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The Color Line As Seen By a Negro

To the Editors of *The Christian Union* :

I have just read the symposium on the color line in your issue of July 11, in which you give Southern correspondents a free field. I shall not attempt to answer the arguments set forth; that is unnecessary. The restatement of your position is a complete reputation of the illogical application of an unchristian principle. So I would like to give some impressions of the color line from the negro's standpoint.

To the negro, knowing the facts of the case, the energetic way in which Southern correspondents compass land and sea for arguments to show that it is the negro's condition and not their prejudice to his race that causes them to treat him as they do is really amusing. It is the Southern man's prejudice to the negro as a negro that causes the existence of what is known as the color line. Of course this prejudice is intensified by the fact of the negro's former position as a serf.

"It is the negro's condition that causes us to draw this line." If then, it is the negro's condition, just as soon as that objectionable condition is removed, the line will be removed. Is this the case? Not so! There are many negroes in the South superior to many whites in education, financial, morality, and culture. This is a patent fact which few deny. Is this proscription raised from them? Rather, in some quarters, where this specimen of the negro is most prevalent, the bitterness is more bitter. When an intelligent negro enters a back community rather than being received as a boon and a blessing he is more frequently routed, and he may count himself happy if he escapes with his life. In the South the toughest white rough is preferable to the most cultured black gentleman. For example: when the brutal John Sullivan came South to disgrace his race on the field of dishonor he was conveyed over the railroad in palace cars which were deluged with flowers cast to the idol of the hour by the far-famed beautiful women of the sunny Southland. When the illustrious Frederick Douglass, one of the historic figures of the nation, comes South shortly after, for the purpose of elevating his people by his eloquence, which has charmed on both sides of the Atlantic, he is compelled to take second-class accommodation with the toughest element, and that after paying first-class fare. Is it necessary to say which one of these personages received the warmest welcome, which the most extensive notice from the press? Certainly not.

It is asked, would Dr. Abbott receive black servants at his table. The import of this query obtains only on the false assumption that all negroes are menial servants. All negroes are not servants. Two hundred and fifty years of (unrequited) toil by the negro in this capacity may serve to make it difficult for the average Southerner to comprehend the changed reality. No one asks that black servants be admitted to the family and social circles. They do not expect it. Not even do white servants expect it. What every one has a right to expect is that equals in station be not debarred from social privileges on account of color. Put a man on his worth, not on his color. Color pertains to the skin, worth to the heart.

Herein, I am informed by those well acquainted with both sections, lies the difference between the attitude of the North

and that of the South toward the negro. Southerners have much sentiment toward the negro. They love him as they would a good dog. They spurn him when he aspires to be a man. Northerners have none of this; care nothing for the negro as a negro, except as an unfortunate creature (if that may be so construed), but appreciate him according as he proves himself of genuine worth. The latter is what the negro wants. He is willing to stand or fall on merit. In the words of the blackest, brightest, and best orator of the South: "Give me nothing because I am black; deny me nothing because I am black."

As to the negro's inferiority the kernel of that old chestnut has long since been devoured by the test worms of time, and its hull cast overboard by all progressive men who have unflinchingly sought and unflinchingly found the truth. Enough arguments have been produced on this subject to batter down the walls of the most strongly entrenched argument. Let me give two instances, arguments in themselves.

A few evenings ago I was sitting on the broad veranda of an elegant dwelling reading the evening paper. My attention was called by the voice of a woman standing at the gate. Raising my eyes I beheld a fine-looking woman of Caucasian blood. I was quite surprised when she asked me to step there and read for her (as she said she could not read) the directions of the sign for rent on the next door. Of course I did so. She secured the house and moved in yesterday.

Now, the elegant house on the veranda of which I was sitting, was the property of a negro born and reared a slave. The house the white lady rented was one of several good tenement dwellings belonging to another negro born and reared a slave. His daughter has graduated from Fisk University, and he is worth not less than \$25,000. Surprised at this incident I mentioned it to my slave-born landlady, who has learned to read since slave time. She said such was a common occurrence. This is a fair sample of how things are changing around, end for end, it seems. Is the inferiority here on the black side or the white side?

Again, as I write this summary comes to notice: "Eight hundred thousand colored citizens of Georgia are represented by 500 well established colored stores, 20 undertakers, 250 colored graduates residing in the State, 4 colored lawyers, 16 saw mills, 2 private banks, 60 real estate dealers, 7 colored colleges of the highest order, 27 colored doctors, 4 dentists, 12 engineers, 800 brick masons, 600 plasterers, several thousand acres of land, 20 shorthand writers, 4 operators, 10 grist mills, 3 steam boats, 8 fruit farms, several hundred mules and horses, 12 newspapers, and 100 machinists."—(*Nashville Tribune*.) The study of this summary is commended to our argumentative opponents.

In regard to the social relation of the Northern missionary to the negro, after much observation and long study, I have come to this conclusion, that he who treats the negro as any other than a man in all respects has no mission to the New Negro. He will do more harm than good. Let him stay at home. It is to be regretted that in one of the leading colored mission colleges in the South a separate table is provided for teachers and pupils. Excellent results are obtained in Fisk University, where no such separation exists. The young negro has realized that he is a man just as good and just as bad, just as dull

and just as smart, as anybody else. He who does not realize this fact and act accordingly cannot receive his support, cooperation, and confidence, essentials to his uplifting.

Granting that the negro is inferior, would the Christian be justified in not associating with him for that reason? Our Southern friends would say yes. Let us apply the principle to one race. Suppose the whites should associate only with equals, how many would be found in one social compact? Apply the same rule to the family. Would there not be a number of circles even in one small family? The principle is ridiculously absurd. "If the colored man is incapable of fellowship with God, there is no Gospel to preach to him. If he is capable of fellowship with God, he is good enough for fellowship with all God's children."

It is not a color line that disturbs; it is race line, race prejudice. Many intelligent negroes not to be distinguished from the whites on account of their proximity to that race are proscribed as vigilantly as the negro of the deepest ebony. Let our Southern friends be candid and honest. It is simply prejudice against the negro as a negro, not his condition, that constitutes the civil and social bugbear of the South.

HENRY H. PROCTOR.

NASHVILLE, Tenn.