

THE NEGRO QUESTION

Henry Ward Beecher's Letter to the Louisville Courier Journal Recently Published in The Outlook

In The Independent of March 19, 1903, we published a communication from Mr. De Hart, of Jersey City, N. J., relative to the negro problem. His views were combated by a number of writers, whose communications were printed and in a number of others which The Independent did not use. In the issue of April 23 was printed the communications of J. H. M., E. J. Benton, and S. G. Sheffer, at which time this was said editorially in a note: "The Independent desires not to devote too much space to this negro discussion, believing that the real problem is humanity without regard to nativity or color. But it gives space to the article above and the ones following, and trusts that the incident may close. Mr. De Hart seems to have aroused the ire of several gentlemen—but his heart will be found to be in the right place, even if his views of the negro question are attacked."

Not long since a communication was received from Traverse A. Spraggins, also of Jersey City, whose views are similar to those expressed by Mr. De Hart—in the main a rational discussion of the subject, but containing some statements which could not fail to arouse a bitter discussion and one which could hardly fail to arouse antagonisms between men who are equally anxious for the good of mankind.

The Independent admires the sharp conflict between bright minds—the flint against the steel—but prefers to avoid those profitless discussions which result only in hatred and accomplish nothing in eradicating evil. So, with considerable reluctance—because of our rule to give as far as possible all earnest men a hearing—we decide not to print Mr. Spraggins' letter.

The article below is quoted from The Outlook of May 30, 1903, and in the main expresses the ideas on the negro question entertained by the editor of The Independent for the past twenty years. It was printed from the original manuscript by The Outlook, received through the kindness of Major J. B. Pond, Mr. Beecher's lecture agent. It was probably published in the Courier Journal at the time, being dated at Louisville, Ky., March 30, 1885, and is as follows:

Courier-Journal: The "interview" published this morning in your paper, while in the main correct, has mistaken my views on one or two points which I beg permission to correct. The statement that I said that South Carolina might almost have been justified in rising against the voting colored population and massacring them is far from my feelings or opinions. The question before me and the interviewer was on the counting of votes. I said that in a case like Carolina I could well understand why the white people refused to count the votes fairly. I did not think that they were to be justified in a false count, or a suppression of the vote, or an intimidation of the voter. But I said that, considering the evils suffered under legislation of colored men, just emancipated, ignorant of government, late the slaves of white men, but now put over their masters by their numbers, taxing without wisdom, issuing bonds without skill or prudence, I did not wonder that the white population resorted to unfair means to suppress their foolish legislation. Even that was wrong in morals, and the savage idea that they were justified in massacre is a revolting sentiment.

Allow me to state explicitly my views of the past and present relations of the colored people. I. The state of slavery in the south, before the war, with all its softening, was evil and only evil, both in its effects upon the blacks and the whites alike, and was, on the whole, both in morals and in political economy, exceedingly bad. A terrible price was paid for the destruction of the slave system; but it was worth to posterity a hundred times what it cost. II. The putting the vote into the hands of an ignorant race was an astounding event in political history. It came not from a belief of their fitness for suffrage, but from a conviction that it was necessary for their defense. The tentative legislation of some of the southwestern states, which under the form of vagrancy laws seemed intended to subject the colored people to essential slavery again, alarmed the north and led to defensible legislation.

But, audacious as was that faith in liberty and suffrage which led the west and the north to give full citizenship and political power to the emancipated, the result has shown that the colored people have not misused this

power. I must say that colored voting since the war has been fully as wise as white voting was before the war. The colored people of the south, after becoming citizens, did not seek revenge nor mischief. They intended well. It was not their fault that many of the results were evil. It was bad enough for white citizens to see their late slaves led by foreign influence. It might be a political necessity—it was not any the less a thing grievous to be borne by their white fellow citizens.

But where the emancipated were largely in excess of the white voters, it amounted in fact to the subjection of the white people to the legislation of the colored. And in those states where legislatures were in the power of the late slaves, and where northern men, not always the wisest, led them on to foolish and wasteful legislation, increasing taxation and squandering the results of it, plunging the state deeply into debt by an unmerciful issue of bonds, it is not to be wondered that something like revolutionary methods were adopted, and that self-defense led men to violent resistance.

