

THE OLD WAR ISSUES DEAD!

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY HAS A PECULIAR INTEREST

For the American Negro—Food for the Future Historian—What the Negro Should do in Order to Cope With Other Races.

* [The following address was delivered by Prof. J. W. E. Bowen, D. D., Ph. D., of Atlanta, Ga., at the Houston, Tex., Afro-American Fair August 24, 1896.]

We must master our obstacles, and not whine over them; take apparent defeat and wrest out of it glorious victory. Our problem is not "how shall we overcome the prejudice of the white man?" Whether we ever overcome them or not is a matter of very small concern. Our ears have been so accustomed to the sound that as soon as any problem is mentioned we unconsciously wait to hear of the prejudice of the white man. How strange it is that so many of us are paralyzed instantly at the bare mention of the white man's prejudices, and we lose head and heart for every endeavor. This prejudice we have conjured into a modern Mordecai sitting in the gateway of prosperity. My friends, this is child's play. It is true that the white man's prejudice is a color prejudice. It is also true that this prejudice can not successfully defeat you if you are of the right stripe and have the right sort of stuff in you. Stop arguing with or pining in the presence of prejudice and rise up and do your level best; you must win success: it is never given. The story is told of Phil Sheridan that, on one occasion, he found his army retreating before General Early; the general in command said excitedly to Sheridan: "Oh, sir, we are beaten!" "No, sir!" quickly replied the dashing general, the fire of whose steed had been drawn from his own breast, "you are beaten, but this army is not beaten;" and seizing his army as Jupiter seizes his thunderbolts, he dashed them upon the enemy with the fury of a giant, and smote them hip and thigh, and routed them horse, foot and dragoon. The admonition comes to us, "show thyself a man."

The god of the times has filled our eyes with his dust—the dust of politics—and we have not been able to discriminate between the essentials and the accidents of race, strength and power. Instead of devoting our best energies in the development of that which creates and controls power, we have been misled into the foolish hope of jumping per saltum to the summit of power and triumph. The mythological fiction of Minerva's leap has no historic parallel in the prosaic facts of to-day. Dig beneath the surface and read the superscriptions upon the foundation stones of this modern fabric chiseled there by a divine power, and be convinced as to the truth that personal excellence in character is the mightiest safeguard to any nation. This stands as the gray dikes of Holland that beat back the surgings of a mad sea. But the production of such characters must be the result of individual effort. This effort on our part must be pushed in the teeth of untoward circumstances and triumph over them in order to dissipate forever the doubt in the minds of so many as to the impossibility of large character development among us.

Finally, the possessions of a consciousness of a racial personality will develop public spirit for large racial endeavors. The new Negro must look out upon the world pregnant with untold and virgin resources and achieve honor and glory. That it is possible for him has been admitted, but this possibility must presently be realized in actual fact. A distinguished writer gives a picture of a new civilization that is to be born in the brain and heart of "Ethiopia's blameless" race. "If ever Africa shall show a cultivated race—and come it must, sometime her turn to figure in the great drama of human improvement—life will there awake with a gorgeousness and splendor of which our cold Western tribes faintly have conceived. In that far off mystic land of gold and gems and spices and waving palms and wondrous flowers and miraculous fertility, will awake new forms of art, new styles of splendor, and the Negro race no longer despised and trodden down, will perhaps show forth some of the latest and most magnificent revelations of human life. Certain, they will, in their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a high power, their childlike simplicity of affection and facility of forgiveness. In all these, they will exhibit the highest forms of a peculiar christian life, and perhaps, as God chasteneth whom He loveth. He hath chosen poor Africa, in the furnace of affliction, to make her the highest and noblest in that kingdom He will set up when every other kingdom has been tried and failed, for the first shall be last, and the last shall be first." Who dare say that this vision of Harriet Beecher Stowe will not be realized?

The successful inauguration and wise management of this fair by the colored people of the state of Texas, with the co-operation of the whites, sets up another mile post of progress. We shall yet make this Southland the garden of the Lord. The products of

brain and hand here exhibited, I take it, are not given as samples of perfected skill and highest art, but are to be considered as a mere earnest of infant skill wrought out under favorable circumstances. It is well to remember in this connection that everything of permanent value to the individual or society is wrought out only through pain, sweat and struggle. Peace and civilization "travel in a gunpowder can," and our history will be no exception to the inexorable law that obtained in the history of other people. The results to-day here presented, have a significance greater than like results from white people. We have had roseate prophecy concerning our future and wisdom now suggests that with might and, we make real these prophecies in substantial products. Your future is in your own hands, and you can make it whatever you please.

"No man," says Mr. O'Reilly, "ever came into the world with a grander opportunity than the American Negro. He is like new metal dug out of the mine. He stands, at this late day, on the threshold of history with everything to learn and less to unlearn than any civilized man in the world; in his heart still rings the free sounds of the desert. In his mind he carries the tradition of Africa. The songs with which he charms the American ears are refrains from the tropical forests, from the great inland seas and rivers of the Dark Continent. At worst the colored American has only a century or so of degrading civilized tradition and habit to forget and unlearn. His nature has only been injured by the late circumstances of his existence. Inside he is a new man fresh from nature. What this splendid man needs most is confidence in himself and in his race. He is a dependent man at present. He is not sure of himself. He underrates his own qualities. He must be a self-respecting man." The door of the new century has already begun to swing, and the index finger of history is pointing to the mighty results to be achieved. You are invited and exhorted to walk in and take your place, not through charity nor sympathy nor the senseless plea of being a colored man, nor even by begging for a chance, but by taking your chance and then by working with might and main to make the world better by adding to the products of civilization. You must win your way by character, industry and thrift. All that could be done for you has been done. You must do the rest. Therefore, Negroes, to work! to work!! to work!!! with the spade and plow, with the saw and the hammer, with the brush and chisel, to work with the trowel and hoe, at the driving wheel and throttle; with the sledgehammer and triphammer; in the school room and sick room; in the pulpit and at the bar. To work with the microscope and telescope. To work in steam and electricity; in wood, iron, brass and in stone, glass, in earth and in sky, anywhere, everywhere, "wherever human foot has trod the sod," or human thought evolved an idea. Then rise into the world of thought, into that higher competition for superiority of contribution for the good of society, until your eye shall sparkle with the blaze of triumphant victory, and then shall men crown your brow with the chaplet of eternal citizenship in the republic of thought. Remember that it is thought and not money that rules the world.

