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SOME NEW ASPECTS OF THE PRO-SLAVERY ARGUMENT*

Among the accepted truisms of Southern history is the contention that the rise of the Abolition movement in the North caused the South to turn to the defense of slavery. In the midst of the sectional controversy, Southerners constantly asserted that their own insistence upon the validity of slavery was due to Abolition agitation. In 1843, George Tucker proclaimed that "the efforts of Abolitionists have hitherto made the people in the slaveholding states cling to it [slavery] more tenaciously. Those efforts are viewed by them as an intermeddling in their domestic concerns that is equally unwarranted by the comity that is due to sister states, and to the solemn pledges of the Federal compact."¹ This view has continued to be accepted, with even such critical historians as Charles and Mary Beard declaring that "the immediate effect of the anti-slavery

*An address delivered in Chicago on the occasion of the celebration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, September 10, 1935.

¹George Tucker, *Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth*, Richmond, 1843, 108.

COMMUNICATIONS

Recently there has been much talk about the book *Behind the Scenes*, written by Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley, who out of her compassion for the all but impoverished Mrs. Abraham Lincoln used a part of her income to aid this unfortunate woman. In keeping with the Nordic idea of making history to order a movement has been started to have it appear that no such Negro woman of that unusual intelligence lived, and if she did she could not have written such a book. Of course, if the traducers say that it is so, American historians "highly trained in modern historiography" will take up the glad refrain and it will be so because they say so. It is fortunate, however, that here in Washington, D. C., are still living persons who were personally acquainted with Mrs. Keckley and knew of her writing this book. One of these persons, Dr. Francis J. Grimke, a graduate of both Lincoln and Princeton, for more than fifty years the pastor of the Fifteenth Presbyterian Church of this city, of which she was a member, writes the following to clear up this matter:

Washington, D. C., November 20, 1935

Dear Sir:

Just now in the newspaper, Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley has been figuring conspicuously, owing to an article published by a man who asserts that no such person as Elizabeth Keckley ever lived; that the character is purely fictitious. I knew Mrs. Keckley very well. I was her pastor for over thirty years, attended her during her last illness, and officiated at her funeral services, committing all that is mortal of her to its last resting place. She is buried in Harmonia Cemetery, south of the old vault near the tomb of the Rev. John F. Cook, the founder of the 15th Street Presbyterian Church. She died May 26, 1907.

Mrs. Keckley was above the ordinary height. She was impos-

ing in stature, graceful in her every movement, with countenance sweet and intelligent. She was a ready talker, charming in conversation. She had a wide experience, in her contact, in the course of her business, with the wives of leading citizens of the nation,—wives of senators, representatives, cabinet ministers, judges, etc. And so she had a fund of interesting things to talk about. She was not an educated woman, in the sense that she had passed through any educational institution, but she was a woman of marked intelligence and had made good use of the opportunities that she had of improving her mind. No one who ever saw her, or had any contact with her, even casually, would ever be likely to forget her. She was striking in appearance, and of most pleasing personality.

I think of her now, as I used to see her on Sabbath mornings in the old church edifice, 15th Street between I and K Streets, as she used to come up the aisle, the very personification of grace and dignity, as she moved towards her pew. Often was heard: "Here comes Madam Keckley." All eyes were upon her.

I have a fine picture of her, autographed, presented to me in 1904. She always said I reminded her of her own son.

These facts were copied from my diary.

Very truly yours,

FRANCIS J. GRIMKE.

The following communication, also from Dr. Francis J. Grimke, throws considerable light on the careers of James Wormley and Frederick Douglass, both prominent in different spheres before and after the Civil War:

913 Rhode Island Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

August 23, 1934.

