

ADDRESS OF WELCOME GIVEN AT A RECEPTION
TENDERED TO THE MEN WHO HAVE
RETURNED FROM THE BATTLE FRONT
BY THE MEN'S PROGRESSIVE CLUB
OF THE FIFTEENTH STREET
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

APRIL 24, 1919,

BY THE PASTOR, REV. FRANCIS J. GRIMKE.

Young gentlemen, I am glad to welcome you home again after months of absence in a foreign land in obedience to the call of your country—glad that you have returned to us without any serious casualties.

I am sure you acquitted yourselves well; that in the record that you have made for yourselves, during your absence from home, there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing that will reflect any discredit upon the race with which you are identified. The colored soldier has always commanded respect, even from his enemies; the colored soldier has always played a man's part in every struggle in which he has been engaged; he has never turned his back upon the enemy; has never shown himself a coward. It is generally admitted that there is no better soldier, in all the world, than the colored soldier.

While you were away you had the opportunity of coming in contact with another than the American type of white man; and through that contact you have learned what it is to be treated as a man, regardless of the color of your skin or race identity. Unfortunately you had to go away from home to receive a man's treatment, to breathe the pure, bracing air of liberty, equality, fraternity. And, while it was with no intention of bringing to you that knowledge, of putting you where you could get that kind of experience, but simply because they couldn't very well get along without you, I am glad, nevertheless, that you were sent. You know now that the mean, contemptible spirit of race prejudice that curses this land is not the spirit of other lands: you know now what it is to be treated as a man. And, one of the things that I am particularly hoping for, now that you have had this experience, is that you have come back determined, as never before, to keep up the struggle for our rights until, here in these United States, in this boasted land of the free and home of the brave, every man, regardless of the color of his skin, shall be accorded a man's treatment.

Your trip abroad will be of very little value to the race in this country unless you have come back with the love of liberty, equality, fraternity burning in your souls, and the determination

to set other souls on fire with the same spirit. In the struggle that is before us, you can do a great deal in helping to better conditions. You, who gave up everything—home, friend, relatives—you who took your lives in your hands and went forth to lay them, a willing sacrifice upon the altar of your country and in the interest of democracy throughout the world, have a right to speak—to speak with authority; and that right you *must* exercise.

We, who remained at home, followed you while you were away, with the deepest interest; and, our hearts burned with indignation when tidings came to us, as it did from time to time, of the manner in which you were treated by those over you, from whom you had every reason, in view of the circumstances that took you abroad, and what it was costing you, to expect decent, humane treatment; instead of the treatment that was accorded you. The physical hardships, incident to a soldier's life in times of war, are trying enough, are hard enough to bear—and, during this world war, on the other side of the water, I understand they were unusually hard. To add to these the insults, the studied insults that were heaped upon you, and for no reason except that you were colored, is so shocking that were it not for positive evidence, it would be almost unbelievable.

That shameful record is going to be written up, and published, so that the whole world may read it, and learn how black men, who went out from these shores to die at their country's call, were treated simply because of the color of their skin. The world ought to know it; and will know it; and it is your duty to help those who will make the record to make it as complete as possible: The facts as you know them, let them come out; write out your personal experience and put it where it can be available for the historian, in order that the facts may be preserved as one of the most shameful and detestable exhibition of race prejudice that can be found in all the world. I know of nothing that sets forth this cursed American race prejudice in a more odious, execrable light than the treatment of our colored soldiers in this great world struggle that has been going on, by the very government that ought to have shielded them from the brutes that were over them.

Again, most gladly do I welcome you back home; and most earnestly do we express the hope that every man of you will play a man's part in the longer and more arduous struggle that is before us in battling for our rights at home. If it was worth going abroad to make the world safe for democracy, it is equally worth laboring no less earnestly to make it safe at home. We shall be greatly disappointed if you do not do this—if you fail to do your part.