El Caney, are asked to step aside and be satisfied to blacken the shoes of these newcomers.

The new Negro who sees and feels all this is asked to be patient—simply to wait and watch. And so he has watched and waited patiently, heroically and confidently. But he now begins to feel that his heroic patience has invited contempt rather than praise. This new Negro, unlike his grandfather, is sensitive to wrongs, writhes under injustice and is fretful under discriminations copied from South Carolina and Alabama.

This country of ours is a country teeming with opportunities. The man of thorough education, the man of technical training, the inventor, the man skilled in law, medicine, diplomacy and statesmanship can find here his opportunity. This new Negro that I have been talking about is here and ready for all kinds of service. His worth is admitted; why not give him a chance? By everything we pretend to be in this country, in religion, in morals, democracy and spirit of fair play, the ambitions of this well equipped man should be honored and he be given the chance he deserves. There are never too many fit men to do the high services of a great and ever expanding nation.

Here, then, is our new race problem that has been brought to the nation by this new and ambitious Negro.

What shall be done for or with this new man with a black face? Here in America we have a wide-open civilization. We are made up of all kinds and conditions of people, and we are alike ambitious to do the low and high services of the nation and to be rewarded according to our worth.

The new Negro today offers himself as a fit man for everything that comes within the range of superior intelligence and worthy ambition. Shall he be encouraged, or shall he be turned away hopeless and discouraged? Can this nation, with its limitless opportu-

nities, afford to fix a limitation to the ambitions of any of its people?

Thanks to the progress of humane sentiment in this country, this new man who asks the question can help to answer it. There was a time when all the questions asked as to what should be the status of the Negro were asked and answered by the same man. Thanks to the growth of intelligence and the manhood spirit of the race, no question concerning us is completely answered without our participation in the answer. This shows progress.

This new Negro is an aggressive man, and he will be increasingly heard, and deserves to be increasingly respected. This new Negro may be impatient, as he has a right to be, but he is not altogether discouraged. He is strong in the faith that he is right and fit, and what is right will some day be the unchallenged law of conduct everywhere.

The race problem of today is not one of social equality, but rather one of recognized moral and mental equality—of the right to aspire, of the right to realize what one deserves, of the right to serve our common country in times of peace as well as in times of war. There never can be too many good men and good women in the world, come they from whatever country or race.

The United States is a nation of great problems, and the nation cannot afford to make it impossible for some men to serve the nation in their solution. In spite of unworthy fears of some Americans concerning the new Negro of today and tomorrow, the unfolding of new opportunities for men of brawn, brain and courage will need us. This new Negro will be wanted. In this growing nation of ours there is to be a new political economy to meet the new conditions of our ever expanding nation. A new social ethics that will enable all men to respect each other without fear or loss of social prestige. A new spirit of politics that shall make public office a public trust. A new spirit of brotherhood when it will be more honorable for men to be just to each other than to be socially equal, and a new awakening of all the higher senses of man in his duty to man. Such a consummation is devoutly to be wished. But none of this "vision splendid" can be realized until our interest in mankind shall be greater than our interest in some men.

Today we are fettered by the spirit of the tribe and those who claim to be most free are most fettered. It is not the things we own and the power we have and misuse that make our nation truly great. Why cannot we afford to be just and patient to a race that daily grows in independence and power of self-hood? Who cannot respect a man of worth, even though he be brown or black? Who cannot afford to be just and have faith that what is just will hurt no man? All of us are ready to say yes to these questions, yet we all painfully know that it is easier to live below our ideals. The man who compels me to pay a first class fare for worse than a second class accommodation in a "Jim Crow" car from Chicago to Tuskegee is often a churchman who gives liberal alms to the poor and needy. The man who thinks most of Thomas Jefferson because he stood for the great idea of equality is apt to be the man who is most violent in insisting that this is "a white man's country." The man who thinks he is a Christian and who pretends to conform his life to the Golden Rule of the Bible is too often the man who practices the iron rule of injustice.

The new Negro knows all this and feels this and yet he is a man of faith and courage. Though held

down he continues to look up and in all honorable ways struggles for his rights. He submits heroically to the things he cannot overcome. Opposition has made him heroic, and his love of justice has made him optimistic. His ambition is to deserve what he claims, and his high privilege is to pity the man who merely stands in the way of progress.

This new Negro is approaching an era of great things. Tremendous are the problems of tomorrow. In the larger world of higher politics, in the new ideals of a higher citizenship, in the social atmosphere of the new ethics of fellowship and in a more exalted religious sense, this new man of our republic will be needed and will find his place, and will be honored for what he is and can do for the world of mankind.

