

Shall we re-barricade
The Negro?

From Congregationalists
Dec. 4th 89

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

SHALL WE RE-BARBARIZE THE NEGRO?

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A book has recently been published entitled "An Appeal to Pharaoh," the title of which is as delusive as the assumptions on which it is based. It claims analogy with the appeal made to the Egyptian king that he would permit the children of Israel to depart out of bondage. It is really an appeal to a Pharaoh, whose power has already been broken, that he should do still further wrong to a people who have served him and his fathers for two centuries and a half without fee or reward, made not by the victims of his oppression, but by a courtier, and advocated as the cheapest method of getting rid of a people he is no longer able to enslave.

Stated in broad terms, "An Appeal to Pharaoh" is a labored argument to prove that, by the adoption of a system of mingled rewards and threats, the American negro may be exterminated in the United States, and what remains of the race left to take its chances on the continent of Africa. The plan proposed is to remove the actual child-bearing women with their families to Africa, and leave the rest of the race in the United States to die off in the course of nature. The author's method is to offer to the families of young married women: (1) free transportation to Africa, (2) a house as good as the one they left, (3) maintenance for one year and equipment for work by which they may afterwards support themselves. His estimate of the entire cost of such transportation and settlement is \$150 a head; \$200 *per capita*, he says, "would be an extravagant estimate." This would be \$10,000,000 a year for fifty years. He thinks the bulk of the race would be willing to go if they were merely offered free transportation, and that they would all be glad enough to migrate if the other lavish inducements his plan proposes were added to the delights of a contract voyage across the sea, and they were thereby enabled to escape their pitiable condition at the South. After the first year in Africa the author complacently points out that "they should cease to be a charge on our selfish generosity."

This is the mess of pottage with which a cunning Jacob proposes to tempt our black Esau, hungry for justice and freedom, to sell his birthright of American citizenship, relinquish his claim against American civilization for 250 years of debasement and oppression, and take his chances, single-handed and alone, without schools, government, protection, commerce or capital, among the barbarous hordes of Africa. The plan lacks only two things to commend it to general approval—justice and feasibility.

The author terms it "a radical solution of the negro problem," and so indeed it would be if it were any solution at all. The "negro problem" is not to be solved, however, by merely answering the query, "How can the negro be disposed of most easily, cheaply and expeditiously?" The question is one infinitely broader and more important to the American people, to humanity, to civilization and to Christianity.

The true inquiry is, "How shall the enlightened Christian white people of the United States perform the duty they owe to eight millions of fellow-citizens whom they have kept in enforced ignorance, upon whom they have imposed inconceivable debasement, and from whom they have received the product of unrequited toil for 250 years?" It is not the future only that is to be considered, nor the comfort and inclination of the white race alone. The problem embraces the rights and interests of the colored man as well. Compensation must be provided of some sort for past deprivation, as well as immunity from farther encroachment upon their rights. A people cannot subject another to their will and pleasure for two centuries and a half without incurring toward them something more than mere negative obligations. The colored people of the United States have a right—a right for which they have paid in advance by generations of suffering and oppression—to share to the fullest extent the blessings of American liberty and American Christian civilization. "As ye would that others should do unto you" is the only criterion by which the white American's

duty to the colored man of the United States, individual or collective, can be justly measured. On no other hypothesis can the negro problem be justly, fairly and honorably solved. The question is not how can we rid ourselves of the negro—how can we cheat, or wrong, or cripple, or oppress him as a race—but how can we do justice to him? Any proposal that is not based upon an inquiry as to the negro's right, and the measure of his just demand, can never be a solution of this problem. It may serve to defer or complicate it, but the debt we owe to eight millions, whom we have made the heirs of generations of wrong, cannot be discharged by evasion.

The book professes to outline a plan for the voluntary exodus of a people desirous of bettering their conditions. It is really a threat that, if these terms of removal are not accepted, their condition in the United States will not only continue to be of the hardest, but will be made even more intolerable by their progress in intelligence and capacity.

"If all the colored people in the South," says the author, "should be raised by any means to the highest level of attainment and achievement now occupied by the most intelligent and educated individuals of the race, there is assuredly nothing in the experience of these individuals to warrant the belief that the present disposition and conduct of the white people would be modified in the least degree" [p. 115]. Thus the author would put the Christian white people of the United States in the attitude of offering to the colored man an option between "voluntary" migration and continued oppression—of standing over the prostrate victim of centuries of injustice with the author's cheaply compounded decoction of hypocrisy and false pretenses in one hand, and a club in the other. "Hobson's choice" has usually been accounted a sorry enough alternative, but the author offers the American negro one even less desirable. He does not say to him, "Take this or nothing," but, "Take this or something worse."

