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# The Roosevelt-Washington Episode

OR

## RACE PREJUDICE,

BY

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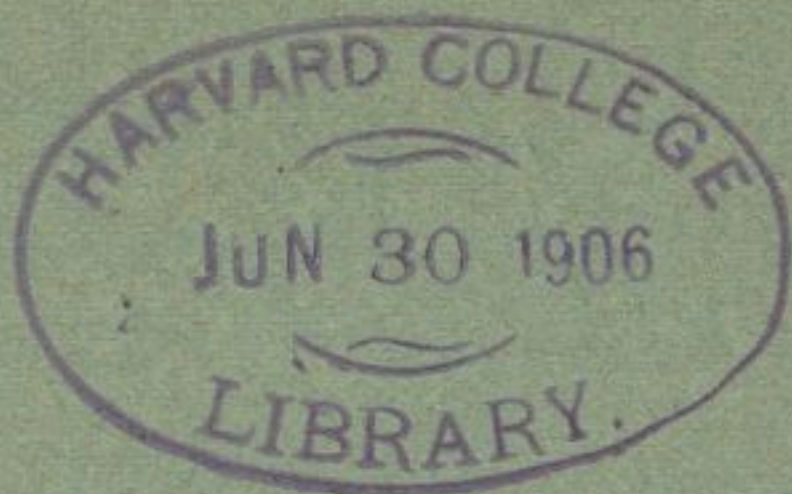
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Delivered October 27, 1901.

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“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

“As ye would that men should do to you,  
do ye also to them likewise.”



Col. J. W. Higginson

Compliments of the author

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OR

## RACE PREJUDICE.

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ACTS xi, 2-3.

*And when Peter was come up unto Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest into men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.*

Of the three great representative races of antiquity, the most exclusive, the most arrogant, the most inflated with pride, were the Jews. They looked down upon all other races; held them in the greatest contempt. They felt that they were the special favorites of heaven. And this was due partly to their education. When God appeared unto Abraham, and said unto him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house into a land that I will show thee," it was with the purpose of separating unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works and thus to prepare the way for the coming of the seed of the woman, which was to bruise the serpent's head.

After the fall wickedness grew very rapidly in the earth. The statement is, "The whole earth became corrupted." Then came the flood, and a new beginning was made in the family of Noah; but it was not very long before evil had again over-

spread everything. Then it was that God took this man Abraham from his home and led him down into the land of Canaan, and began the work of building up a nation in which the knowledge of the true God would be preserved, and among whom the Messiah might appear and set up his kingdom.

In order to do this certain things were necessary. (1) That they be separate from all other races and peoples. And (2), that they be specially trained. To this end, God entered into a covenant with Abraham, and after his death the covenant was renewed with his son Isaac, and after Isaac's death with Jacob. Then came the period of expansion, of growth, of development. In the providence of God, the family of Jacob goes down into Egypt, and while there multiplies so rapidly that the Egyptians become alarmed and begin to oppress them. Then Moses comes upon the scene, and through him, under the divine direction, after working many signs and wonders, they are led out of Egypt across the Red Sea to Horeb, the mount of God, and there, amid mighty thunderings and lightnings, the law is given unto them,—the moral law and the ceremonial law,—and the process of education and of separation begins. For forty years they wandered in the wilderness, during which time God fed them. Then he brought them to the promised land and settled them in that land.

It is impossible to read their laws without realizing that one object was to keep them to themselves, separate and apart from others. Thus, they were forbidden to enter into a covenant with other nations, to marry among them, or to follow their practices, or to worship their gods. And according to the statements in John and the Acts, they were to have no intercourse whatever with strangers, no social contact in any way with them. The reason for this was because the surrounding nations were very corrupt; and one purpose which God had in view in training them was to make them strong in character, pure, upright in heart and life.

