

TWENTIETH CENTURY NEGRO LITERATURE

OR
A CYCLOPEDIA OF THOUGHT
ON THE
VITAL TOPICS RELATING
TO THE AMERICAN NEGRO

BY
ONE HUNDRED OF AMERICA'S
G R E A T E S T N E G R O E S

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PUBLISHED BY
J. L. NICHOLS & CO.

MANUFACTURING PUBLISHERS
ON THE EXCLUSIVE TERRITORY PLAN

TORONTO, CAN.

NAPERVILLE, ILL.

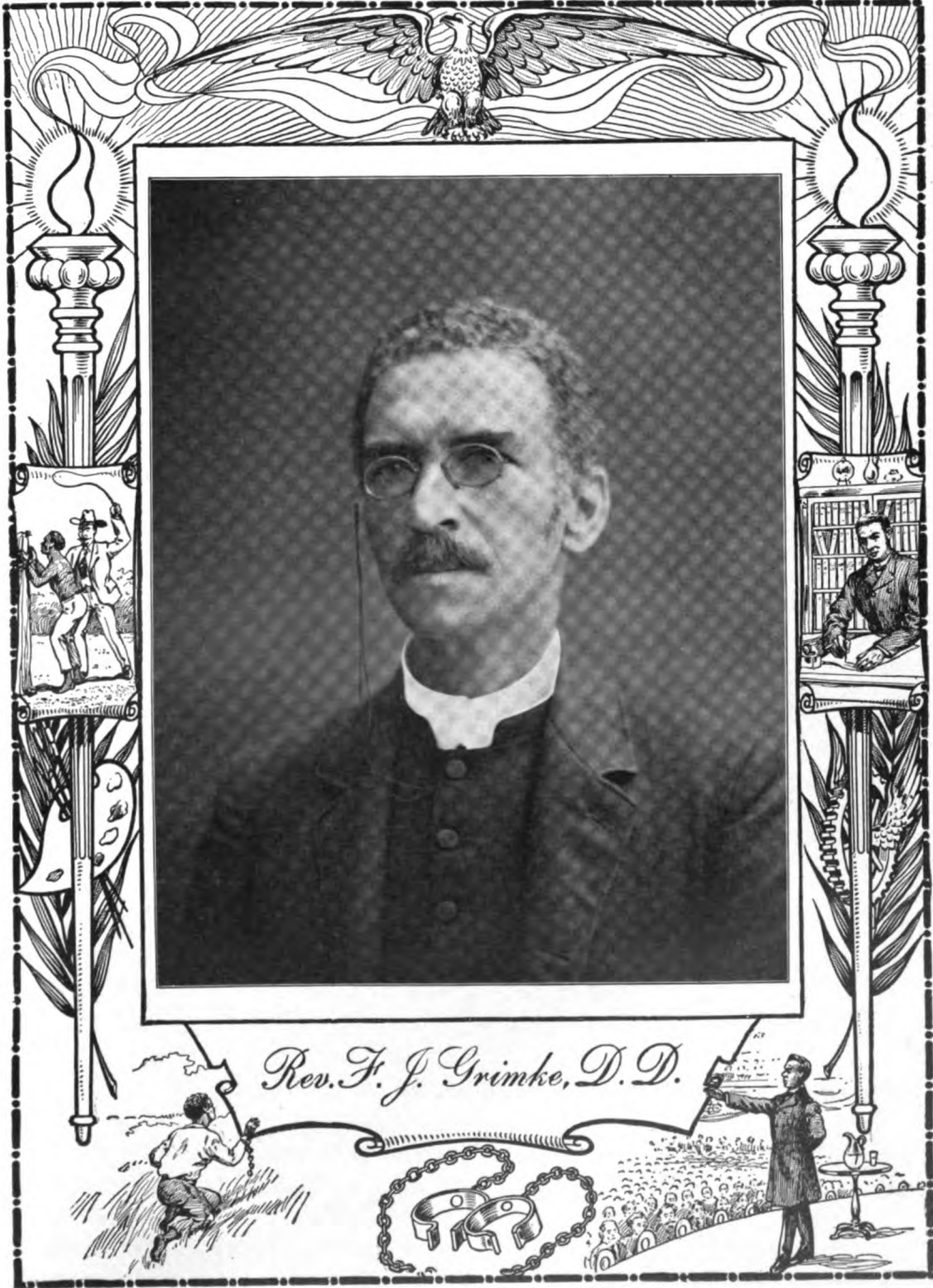
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Francis J. Grimke, clergyman, was born near Charleston, S. C., November 4, 185). Son of Henry and Nancy (Weston) Grimke; attended school in Charleston; entered Lincoln University, Chester County, Pennsylvania, in 1866, and graduated in 1870 (A. M., D. D.); graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1878. Ordained pastor of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church the same year. Remained until 1885. Took charge of Lama Street Presbyterian Church 1885-1889. Returned to Fifteenth Street Church, Washington, D. C., in 1889, where he is still. Has published articles in the New York Independent and New York Evangelist. Wrote monographs on "The Negro: His Rights and Wrongs; The Forces For and Against Him." In 1898, "The Lynching of Negroes in the South; Its Causes and Remedy;" "Some Lessons from the Assassination of President William McKinley," 1901; "The Roosevelt-Washington Episode; or, Race Prejudice," 1901. Address, 1526 L Street, Washington, D. C.