III. When, at a little later period, history, no longer under the influence of violent and heated passions, shall sit in impartial judgment upon this whole movement of the past quarter of a century, two results will stand out prominently.

(1) The admirable conduct of the slave population during the war, industrious, orderly, humane, and peaceful; their great bravery when the north made them a part of the army; their general good conduct after peace was established, and their thirst for education as the indispensable condition of good citizenship. Their future may not be what theorists predict, but it will be auspicious.

(2) The remarkable conduct of the white population of the south. Hurled from political power, defeated in war, wasted in all resources, wounded in every household, in the loss of husband, son or father; all industries subverted and to be refounded on a new basis—and, worse than all, to see their late slaves changing place with their masters and holding the reins of legislation under foreign leadership—is it wonderful that at such a revolution, convulsion rather, southern citizens often mistook the way of duty, that some rude remedies of violence were practiced, that some counter methods of violence were attempted?

These things are not to be justified. But is it not now a matter of transcendent wonder that the evils were so few, and that the patience and self-control of southern people so soon readjusted the whole industrial and civil economy? I glory in a history which, with all its infirmities and blemishes yet presents to the world the most notable instance of the force of self-government which has ever occurred in history!

IV. Passing from city to city, and the prey of reporters, who report from memory, I am grateful to them that so few misconceptions of my language creep into their statements. On one or two points allow me to be explicit.

(1) I do not think it wise that the whites and blacks should mix blood. Yet it is their right and liberty to do so, if they choose. But it is to be discouraged, on grounds of humanity. But if it must be, it should not be illicit, but under the sanctions of marriage.

(2) The slaves are free. They must come under a universal law as to their social position. No legislation can put ignorance and knowledge on a level; indolence and industry, virtue and vice, rudeness and refinement. The household is to be free to choose or refuse its company. No obstruction should be put in the path of education. All opportunities for development should be sacredly kept open to every class; every encouragement given to industry, wealth, refinement, and good citizenship. After that society must be free, so far as legislation is concerned, to choose its own partnerships.

(3) The Atlanta Constitution makes me point out Mississippi as the great central state; I said Missouri, not Mississippi.

V. I was born in New England, but from my childhood I breathed the air of the whole continent. I was from my cradle a friend of the oppressed, of the poor and of the struggling. An anti-slavery man by the force of my lineage and of my inherited nature, I spared no energy in fighting against slavery and against that whole malarious political influence which exhaled from this Dismal Swamp.

When, by the supreme folly of southern leaders, the war broke out, I gave my children to the army and myself to every influence at home and abroad which should give victory to the federal army.

When peace came, with vigor I

plead for mild settlements and against all bloody sacrifices. There had been blood enough shed. There must be no victims for the gallows, the sword, or the prison.

And now that a new era and a readjustment of all national questions has been reached, I am for the welfare of the undivided nation, and I belong, in detail, to that party which shall best serve the interests of the whole land; I am not a slave of either. The party is my servant, I am not its slave. The administration, with that strong and just man, Cleveland, at its head, has my hearty support and my full confidence, not because it is democratic, but because it is national, patriotic, and adapted to the exigencies of the hour. Should it fall in its national duty, I shall still seek the honor and welfare of this great nation, but by another road.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

Bible Reading

Editor Independent: Last January I sent you two letters—one criticising the actions of the petitioners for a rehearing of the Bible reading in the public schools case and the other one doing the same thing for the supreme court on account of its decision in the rehearing. Of course I did not much expect to see these letters in print, but I thought at least to see a few quotations and your comment in one of the issues of The Independent so that I could know whether in your opinion I was right or wrong. I have also been waiting patiently for some more extended report of the court's decision in this case than the short paragraphs of yourself and Mr. Hardy, which I asked you and him to explain, but it seems that I have waited in vain. While The Independent is true to its name when politics are in question it seems to cringe considerably when it comes to Bible decisions and religious matters.

