

PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF BISHOP HOLSEY

Editor Constitution: Mr. Cleveland's speech on the negro problem in New York, and your editorial thereon, in The Constitution of the 16th of April, discovers a few points that the negro race and the white people of the north do not seem to comprehend. Neither party has yet reached the depth nor touched the fundamental and pivotal factors that operate at the base of the social problem. Northern philanthropy has been too hopeful and too enthusiastic—and even too far off—to come in immediate contact with those essential elements and distinctive characteristics that inspire and control southern feeling and sentiment. We do not doubt the sincerity of the philanthropic friends of the north, but we deplore the fact that neither they nor the majority of the leaders of the negro race do not see the real entities nor those preconceived and fixed principles, that are as dear to the southern heart as the love of their civilization. To reverse the old and preconceived opinions as to the moral and intellectual possibilities of the negro race is to attempt the impossible. Neither are we astonished that there is a racial problem, or a conflict of political and social factors. It is the inevitable outcome of readjusting forces and a struggle for the reestablishment of harmonious relations.

The negro race (I am sorry to say) has not yet, if ever it does, arrived at that point in its intellectual development as to see its own state and alarming condition. It is to be admitted that he has made progress, and his friends have emphasized this fact to prove his possibilities and even his acceptability in the social and political circles. But they forget, or overlook, the fact that none of these can put him on the same plane of citizenship, in the south, with that of the white people. His moral, social and intellectual attainments, however great, cannot put him there. In the midst of this strenuous civilization it is natural and is expected for the black man to make progress in civil life. He would be less than human if he did not, yet there is not a single instance where real worth and merit has guaranteed to him the full privileges of citizenship in the south. Neither is it possible in that section for him to become such. This is no longer concealed, but frankly admitted in all the utterances of the south, from the floors of congress to the small voice of the most insignificant village paper. There is no more chance for the black man to be anything beyond a mere degraded element at the bottom of society than it is for him to change his color by the process of culture. All the tendencies, edicts, and plot acts of legislation and sentiment puts an unalterable negation upon his social, political and intellectual possibilities, capacious enough to reverse or change this decreed sentiment of the public heart or the private judgment. In this particular, there is no more possibility for Booker T. Washington, or his counterpart, than it is for the most degraded of the black people. The negro must abide the present status, or leave the south, or go under the

ground. Nothing is clearer than the potential fact, that negroes will never enjoy the some privileges of citizenship as guaranteed to the white people, and bequeathed to their children. I cannot see, neither does it accord with experience and philosophy, how a race or people can reach or fulfill the best and noblest ends of society without the possibility of attaining unto that degree of exalted citizenship which the state has to give. No race, white or black, can operate the functions of true manhood when the legitimate instruments of achievements are cut off. In short, I see no chance for the black man to be anything in the south but a mere social scavenger and political scallawag, and therefore cannot be wrought into the social compact. It is assumed by northern philanthropists, and by the leaders of the negro race (with few exceptions) that whenever negroes are prepared for the privileges of citizenship it would be given upon grounds of merit and fitness; that such would be given as a matter of justice and fair play. This is the faith, and apparently the logical assumption, which inspired the philanthropists of the north to give millions of money for the higher education of negroes, but this can never bring him to the privileges of the best citizenship or allow him to be equal to the white people in civil life. It is not so yet, and can never be, until the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots.

The racial problem is not new. With us it may be somewhat new in its present phases, but its pivotal elements and fundamentals are as old as those peculiar traits of racial character that distinguishes one from another. If these are not God-given or decreed to be so by the Almighty, yet they must be considered as enduring fixtures, and regarded as no small factors in the racial problem. Although this should never be a cause for injustice or unfair dealings, yet it is a mighty part of the prodigious whole. Ex-President Cleveland vibrated the central chord in this vexed question when he said: "As friends of the negroes, fully believing in the possibility of his improvement and advancement, and sincerely and confidently laboring to that end, it is folly for us to ignore the importance of the ungrudging cooperation on the part of the white people of the south in this work. Labor as we will, those who do the lifting of the weight must be those who stand next to it. This cooperation cannot be forced, nor can it be gained by gratuitously running counter to firmly fixed and tenaciously held southern ideas or even prejudices." The phrase "even prejudices" at once takes us to the seat of the disease and gives us an X-ray view of the largest part of the racial complications. How far the black race exercises prejudice toward the white people we cannot safely say, because that race has never had the chance to show it. That the negro race has prejudice we do not doubt. On the other hand, the white people—many in the north as well as in the south—have a degree of prejudice that amounts to intolerance and disdain; so much so that it threatens to upset the social order and divert the peaceful trend of civilization. Sectional prejudices existing in a homogenous race as between north and south, may find a way of solution, but not between distinctly opposite races. Hence the southern people are doing, and have done, only what others would have done under

like conditions. They are as good as forbearing as any other people who might have had the same difficulties to contend with. Indeed the marvel in the whole question is that the white people of the south have done as well as they have. What, then, is the remedy? Answer—separation and segregation. This is the sure and only solution to this ever-present and momentous question. For as long as these two very distinct races are living in the same territory and in immediate contact there must abide constant bitterness, race antagonisms and the danger of bloodshed. One of the reasons why the wheels of society have moved on as smoothly as they have is because the black man has never been assertive nor vindictive, but has quietly submitted to whatever has been imposed upon him. But the old guards of peace, on both sides, are passing away and the chasm between the new negro and the new white man is expanding its yawning jaws and growing wider and deeper as the days go by. I know it will be said that separation is a thing that cannot be done, and that it is beset with difficulties, but it cannot be surrounded by more difficulties than the present state of affairs. If it is impossible to do the one, it is impossible to do the other, except to settle the black man at the bottom.

L. H. HOLSEY,

Bishop of the Colored M. E. Church