So it is impossible to read their history without realizing that they were wonderfully blessed. They were exalted to heaven in point of privilege. As Moses expresses it, "For what great nation is there that hath a god so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is whensoever we call upon him. And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" And in the 105th psalm we have this record, "They went about from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people. He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reprov'd kings

for their sakes; saying, touch not mine anointed ones and do my prophets no harm." All these great blessings that came to them were intended to bring them nearer to God; to purify their hearts, and to fit them to do the work which he had mapped out for them, namely, to become his chosen instruments, in the fulness of time, when Shiloh should come, to carry the blessings of the true religion unto the ends of the earth. The promise made to Abraham was: "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And again we have the statement, "Ask of Me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Hence the great commission given by Christ to his disciples: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel unto every creature." That was the purpose which God had in view in the training of the Jewish nation, to use them for the dissemination of the gospel among all peoples. Instead of this, however, it had the very opposite effect upon them. The fact that they were so highly favored, that they had enjoyed so many privileges, filled them with pride, puffed them up, gave them an overweening sense of their own importance; led them to despise others, to hold themselves aloof from them; to feel that these blessings were for them only. This feeling was general among the Jews. They shrank away from contact with others as they would from a thing unclean. Peter himself was not free from it. When God wanted to use him and send him on a mission to a certain Gentile he had actually to work a miracle in order to prepare him for it. You remember the record in the tenth chapter of the Acts: "About noon Peter went on the housetop to pray, and became hungry and had a vision. He saw the heavens open and beheld a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet, let down by the four corners upon the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things of the earth and fowls of heaven. And there came a voice to him, Rise Peter; kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean. And a voice came unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. And this was done thrice, and straightway the vessel was received up into heaven."

"Now while Peter was much perplexed in himself what the vision might mean," the narrative goes on to say, "behold the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodging there. And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said

unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. But arise, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting; for I have sent them."

It was under such pressure as this; it was only because of this message direct from heaven that Peter was induced to go down to Caesarea. And even then he had to explain to Cornelius that he was doing an unusual thing. "Ye yourselves know," he said to him and his friends who were present, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man who is a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another nation." He justifies himself however, by the statement "And yet unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean."

In order still farther to strengthen Peter in what he had done, in the position which he had taken, to make assurance doubly sure that he had the approval of God in what he had done, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Cornelius and his friends, just as he had been poured out upon the apostles and those who were with them in the upper chamber on the day of Pentecost. The same manifestation of the Spirit's presence was visible; they spoke with other tongues, the same as they had done.

Cornelius, grateful for what had been done, for the wonderful blessings which had come to him and his household, through Peter, very naturally was desirous of showing him some attention, of expressing in some way his gratitude, and so pressed him very earnestly to spend a while with them, and he accepted, so we are led to infer from the narrative. He became his guest.

Peter doubtless felt very happy over what had occurred. He had had a wonderful experience and had seen what he had never expected to see. And in this frame of mind he returned to Jerusalem, full of the subject and anxious to break the good tidings to the brethren. But he found that the news had preceded him, and that the most important part of the transaction had been entirely overlooked, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles, and that the only thing that was remembered and commented upon was the fact that he had gone in unto men who were uncircumcised and had eaten with them. For this he was bitterly denounced. We can imagine how they must have frowned upon him, and how they must have sought to make him feel that he had belittled himself and had brought dishonor upon the whole Jewish race by his unseemly conduct.

It is interesting to see who this man was with whom Peter ate, and on whose account such a tremendous hubbub was

raised. It was Cornelius. And who was Cornelius?

(1) He was a Roman citizen, a member of the Latin race, then the dominant race of the world, a race that had produced a Julius Caesar, a Cicero, a Seneca, a Virgil, and other illustrious names.

(2) He was a man who held an honorable position. He was an officer in the Roman army.

(3) He was a man of wealth, he had an abundance of this world's goods. He was able therefore to surround himself with all the comforts of this life.

(4) He was a man of high social standing. This is clear from his position and from his possessions.

(5) He was a man of high character. He stood well in the community, was respected by all who knew him.

(6) He was a religious man, a man who feared God, who believed in prayer, and who sought to regulate his household according to the teachings of religion. There are two descriptions given of him in this tenth chapter. The first is in the second verse, "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." The second is in the twenty-second verse, where he is said to be, "A righteous man and one that feareth God, and well reported of by all the nation of the Jews."

