

## TOPIC XV.

### IS THE YOUNG NEGRO AN IMPROVEMENT, MORALLY, ON HIS FATHER?

BY EDWARD MACKNIGHT BRAWLEY, A. M., D. D.

A generation has come since the passing away of the period to which the old Negro belonged, and this generation has lived in the period of the new Negro. Is this new Negro an improvement morally on his father? Zealous friends of the race stoutly maintain that he is; while enemies assert that he is not as good. It is the purpose of this article to present some facts which will prove that the young Negro, in spite of his dreadful inheritance, has, by the aid of generous friends and the grace of God; lifted himself to a higher moral plane than that upon which his unfortunate father stood.

It is well, however, to note carefully at the very beginning, that we are not dealing with exceptions in this discussion, but with the race as a whole. At a river bank the water sometimes appears to run up stream, while if one will but look in the middle, he will see the river in full force gliding smoothly on to the ocean. So in all matters belonging to the realm of morals we must discard the narrow vision, and, taking the broad view of the Christian philosopher, sweep the entire horizon.

Let us first, as an antecedent matter, consider some reasons why the young Negro should be expected to be better than his father.

1. His father had no moral training. His very person was the victim of a prodigious theft, and his labor was daily stolen. Could such a man be effectively taught honesty? To have taught the slave the elements of morals meant the quickening not only of his moral, but also of his intellectual nature; and such a thing would ultimately have developed resistance on the part of the slave. No true instruction in morals was possible in a condition of slavery. Look over the entire moral code as set forth in the Ten Commandments, and the impossibility of teaching effectively those great truths to slaves—American slaves—becomes apparent. The old enslaved Negro was destitute of true moral training; and very much of what was offered to him as such was nothing more than "sounding brass," and he knew it and could not profit by it.

2. And while the old Negro did not have true moral training, he







## REV. EDWARD MacKNIGHT BRAWLEY, A. M., D. D.

Edward MacKnight Brawley was born at Charleston, S. C., March 18, 1851. His parents, James M. and Ann L. Brawley, were both free. Before the Civil War, in order that he might secure good educational advantages, he was sent to Philadelphia, Pa., where he passed through the grammar school; then he entered the Colored High School, of which Prof. E. D. Bassett was principal, and there prepared for college. In the fall of 1871 he entered Bucknell University, where he was graduated Bachelor of Arts in the class of 1875. During his college course he also pursued theological studies and was ordained for the ministry on the day after his graduation, by a council composed largely of professors of the university. He was the first colored student to attend Bucknell, and in 1878 he secured from his college the degree of Master of Arts. In 1885 the State University of Louisville, Ky., conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and Rev. E. M. Brawley has this distinction, that he has held this degree for a longer time than any other living colored Baptist minister. For eight years he was State Missionary in South Carolina for the American Baptist Publication Society.

In 1883 he was called to the presidency of Selma University, Selma, Ala., and devoted several years to educational work. He then became District Secretary for the South for the American Baptist Publication Society, which work he resigned in 1890 to accept the call to the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Petersburg, Va., the oldest colored Baptist Church in the country, which he subsequently left to go back to the work of the Society, at its earnest solicitation. He has also served in the pastorate at Greenville, S. C., Darien, Ga., and Palatka, Fla. He has done considerable newspaper work, and has devoted much time to religious writing, many pamphlets and books along race and denominational lines having been written by him. He is now Editorial Secretary of the National Baptist Publishing Board, of Nashville, Tenn., under the auspices of the National Baptist Convention. Dr. Brawley's qualifications and experience well fit him for his present position, for he has made a specialty of Sunday-school and denominational literature.

did have positive training in the opposite direction. For the very system under which he lived was a training in evil. His ancestors had been stolen; he himself was stolen; his civil liberty was stolen. Could he form any adequate conception of property rights? And is it now a matter of surprise to us that the old man sometimes did a little stealing himself in order to relieve a hungry stomach? He was not taught the sacredness of the married life. Indeed, he was not taught to marry at all. He was, as a rule, simply told to live with a woman whom he might *call* his wife, and when the good pleasure or the necessities of his master demanded that she should be sold away, to take another woman and live with her and call her wife, also. He was not allowed to develop the idea of fatherhood toward his children, for they were not his, but rather mere chattel, to be sold at the pleasure of his master. The two great vices charged against the Negro race are theft and adultery. Whatever truth there is in this charge is due to the long training slavery gave. Indeed, slavery was largely a training in moral evil. Antecedently, therefore, we expect the old Negro to be worse than his son.

But, now, what are the positive arguments to prove that the young Negro is an improvement morally on his father?