Dickens and David

Probably every great novelist has had a certain influence and power over the people of his own generation which are not to be duplicated for those later born.

The very air changes, and with it goes that mysterious element of comprehension which inexplicably and forever binds to the writer the hearts of his readers.

"But is this true of Dickens?" some one will ask. And unhesitatingly we answer "Yes." "Yes," in the face of the wonderfully beautiful editions of his works with which publishers are flooding the market, and still "Yes" despite the fact that thousands buy his books and weep over the too dramatic words of little Paul—words which no child ever could have uttered spontaneously and without "malice aforethought."

Real pathos there is, of course; alas, too much of it when one remembers the sad experiences of actual life, and realizes how many souls longing for joyousness as conveyed by printed pages have turned away with hunger unsatisfied. For humor is not *gladness*; and too often the laughter is dangerously near to tears. Or else we find *no* humor, but an endless succession of grotesque fancies and characters—almost without parallel (to an American)—indeed, *caricatures*; not like the clear black-and-white pen etchings of Thackeray's, but so highly colored as to suggest the dreadful yellow and red pictorials, the taste for which has long since passed away.

Yet there was much interest formerly in the gayly crayoned crudities of so-called art, and thus with Dickens' tableaux vivants; but just as people have turned from the abuse of color, so we turn from the disagreeable pictures of Sairey Gamp, Betsey Prig, Bill Sykes, Noah, Fagin, the Jew, Squeers, and, in brief, the whole retinue of what should deservedly be "The Rogues' Gallery."

Our eyes behold another company—the dear, familiar faces chosen from that masterpiece, David Copperfield. Of this volume Dickens says: "Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child. And his name is David Copperfield." And no wonder that he loved his character and many of that character's friends! For they were not shadowy, imaginary ghosts, but real flesh and blood creatures, with whom he despaired and hoped and suffered—almost always suffered—for even that which most nearly approached happiness gained its strength by having some awful grief as contrast.

With David sorrows were many. The child of a father whose dreamy, gentle life had ceased before his own begun, he knew the dependence of a half-orphaned son on a fragile mother's affection. That mother, unwisely marrying again, dared no longer openly express her real love for her boy, who, wilfully misunderstood by his step-father, is sent away to a school whose cruel, tyrannical master does what he can to further break the lad's spirit.

But the memory of his mother and of his faithful nurse, Peggotty, enables him to endure, and the months drag by. Finally he is permitted to spend a holiday at home. Needless to say the time is poisoned by his stern connections. So he hails the hour of departure—to school, even!—for, as he says in speaking of his mother, "The gulf between us was there, and the parting was there, every day. And it is not so much the embrace she gave me that lives in my mind (though it was fervent as could be), as what followed the embrace.

"I was in the carrier's cart when I heard her calling to me. I looked out, and she stood at the garden-gate alone, holding her baby up in her arms for me to see. It was cold, still weather; and not a hair of her head, nor a fold of her dress, was stirred as she looked intently at me, holding up her child.

"So I lost her. So I saw her afterwards, in my sleep at school—a silent presence near my bed—looking at me with the same intent face—holding up her baby in her arms."

And in dreams or in reality, David never saw his mother again.

After her death he took refuge from continued tyranny and dreadful servitude with an old great-aunt who gave up her detestation of trespassing donkeys to espouse the cause of her nephew's son.

Perhaps Miss Trotwood is one of the best characters in the story—certainly a stronger one than Dora, the child-wife of David, whose sweetness and love captivate him, albeit he realizes that his wife and he are on different planes. And Dora is so very docile, and desirous of being to her husband all that a wife can be, and all that she knows *she* never can be, that we, too, are made prisoners, and do not resign David to Agnes Wickfield (Dora's best friend and exact opposite) after the little child-wife's death, with the same resignation and sense of fitness that mark the author. We should prefer that Dora might have lived, for, as is the case with most of those who leave this world, "she had just commenced to know something."

The English people have often said of us, their cousins, that we do not understand them. (You see we are carrying the cry back to its starting point.) And if we do not understand them, we cannot hope to understand as they do a mind like Charles Dickens'.

Granted, the rule, Island Cousins, and grant us (as is usual) one exception. For there was *one* American who so loved and knew him that, without imitation conscious, he drew from him knowledge of Dickens' strongest point—style. And better is it that he should be the one to interpret something of the wonderful spell Dickens exercised over a quarter of a century since. Enter Mr. Francis Bret Harte with your tribute:

DICKENS IN CAMP.

Above the pines the moon was slowly drifting,
The river sang below;
The dim Sierras far above uplifting
Their minarets of snow.

The roaring camp-fire, with rude humor, painted
The ruddy tints of health