From the account which we have of him, it is evident that he was an exceptionally fine man, a man of high ideals and noble aspirations, a man who would have been a credit to any community, and whose friendship any one might feel honored in possessing; but unfortunately, he happened to belong to another race, to the Gentiles, to the uncircumcised, and that fact rendered all of his splendid and noble qualities of no avail. He must be discriminated against; no Jew must enter his house; no Jew must eat with him. Peter is denounced for dining with such a man as Cornelius. The Lord Jesus Christ was censured, severely criticised for eating with publicans and sinners; but in the case of Peter it is for enjoying a social repast with one of the very finest gentlemen presented to us in the New Testament, a man very different in character from publicans and sinners. The ground of objection against him was not his character, but his race.

It is interesting also to note who these people were who attempted to frown Peter down and to criticise him.

(1) They were members of the church; they were professed Christians; but they were in the dark; they failed to catch the spirit of Christ, and to enter into the great purpose for

which he had come, which was to break down the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, and to make all one; they failed utterly to understand that in Christ Jesus there was to be neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free, but that all were to stand on precisely the same level.

(2) They were men who were socially inferior to Cornelius. The members of the early church were gathered, not from the upper and aristocratic classes among the Jews, but from the common people, from what are called among us the laboring classes. The fact that they were Jews however led them to feel that they were superior to any Gentile, whatever might be his attainments or position. It shows the nature of prejudice, how blind and stupid it is, how unreasonable, how utterly devoid of common sense. Sometimes it is impossible to avoid feeling contempt for it, and yet, I suppose, it deserves our pity rather than our contempt.

But I must hasten on. Poor Peter is not the only one who has been criticised for eating with a member of a supposed inferior race. Our good President is just now passing through a similar experience for inviting Booker T. Washington to dine with him. What a howl has gone up all over the South, and why? Because the President has seen fit to entertain at his table a colored gentleman, the head of a great institution, a man of national reputation, and a man, by the way, who has been more lauded by the South than any Negro who has ever lived in this country. Booker T. Washington has always been the ideal Negro in the eyes of the Southern whites; and it is the entertainment of this man that has provoked all this criticism, that has brought down the wrath of the Southern people upon the head of our worthy and honored President. These people who are criticising the President, do not deny that Booker T. Washington is a gentleman, that he is a man of high character, of unblemished reputation. They do not deny that he is a man of some attainments, that he is a thinker, and that he knows how to express himself; they themselves rank him with the foremost orators of the country. They do not deny that he has done a great work in building up Tuskegee, one of the greatest industrial schools in the country. They do not deny that his influence has been far reaching. According to their own estimate of him he knows more about this negro problem, the greatest problem to-day before the American people, and has done more than anyone else to bring about a proper understanding between the races. If the eulogies pronounced upon this man by the Southern press and by Southern men were



gathered together they would fill a volume. Everywhere his praise has been sounded throughout the Southland; everywhere he has been held up and lauded to the skies.

Why then all this howl about his dining with the President? What is the trouble? A physician in this city told me once of an experience which he had, which will perhaps, throw a little light on the subject. He was making a call on one of his patients, and while he was sitting by her bedside a member of the Salvation Army came in. Her first words to him, after looking him over, were: "Do you know the Lord Jesus?" His reply was, "Yes, I know him very well." "What do you know about him?" she asked. His reply was, "I know him to be a very nice colored gentleman." At which she threw her hands up in holy horror and cried out: "Blasphemy, blasphemy." "What do you mean?" said he, "do you mean to say he is not a gentleman?" "No, I don't mean that," she answered. "You said he was a *colored* gentleman!" It was blasphemy in the estimation of this member of the Salvation Army even to think of Jesus Christ as a *colored* gentleman. And that is the secret of all this hue and cry that has been going up all over the South, in regard to the Washington episode; it is because Prof. Washington happens to be identified with the despised Negro race in this country. If he had belonged to any other race under the sun it would have made no difference. He has worked his way up from chattel slavery; from the log cabin to the position which he today occupies in the public estimation, which in a Grant or a Lincoln would have made him an honored guest in any home, even the proudest in the land, but because of his race affiliation, in spite of his remarkable career, he is, in the estimation of the Southern whites, an outcast, unfit to receive any social recognition from them. It is because of his color that these fools are uttering their impotent rage. "He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh. He will have them in derision."