1. Slavery has been abolished, and the young Negro has not felt it. He has, therefore, missed its direct evil training. It is not denied that he is damaged because he was trained by a father who was brought up in slavery; but it is claimed that he has not received from his father, and cannot receive, as much injury as his father received from the system of slavery.

2. The young Negro now has the gospel. The many thousands who came to Christ in the days of slavery, and are now at rest from their earthly toils and sufferings, are not forgotten. That they were saved is due to the fact that, owing to God's infinite goodness and mercy, a little knowledge and a little faith can save a sinner; and God pitied our fathers. But the young Negro now has the gospel in its fullness. He gets it from the pulpit, from the Sunday-school, and daily in scores of our highest literary institutions. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and our youth, constantly learning it, have in large numbers been made to feel its power. Their lives having thus been purified and ennobled, beautiful and strong Christian characters have resulted.

3. Many young Negroes have been thoroughly trained for the ministry, who have led strictly upright lives and have taught others to do

the same; and many others, not ministers, have enjoyed systematic training in ethics. Is it conceivable that the combined work of this class of our young people has accomplished nothing in the moral uplifting of the race? Such work must and does count powerfully on the right side, or else the gospel is a failure. Just as heathen nations have been redeemed and regenerated, having put away their savage life and accepted civilization and Christ because the gospel was preached to them, even so has our race been saved; and just as no other people ever received the gospel without being immeasurably blessed and lifted up, so also is that true of the Negro. And it is further true of all men that the more gospel privileges they enjoy, the better will be their condition. For the kingdom of evil is sure to be overthrown, and the kingdom of Christ established on the earth. And thus the young Negro cannot help being a better man morally than his father.

4. The young Negro is living in an age of higher morals and necessarily partakes of its superior advantages. The age of brute force is fast passing away. When after our great civil war the adjustment of our troubles with England was arranged by arbitration rather than settled by war, an immense stride in civilization, men say, was made. Very true, but why not say that the men in control of the two great nations involved were moved to act as they did because of their strong ethical principles? And from that time until now the moral advance of the world has been rapid and steady. The new Negro is living in this higher and better age, and his moral constitution has been built up and made strong because of it. The principles of international comity are fast spreading among the nations. And just as the economic principles of the trust are being applied to religious organizations, even so the stronger ethical principles that are moving the nations are inducing Christian white men to come nearer to their brethren in black, and to treat them more as *men, brethren*, than has ever been done before. And thus both external and internal forces have combined to make the young Negro morally better than his father.

5. And, last of all, the young Negro is turning his social and political disadvantages to his best interest by relying calmly upon the justice and wisdom of God's moral government. Life is, indeed, but a conflict of forces, but the intelligent young Christian Negro knows that the universe does not operate by chance. He feels the full force of what Charles Sumner said in his eulogy on Abraham Lincoln: "In the provi-

dence of God there is no accident—from the fall of a sparrow, to the fall of an empire or the sweep of a planet, all is controlled by divine law.” And thus he lives undisturbed by the wrathful elements that are at play around him. His full confidence in God at this trying hour, and his firm belief that the wrath of man will yet be turned to his advantage, are but the evidence that he trusts intelligently; and the fact that he does so, and does not become an anarchist, is the proof of his higher moral life. If it be said that his father did not become an anarchist, the answer may be that slavery had dispirited him. But the young Negro is not dispirited. He knows enough and has spirit enough to make this country tremble; but whatever knowledge and spirit he has which could be used for evil, he has restrained and will yet further restrain, because he has abiding confidence in God, and knows that “giant right is more than might;” and this confidence has aided in making him a better man than his father.

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## SECOND PAPER.

### IS THE YOUNG NEGRO AN IMPROVEMENT, MORALLY, ON HIS FATHER?

BY REV. J. S. FLIPPER.

The difficulty of considering this question deepens as we consider the young Negro from every phase of life. Universally it cannot be answered in the affirmative, for the Negro is divided into classes as well as are other races, and as no people are universally, morally good, so such cannot be expected of the Negro.

The Negro possesses an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class, and in a consideration of these classes we shall look for an answer to the question. The upper class consists of those who have made extraordinary progress, morally, religiously, mentally and materially; who have outstripped their fellows in the race of life and attained a standard of civilization commensurate with their opportunities and proved to the civilized world that under favorable circumstances the Negro is as capable of a high development in civilization as any other race. This class is an improvement, morally, upon their fathers. For their opportunities have been such as to render them more capable of a higher conception of morality and of their duties to their fellowmen, and in proportion as a