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Board for Freedmen

EDWARD P. COWAN, D.D., SECRETARY.

Mr. Doubtful and Mr. Hopeful

By Rev. S. J. Fisher, D.D.

When Dr. Guthrie first went to Edinburgh as the pastor of Old Greyfriars' Church, he tells us how one dark and grimy day he stood where the street is bridged across the Cowgate, and looking down on the poor and bedraggled masses, realized that this was his parish, and it was among these heathenlike people he was to labor. And as the thought oppressed him almost to discouragement, he heard the voice of Dr. Chalmers, and turning around saw that glowing and benevolent countenance as he too watched the throng, and exclaimed in enthusiasm, "A beautiful field for operations; a beautiful field!" It is often thus that looking out upon any special Christian work there seem to be two pairs of eyes, one which Bunyan would say belonged to Mr. Doubtful and the other to Mr. Hopeful. Those two characters are now and always looking out on the work among the negroes. How often Doubtful calls to mind the idle, ragged, ignorant numbers of this people which one sees at railroad stations in the South, in the poorer quarters of the cities, the hangers-on of hotels. The sight of these shiftless, lazy, tattered men and women, old and young, is depressing. But Hopeful sees all this, and reminds us that it is this very class we must elevate. We are like physicians, not sent to the whole, but to the sick. It is just as much for us a field of operations as Raikes found in the ragged children of London or Dr. Bernardo gave his life to assist in the same city. But Hopeful would remind us that these ragged and lazy negroes are so much in evidence, because they are lazy and idle. The industrious and intelligent are unseen because they are at work, too busy to hang around depots or idle at stores. The toil-

ing multitudes which are earning their daily bread and becoming owners of little homes and farms, are not loitering in the streets as the habitués at our saloons, and the poor in our parks are few beside the mechanics and toilers in factory and field.

Doubtful also reminds us that travelers through the South often return with doleful stories of the degradation and low estate of the negro, that the commercial traveler is full of sharp criticism for this people. But Hopeful cheerily brings to our remembrance how often such criticism has been spent on our Foreign Missions and missionaries, condemning them as useless, only to be refuted by wiser and more honest observers. The irresponsible traveler, making no careful study of conditions seeking no complete information, takes a surface view, and often only meets the classes who are out of sympathy with any and every attempt to evangelize or elevate this race.

Doubtful is troubled because Thomas Dixon and Tom Watson and Nelson Page are Southerners who bitterly oppose any advance of this race, and who wish all effort to be limited to keeping them down. But Hopeful cheerfully reminds him of the countless Christian men and women in the South who tell us of the faithfulness and industry and usefulness of many of this race, and who heartily endorse such a work as our Church is carrying on. Hopeful waves his hand toward the multitudes who are acquiring property and knowledge and influence, to the eager scholars which throng our schools, to the brighter minds which are developing into leaders of their race; and then suggests that the arguments to show the impossibility of this elevation are in the light of the steady growth as foolish as the pamphlet which appeared

in England, proving the inability of the Great Eastern to cross the Atlantic, just as she had reached our shores. When Hopeful can see the development and elevation of the boys and girls under the patient care of a Satterfield, a Smith, a Lucy Laney, a Sanders, an Amos, or many another, he smiles at the despondency which is unmoved by such signs of progress, after centuries of slavery and degradation.

Perhaps Doubtful repeats the remark that education and progress make the negro insolent and unwilling to be a hewer of wood. But Hopeful gently reminds him that this has been the stock argument against all popular education, against any elevation, as much used against the Irish, the Hunga-

rians as against the black. Education is a peril, and all the more should it be surrounded with moral influence; but ignorance will not create industrious habits, or repress vice, passion, lawlessness and crime.

Then Doubtful may enumerate the instances of increased violence and of viciousness since slavery was abolished and look despondently at the future. But Hopeful waves his hand again toward the peaceful and industrious thousands, and reminds us that no people is fit for liberty without moral education, and that even these sporadic cases, so truly exceptional, call Christians to seek the regeneration and elevation of this race for the safety of all.

A White Woman's Handshake

By Rev. S. J. Fisher, D.D.

"We've heard a heap that was 'ligious and liftin.' It helps me to rear up my chillen every time a white woman shakes my hand." Such was the remark of a negro woman at the close of a Mothers' Meeting held in Tennessee among the negroes. What a revelation it is of the craving these poor hearts have for the truths and counsels which they soon recognize are religious and uplifting! It is no little thing to give these ignorant souls glimpses of a better and higher life; and how true it is, as was said long ago: "Where there is no vision the people perish!" Deeply suggestive also is the declaration that the kindly handshake of the white woman gives courage and incentive to train her children. For sympathy is a great power. It stimulates to renewed effort. It inspires with the feeling of kinship and responsibility. The handshake wakens to better ideals and creates a noble ambition. It stirred this humble negro mother to long and strive that her children might grow up to purity and loveliness of life. It taught her that the best thing she could give her children was an upright character, a true heart, an honest life. Just as Harlan Page's hand on John B. Gough's shoulder helped him to struggle from a

drunkard's life, so the kindness and sympathy of the white man toward the negro is a call to a better life. And thus the work our Church is carrying on among the freedmen gives every member a chance to speak uplifting words, and show an interest in these humble natures. Through our missionaries and teachers each one of us can inspire these ignorant and groping souls with better longings and holy desires. You shake these toilworn, dusky hands; you let fall into these untaught minds some quickening counsel; when you give and pray that this work among the freedmen may be carried on and you make its missionaries your fellow-workers. Nothing is more cheering than the multiplied instances of negro parents who have learned to desire better things for their children and of sons and daughters who have returned from our schools, from the counsel and influence of our teachers with new desires for purity, and an ambition for an honest and useful life. Situated as they are—burdened, hampered, limited as they are—it will be many years before these negroes shall not need the blessed help and encouragement and counsel of our missions to the freedmen.