I for one am glad that this thing has occurred; that Booker Washington has had the opportunity of dining as a guest at the White House. I am glad, for several reasons: (1) because it shows that we have at last in the White House one who is every inch a man; one who has convictions, and convictions in the right direction, and who has the courage of his convictions. It is a great thing to be a man, to have the fear of God so implanted in the soul, and to have the love of right so strongly developed in us, that we will not be turned away from the path of duty though confronted by all the powers of darkness. You see that kind of manhood in Garrison; you get a glimpse into his soul and see what kind of moral fiber he was

made of, in those magnificent words of his, "I am in earnest. I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." And in those burningely eloquent words of Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty, or give me death." There was the purpose to stand for the right, though death ensued.

There are some men who are so only in name. They are mere apologies for men. They are weaklings; they have no stamina, no backbone. They are putty men, easily moulded, mere tools in the hands of others. They are moral cowards; they are afraid of their own shadow. They never dare to act without finding out first which way the wind is blowing. They are afraid of doing the unpopular thing. For such men we can't help feeling contempt. Manhood is the thing that commends itself to us always, whether we agree with it or not. Give me a manly man, a man who dares to do right, who dares to follow his convictions, who dares to do the unpopular thing because it commends itself to his conscience. Such a man I believe is the present occupant of the White House, Theodore Roosevelt. Everything indicates it. A short while ago I read in the Times of this city the following: "I am going," he is quoted as saying, "to select the very best men for public positions. Men appointed to high public places must be high in morals and in every other respect. If the American people care to show their approval of my course as President during the three years and a half that I have to serve, by placing me at the head of the Republican ticket in 1904, I should feel deeply grateful. It would be an honor that it would be difficult for any man to decline. But if I have to pander to any cliques, combinations or movements, for their approval, I would not give a snap of my fingers for it or a nomination under such circumstances."

It has been a long time since we have heard any such manly utterance from any high official in this country.

Again, in the appointment of ex-Governor Jones, of Alabama, he said distinctly: "One reason why I have appointed him is because of his attitude on the subject of lynching." There is no dodging the question, no beating about the bush. He defines his position on the subject, and in a way not to be misunderstood. In his official capacity, in the exercise of his appointing power, he puts the seal of his disapprobation upon that phase of Southern barbarism.

And still again, in his invitation to Professor Washington to dine with him, the moral fiber of the man is also clearly seen, for he was not ignorant of Southern public senti-

ment in regard to the step which he was about to take. He knew that all negroes in the South are regarded as social pariahs; but he was not deterred thereby. He wanted the professor to dine with him, and he had him, and will have him again when he wants to, Southern sentiment to the contrary, notwithstanding. Theodore Roosevelt is no reed shaken by the wind. He is not a man to be deterred from the course which he has mapped out for himself by the clamor of the multitude, by adverse criticism, or by the prating of fools.

For the first time in the history of the country a colored American citizen has dined at the White House as the guest of the President of the United States. It is a shame that it has not occurred before. For twenty-five years there lived in this city the most eminent representative that this race has yet produced, the immortal Douglass, a man of whom Theodore Tilton has said:

“In the paths of men  
There never walked a grander man than he!  
He was a peer of princes—yea a king!  
Crowned in the shambles and the prison-pen,  
The noblest slave that ever God set free!”

He was Marshall of the District, he was Recorder of Deeds, he was the American minister to Port au Prince, he was, as the papers said at the time of his death, the most famous citizen of Washington.

The *Philadelphia Record* said at the time: “No other Washingtonian, white or black, has the world-wide reputation that he had. Indeed, when we think of it, it would be difficult to name any other man, white or black, in the whole country who would be as well known in every corner of the globe as is Frederick Douglass. Lincoln and Grant were such men, but I cannot think of any one now except President Cleveland and ex-President Harrison, who are, ex-officio, so to speak, our world-wide celebrities. Dr. Holmes was the last of our men of letters who had this world-wide fame, and no other class of men or women seems to have produced an international character in our time. Our great lawyers are perhaps known by lawyers the world over; our great physicians by physicians; clergymen by clergymen; journalists by journalists; business men by business men, but where is the man or woman who is known in all countries by people of all classes.” And yet, during his entire sojourn in this capital city of the nation, there wasn't a man in the White House big enough