The book is a decided advance on the "Ariel" and "Nojoque" emanations of the same philosophy of twenty years ago. Those disquisitions denied to the negro

any claim of manhood, or any right to consideration at the hands of the white man. The present work insists, with the utmost earnestness, that he ought at least to be given a choice of evils. That the race have a right to demand anything more—that they have even a right to demand this—seems never to have entered the author's consciousness. He simply argues that it is a more decent and manly way to offer the negro a means of escape than to continue to treat him as we have in the past, and are likely to in the future; and he urges the adoption of this plan because it will not cost much, will leave the bulk of the race with us under present conditions for half a century at least without hope of betterment, and will make the enforced emigrant an entering wedge for Christianity and commercial enterprise on the continent of Africa—though the author does not take pains to explain this part of the plan.

The book is written in good temper, with an evident desire to appear candid, with considerable parade of humane purpose, and with a naïve unconsciousness of the unfairness and insufficiency of the remedy proposed.

Assisted emigration is a matter which is entirely within the scope of enlightened policy with regard to the negro in the United States; and no man who looks upon the future with apprehension, or feels any touch of sympathy either for the white or colored victims of the inexpressible horrors of American slavery—every one whose heart throbs with pity either for the Christian slave bowed down with injustice and debasement, or the Christian master whose soul has become so calloused with unconscious evil that the right seems wrong, and wrong right, if the victim have but a trace of colored blood in his veins—no one who has any kindly feeling for either of these classes can fail to wish that there were some such simple mechanical solution of this evil, some way by which the roots which have been growing downward for centuries might be plucked up, and the ground left clear of the fruits of evil and of provocation to greater wrong. This cannot be effected, however, by tempting today's civilization into fresh wrong, in the hope to avoid the consequence of yesterday's enormity.

When the white people of the American Colonies assumed the right to enslave the negro, they became debtors to humanity, and accountable not merely for his life and safety, but for his civilization and Christianization as well. The obligation arising from centuries of enslavement cannot be discharged by returning him naked to the wilds of Africa. He became, by our act, a rightful heir of our prosperity, intelligence and civilization, and we cannot avoid the obligation. For every dollar of unrequited toil that went into our wondrous aggregate of wealth, he has a right to claim a just and fair equivalent in intelligence and opportunity. When by his labor he made it possible for schools and colleges to be built, where the sons of the masters might enjoy the blessings of knowledge; when his labor helped pay for churches and court-houses, and all those monuments of progress of which our nation boasts—when he did this even weakly and blindly—he established an indefeasible equity, for himself and his descendants, in their enjoyment. He is an American whose sweat has consecrated the soil he tilled without hire, and whose blood is an unavoidable lien upon our national institutions. The Church cannot allow the victims of its shameful laches to be exposed again to the paralyzing touch of paganism or the withering sirocco of Mahometan frenzy, until she has first lifted them to the same level of intelligence and self-reliant faith which the white Christian has attained, and taught them by actual experience the supreme lesson of individual and collective self-direction and self-control. It will not do to send missionaries to Christianize Asia, and at the same time re-ship ignorant negroes to be heathenized in Africa. The American people are trustees *de son tort* for the enlightenment and elevation of the Ameri-

can negro, and the obligation is one that cannot in any manner be avoided.

When the negro has enjoyed to the full the blessings of Christianity and freedom in America, it is possible, and even probable, that he may turn voluntarily and gladly to Africa, as the herald and instrument of her re-generation and civilization; but in whatever remedy is proposed for the amelioration of his condition in the United States, or the Christianization of Africa through his reluctant action, the first and most essential ingredient is justice. For this there can be no substitute; and any so-called remedy which has for its basis-principle that the white people of any part of the country will never permit the colored man to enjoy equal rights of citizenship and opportunity, will be a failure, as all such compromises with iniquity ought to be. There is no need of discussing the superstructure raised on such a foundation. It is useless to call it a "voluntary" migration. The whole tenor of the work shows that it is predicated on the idea that the white man, while he may be willing to make a show of hiring the negro to depart, means to crowd him out if he will not go willingly.