Are there no more worlds to conquer? Have we no more truth to discover in the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or in the human soul? Have men struck bedrock truth in all the disciplines of learning and callings of life? Nay! a thousand times nay! Lift your eye upon that mighty bird that rises in the circumambient blue, beating the air with his proud pinions as he circles in majestic sweep the silent heavens. His aim is to look into the face of the sun, and he mounts until, far above the stormy clouds, his eye sparkles with the blaze of the sun. Go thou and do likewise; lift your life in moral tone; strengthen your character with the essentials of virtue; plume the pinions of your thought of the upper regions where the air is pure and varrified; search, dig, work in the realm of thought and matter until you shall be able to say, with the immortal Kepler, "Oh, God, I think thy thoughts after Thee."

I could not if I would, and I would not if I could, justify the slavery and oppression of my people. There can scarcely be found to-day one thoroughly sensible man in this country to do so upon sound biblical grounds. I am willing to close the whole chapter forever with the noble thought of Joseph to his brethren: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good." We have to suffer yet more before we are thoroughly purged and made the equal of our white brother. But we must treasure the lessons and transmit them to the generations unborn. I do not belong to that class of superficial men who thrive on the praise of our people by telling them that they have accomplished as much as our white brother. To talk thus is to babble ignorantly and to use billingsgate to win the applause of the unwary. You must remember that the plane upon which our brother in white stands to-day, has been reached by generations of slavery, toll, adversity; war, pesti-

lence and death. And this rich legacy of wealth, courage, fortitude, sagacity, learning, skill and morality is bequeathed to every child of Anglo-Saxon blood. But sad to relate, we have not such legacy to bequeath to our children, and even the wayfarer dare not assert it. Observe what I say. I do not say that the elements of kindred strength are not found in us as individuals and as a race. Nor do I contend that the Anglo-Saxon as a whole is thus richly endowed, and that the black man as a whole have not as yet as a whole measured up to him, and I state with equal modesty that the embryonic strength of a giant are in his baby limbs.

Before asking now what is the Negro's place in American civilization, a larger question comes into notice that effects all men, namely, what is the place of any branch or family of the human race in the sum total of humanity? The Negro's will be what he makes for himself, just as the place of every people is what that people makes for itself, and he will be no exception to the rule. The method whereby he shall make that place is under consideration. One class contends that he must make it by staying in the three "Rs" and they are specially at pains in ridiculing the higher education of the Negroes, even for leaders in church or state. Yea, he must learn the three "Rs," he must master the kings of English and then he must plume his pinions of thought for a flight with Copernicus, Kepler and Herschel, he must sharpen his logic for a walk with Plato, Emanuel Kant and Herbert Spencer; he must clarify his vision for investigations with Virchow, Huxley and Gray; he must be able to deal in the abstruse questions of law as do Gladstone, Judge Story and Judge Speer; he must fortify himself to divide rightly the Word as do Canon Farrar, Bishop Foster, Bishop Haygood, Dr. John Hall and Dr. H. L. Wayland. In short, the education of the Negro must be on a par with the education of the white man. It must begin in the kindergarten, as that of the white child and end in the university as that of the white man. Anything short of this thorough preparation for all of the stages of life for the Negro would be unfair to a large part of humanity. We ask that nothing be done that would spoil his nature or emasculate his personality, but let everything be done that would fit him to fill every situation in life that man may fill from the blacksmith and hod carrier to the statesman and philosopher. And if such preparation require a knowledge of the old blue back spelling book or of Aristotle's logic; a knowledge of the plow or hammer, or of the spade or of the driving wheel; or of simple addition or integral calculus; or the first reader or Kant's "Critique," simple justice and common sense require that he be acquainted with whatever shall fit him to fill his station in life. Does this mean that the Negro be turned into a white man? Is he to be so educated that he will cease to be what God meant that he should be? Nay, verily, for any education that makes a people dissatisfied with their racial personality is a farce and a reproach.

I repeat, my hope is fixed, and standing upon the top of this present Mount Nebo, and letting my eyes sweep through the dark past up along the shores of the river we have crossed, and now into the wilderness with our churches, school houses, trade schools, and various Christian and civilizing agencies, with faith in God, I am certain that I see, through the thick darkness that envelops us, the gray rays of a new morn, and I hear the tramp of a new civilization and the music of its avant courier joyfully shouting:

"There's a good time coming, boys, a good time coming.."

And rising in my meditations upon the afflictions of my fathers that made them groan, I hear the united voice of all nations that have preceded us as the voice of many waters, saying: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And rising still higher, I listen again, and the voice of prophecy rings with the distinctions of a clarion note and with the sweetness of an angelic harp and the melody of a heavenly lyre: "Thou hast lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold," for

"Out of the shadow of night The world moves into light. It is daybreak everywhere."