and broad enough and brave enough and sufficiently free from his prejudices and from the fear of offending public sentiment to invite him to dine with him. It is, to say the least, highly improbable that a man of his eminence and of his wide acquaintance with public men in high official positions of any other race could have lived here as long as he did without being honored with such an invitation, but he was not; and it was simply because of his color, because of his race affiliation. That fact, I say, is a disgrace to the country, and it reflects seriously upon the men who have occupied the Executive Mansion. Why shouldn't a colored man dine there, if he is sufficiently eminent and is of the right stamp? Is he not an American citizen? Is he not a part of this great Republic? Why should he alone be shut out and all others admitted?

Thank God there has come at last into power a man who by this act has said, Whatever others may have done, so far as I am concerned, I shall know no man by the color of his skin. What I accord to white men I will accord to black men, I shall treat all citizens alike. That is the kind of President to have; that is the only kind of a man that ought ever to be entrusted with power in a democratic republic.

(2) I am glad that this episode has occurred, because it has brought out in clearer light than anything which has ever happened before the real feeling of the South toward the Negro. It doesn't make any difference what he becomes, what his achievements are, however pure his character, however cultivated his mind, he is always to be treated as an inferior, to be kept in his place. Every Negro in the South may become a Booker Washington, and yet the brand of inferiority is to be stamped upon him. He is still to be forced to live apart by himself, to ride in Jim Crow cars, to sit in dirty, filthy waiting rooms, to be denied all the common courtesies and civilities of life. That is what this incident teaches, and it makes it so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err. The Negro can never be anything but an inferior, that is what the South believes; that is what it has been teaching; that is what this howl that has been going up about the entertainment of Professor Washington means. And I am glad that this fact has at last come out in the way it has. Let us hope that it will have the effect of undeceiving hundreds and thousands of professed friends of the negro, who have become converts to the pernicious doctrine which has been steadily growing in favor in the North, that the South knows best how to deal with the Negro. That is true, assuming that the Negro is

hopelessly inferior, but if he is a man, and ought to have a man's chance in the race of life, is it true that the South knows best how to deal with him? Is it safe to leave him in the hands of the South, entertaining the low view of him that it does? Is that according to reason? Is it according to common sense? There is but one ground upon which the North can or ought to accede to any such proposition, and that is that in its judgment the Southern white man is more kindly disposed toward the Negro; the Southern white man has a larger sense of justice in dealing with the Negro; and that the Negro left to the South will have a better chance of growing up into the full measure of the stature of a man and of a citizen. There isn't a man in the North who has given the subject any serious thought, or who has kept himself posted as to what is actually going on in the South, who believes anything of the kind. The whole past record is against any such assumption.

It is not true that the Southern white man is more kindly disposed towards the Negro. He is toward a certain kind of Negro, the Negro who knows his place, who is content to be an underling, and who believes in political self-effacement. But the manly Negro, the Negro who respects himself, who knows what his rights are, and who stands up for them, he hates, he wants nothing to do with him, he would be glad to see every one of that description driven out of the South.

It is not true that the Southern white man has a larger sense of justice in dealing with the Negro. The very reverse of that is true. What rights has a Negro that a Southern white man feels bound to respect? What is it that he hasn't done to despoil the Negro of his rights? His attitude towards him has been one of constant aggression. The Southern white man has never accepted the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. He has ignored the Negro's citizenship, has robbed him of his vote at the polls, and has given him scarcely the ghost of a chance in the courts of law.

It is not true that the prospects of the Negro's growing up into the full measure of a man and of a citizen are more favorable, if he is left entirely in the hands of the South. It needs no argument to prove this. It is patent on the very face of it. What hope is there for the Negro, left to be dealt with by men who object to Booker T. Washington dining with the President of the United States, and who denounce the President's conduct in inviting him as an "outrage"?