Why did you not give the report of the court's decision in full? Then your readers could have judged for themselves. Is that not what you say all populists (the majority of your readers) insist on doing? Why then do you give only a short garbled paragraph, and the same from Mr. Hardy, on this important case? Do you not know that the court's decision is certain to cause quarrels in many school districts throughout the state when part of the board wants the Bible read and the other part not? If the school boards insist on having the Bible read in the schools what are those parents going to do who do not want their children to hear the reading?

You may garble reports of such cases as much as you please; you may extol the grand literature of the Bible to your heart's content; you may try to sweeten the atrocities recorded in that book from now until doomsday, and all your efforts will not make it fit to be placed in the hands of children! You know that there is not one clergyman in the state of Nebraska who dares to read each and every chapter of the Bible publicly in his church, and why then will you insist that it is right and just that it be read in the public schools? In conclusion allow me to ask you which version of the Bible is non-sectarian? I presume you will show again that you actually believe in "equal rights to all and special privileges to none" by throwing this into the waste basket.

GEO. S. PETERS.

Peters, Neb. (The editor has constantly on hand from one hundred to five hundred letters from subscribers commenting more or less at length upon a great variety of subjects. In the nature of things these cannot all be printed. The Independent did not give the court's decision "in full" for the same reason that it does not print every communication received—simply because it cannot print all the things which may be of interest. Write the West Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn., for a copy of the Northwestern Reporter advance sheets containing the latest decision in full.)

Doubtless people may quarrel over reading the Bible, just as they may quarrel over the tariff or the money question or whether potatoes should be planted in the dark or the light of the moon. The Independent does not pretend to map out a course of action to be followed by parents who do not want the Bible read in the public school where their children attend. They might help elect a school board that would not insist upon the reading; they might do as Dan Freeman did—go to law over it (for the case decided was upon the record made in that case alone); they might keep their children out of school and defy the compulsory education law and thus get into court from another route—or half a dozen other things. The best plan would be to consult a good lawyer and take his advice.—Ed. Ind.)

He Stopped His Paper.

He would stop his local paper to economize, he said. The dollar that it cost him he would save.

Said he was so busy working that the sheet was never read, and other reasons weighty then he gave.

"Nothing in it that's worth reading," was the thought he had in mind, and he chuckled that he'd saved a dollar bill.

But while neighbors were progressing he was left so far behind that the bunco men could see him standing still.

He didn't see the warning 'gainst the sharpers going around with cheap pot-metal ranges called the best;

And the contract signed to take one to his horror soon he found

A note he had to pay with interest. Next he signed a little paper for a pair of wily guys

Who said the fact would help 'em sell their trees,

And in just three months thereafter, to his very great surprise,

The local bank wrote: "Pay this, if you please."

One bright day a fellow met him and said, "Say, I'll buy your land and give you just six thousand for the place."

And the owner said, "I'll take it; put the money in my hand."

So the stranger posted forfeit with good grace.

But next day another fellow hove in sight and offered more,

And the owner paid a premium to the first.

Then when both the sharpers faded loud the owner then did roar,

For he saw that in the deal he'd got the worst.

Next he bought a lot of woollens from a man who whispered low

He'd smuggled them and so could sell them cheap.

Then when he set out to wear them quick and fast his tears did flow—

The stuff was but base libel on a sheep.

Then a wily gold brick artist filled his ears with thoughts of gain.

He said a chance like that should never pass.

So he hustled for the money with his utmost might and main,

And paid it for a shining chunk of brass.

When he'd squandered all his money and he'd mortgaged all his land

He realized he'd been a blooming dunce;

And he struck out for the village with a dollar in his hand

And hunted up the editor at once.

"I have got to have your paper, and here's for a year ahead,"

He shouted as he struck the office door.

"I have saved one blasted dollar, but of thousands I've been led,

And I'll never stop my paper any more."

—Will M. Maupin, in The Commoner.

Cyrus E. Gallatin, Garrett, Ind.: I prize your paper highly because of the ability with which it discusses democratic principles. However, when I realize the united and successful efforts of the money power to pervert the American form of government and enslave the people through the manipulation of the republican party, I cannot help but feel that it is a great waste of power for the opposition to divide up in hostile camps when they could work so much more effectively if their energies were directed in making the democratic party in reality what it has long been in name, "the party of the people."

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