Mr. G. Smith Wormley,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. Wormley:

I remember your grandfather, Mr. James Wormley, very well. Physically, he was a fine specimen of a man. He was tall, well built, with clean cut features, and piercing black eyes. He was what I would call a handsome man. He was a manly man, a

man who respected himself and who demanded respect from others. A man was a man with him. There was nothing cringing or obsequious about him in his contact with white people, as so many colored people are. He was a race man, in the sense that he was thoroughly interested in the welfare of the race. He was highly thought of by Charles Sumner, and he kept in close touch with Mr. Sumner and other prominent friends of the race as long as he lived.

As a business man, he was a conspicuous success. No hotel in Washington stood higher than his; no hotel in the city was better conducted, or was patronized by a finer class of customers. The fame of Hotel Wormley had even gone beyond the bounds of our own country, so that distinguished foreigners coming here sought its shelter. He not only proved his ability as a first class business man, but also showed his good common sense, in that he saved his money: so that when he died, he left a considerable fortune. I remember spending one evening with him in company with Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden, the noted African scholar, at his farm, a little out of the city. We were both invited by him, and were driven out in one of his vehicles. It was a very pleasant evening. We talked about many things, especially bearing on the race question. And among them, of the Commission which President Grant had sent to Haiti and on which Mr. Douglass had a place. There was something about the affair that greatly displeased Mr. Wormley. I cannot now recall exactly what it was; but I do remember very distinctly that he was much wrought up over it, and expressed himself in very forceful language.

The evening ended with a delicious oyster supper, which we all thoroughly enjoyed. I may mention also, before closing, that Dr. Blyden, at this time on his visit to this country and city, was stopping at the Wormley Hotel. I mention this to show that Mr. Wormley did not shut the door of his hotel against a member of his own race, which was greatly to his credit.

Yours truly,

FRANCIS J. GRIMKE.

Dear Dr. Woodson:

When I was in to see you on Saturday, among other things, you spoke of publishing my letter on Mr. James Wormley. In that letter, I spoke of how Mr. Wormley felt in regard to Mr. Douglass' position on the Commission which General Grant sent

to Haiti. What position did Mr. Douglass really occupy on that Commission? I have forgotten, and have no means at hand to determine. Whatever it was, Mr. Wormley felt that in accepting it, he compromised his dignity. He regarded the offer of it as an insult; and in expressing himself in regard to it used very strong language. He said, if he had been in Mr. Douglass' place, and it had been offered to him, he would have spit in General Grant's face. And he meant it. He seemed greatly wrought up. From what I could gather from the tenor of Mr. Wormley's remarks, Mr. Douglass was named as secretary of the Commission, but was not *expected* to act; some white man was to be the real secretary, Mr. Douglass' name being used merely to get his influence, hoping thereby to aid in the accomplishment of General Grant's purpose. And this is why, I am asking, you will know, what really was Mr. Douglass' position on the Commission? Did Mr. Douglass in joining the Commission, under the circumstances, compromise his dignity? Was he really secretary, or in name only?

Look the matter up. I will come in to learn the result.

Yours truly,

FRANCIS J. GRIMKE.

To learn the facts in this matter the Editor addressed a communication to the Department of State and received this reply:

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON

May 31, 1935

In reply refer to HA 116.3/3255
Mr. C. G. Woodson, Director,
The Journal of Negro History,
1538 Ninth Street, N. W.,

Washington, D. C.

Sir:

The receipt is acknowledged of your letter of May 25, 1935, inquiring whether Frederick Douglass was Secretary of the Commission or to the Commission, which was sent to Haiti not long after the Civil War.

The records of the Department show that Frederick Douglass of New York was Assistant Secretary to the Commission which was sent to the Dominican Republic in 1871 under the joint resolution of Congress approved on January 12, 1871.

The records also show that Frederick Douglass of the District of Columbia was appointed Minister Resident and Consul General to Haiti on June 26, 1889, and Chargé d'Affaires to the Dominican Republic on September 20, 1889. His services terminated in both places in June, 1891.

Very truly yours,

For the Secretary of State:

M. F. PERKINS,
Acting Historical Adviser.