Now these facts are well known all over the North. The North hasn't been asleep all these years. It has had its eyes and ears wide open; it knows perfectly well what is going on. It knows just how the Negro has been treated and how he is still being treated. And yet it has been largely won over to the let-alone policy, partly because it doesn't want to offend the South. It wants to bridge over the bloody chasm. It wants to bring about a spirit of fraternity between the Southern white man and the Northern white man, which is all very well; far be it for me to say a word against it; but is it right to sacrifice the Negro in so doing? When the Southern white men took up arms to destroy the Union, it was the negro who bared his bosom to the bullets of the enemy in order to preserve it. It is well for the North to remember that. And it has also taken this position partly because of indolence, because it has become weary in well doing, because it has grown tired of the struggle. It wants peace, but it seems to forget that permanent peace can never be won by yielding to evil. This so-called Negro question will not down, it will come up and continue to come up until it is settled, and settled right. The men of this generation in the North may adopt the let-alone policy and permit things to go on as the South dictates, but they are simply laying up trouble for their children and their children's children. As the poet has expressed it:

"They enslave their children's children  
Who make compromise with sin."

(3) I am glad of this episode because it will also have the effect of opening the eyes of Professor Washington himself, who has taken a rather rose-colored view of things in the South and of the Southern people. Now the scales will fall from his eyes and he will see things as they really are; he will see just what the Southern white men think of him in spite of all the praise which they have lavished upon him, and of the race with which he is identified. They value him simply because they believe that he accepts their view of the race problem, because they believe that he is laboring simply to make the negro a laborer, a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. After his address before the great missionary conference held at New Orleans, a Texas editor in speaking of him, said: "He is most assuredly a man raised up of God to do a great work among the negroes of the South. And as long as he holds to his present theory and practice of industrial education, he is certainly entitled to the support and co-operation of the Southern people. He is doing a work second to no man of this century.

And such is his consecration to his purpose and aim that, so far as we are able to judge, the money and attention bestowed upon him and his work by the people and press of the North have in no wise lifted him into the airs of conceit or unbecoming egotism. With all the prominence given to him and with his rare gifts of oratory, he is a man of commendable humility and stupendous common sense. Therefore the people of the South, regardless of race distinction, can well afford to extend all needed encouragement to Booker T. Washington in his laudable efforts to bring his people into higher attainments in the knowledge and practice of the mechanical arts and useful industry." That is to be the limit of the negro's aspiration, "the practice of the mechanical arts and useful industry." And as long as they believe that Professor Washington believes in thus limiting the aspirations and the activities of the race, and in political self-effacement, he will be tolerated. This man distinctly says so, "As long as he holds to his present theory and practice of industrial education, he is entitled to the support and co-operation of the South." If he dares to entertain any other theory or ventures to step out in any other direction, the South must withdraw all sympathy from him and relegate him to the class of undesirable negroes, negroes who think themselves as good as white men. Whatever may have been Mr. Washington's views in the past, he cannot fail now to see that the possibilities of the negro in the South, unless there is a very decided change in public sentiment, are not such as a free American citizen ought to be satisfied with.

In the (4) and last place I am glad of this episode because it has brought to view the fact that we still have some friends left. The North had become so apathetic, so indifferent to the Negro, that we began to feel that our friends were becoming fewer and fewer. Men who were once identified with the cause of freedom we found fellowshipping with the man who a few days ago, in referring to the incident at the White House, said: "The action of President Roosevelt in entertaining that nigger will necessitate our killing a thousand niggers in the South before they will learn their place again." But the splendid showing of the Northern press has come like a gleam of sunshine in the darkness. They have spoken out in a way to cheer our hearts. All honor to them. May they continue to speak in the same lofty strain. What we need in the editor's chair as well as in the pulpit are men, God-fearing men—men who love righteousness and hate

iniquity. And just in proportion as such men come to the front will public sentiment be moulded in the interest of justice and humanity.

Let us not be discouraged. God reigns and the right will ultimately triumph. The noble words of Norman Macleod may well close these remarks :

“Courage, brother! do not stumble,  
 Though the path is dark as night;  
 There’s a star to guide the humble;  
 Trust in God and do the right.

Let the road be long and dreary,  
 And its ending out of sight,  
 Foot it bravely, strong or weary,  
 Trust in God and do the right.

Perish policy and cunning,  
 Perish all that fears the light,  
 Whether losing, whether winning,  
 Trust in God and do the right.

Some will hate thee, some will love thee,  
 Some will flatter, some will slight;  
 Cease from men, and look above thee,  
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