TOPIC XXX.

THE SIGNS OF A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE AMERICAN NEGRO.

BY REV. F. J. GRIMKE, D. D.

Extracts from his sermon on the race problem.

“Some of these days all the skies will be brighter,
Some of these days all the burdens be lighter,
Hearts will be happier, souls will be whiter,
Some of these days.

“Some of these days, in the deserts uprising,
Fountains shall flash while the joybells are ringing,
And the world, with its sweetest of birds, shall go singing,
Some of these days.

“Some of these days: Let us bear with our sorrow,
Faith in the future—its light we may borrow,
There will be joy in the golden to-morrow—
Some of these days.”

That is my faith; I am no pessimist on this Negro problem. Terrible as the facts are, cruel and bitter as is this race-prejudice, and insurmountable, almost, as are the obstacles which it sets up in our pathway, I see a light ahead, I am hopeful, I look forward to better times. And I want to tell you this morning what the ground of this hope is.

(2.) I am hopeful, because of the progress which the Negro is making in intelligence and in wealth. Think of what our condition was at the close of the war, and of what it is to-day, in these respects. That we are progressing, there can be no doubt; indeed, in view of all the circumstances, our progress has been marvelous.

Take the matter of wealth. Since freedom, hundreds and thousands of our people have become property owners in the South. Many of them are prosperous and successful farmers; thousands and hundreds of thousands of acres of land have come into their possession, hundreds and thousands of them in the cities own their own homes, and are engaged in small but lucrative business enterprises of one kind or another. They are now paying taxes on some three hundred million dollars' worth of

property. That is not a very large sum, I admit, considered as the aggregate wealth of a whole race, numbering some seven or eight millions; but whether much or little, it indicates progress, and very considerable progress, and that is the point to which I am directing attention. The acquisitive faculty in the Negro is being developed; his eyes are being opened more and more to the importance of getting wealth; and slowly, but surely, he is getting it.

Educationally, the same is true. Thirty years ago there were but few educational institutions among us, but few professional men—doctors, lawyers, ministers—ministers of intelligence—teachers; but few men and women of education. Now, there are thousands of well-equipped men and women in all the professions, and thousands upon thousands of men and women of education in every part of the country. Not only are there institutions founded especially for our benefit, crowded with students, but all the great institutions of the land are now open to us, and in all of them, with scarcely an exception, are to be found representatives of our race; and the number in such institutions is steadily increasing. The last report of the Commissioner of Education shows that in the common schools of the sixteen former slave States and the District of Columbia, there are enrolled 1,429,713 pupils, and that in these schools, some twenty-five thousand teachers are employed. It also shows that there are 178 schools for secondary and higher education, with an enrollment of over forty thousand pupils. There are, of course, thousands of our people who are still very ignorant, but that there is vastly more intelligence in the race now than at the close of the war, no one will pretend to deny. The colleges and universities, the high and normal schools, are turning out hundreds of graduates every year. The educational outlook for the race is certainly very encouraging.

In view of these two factors—the growing desire on the part of the Negro for material possessions, the fact that he is actually acquiring property, and his growing intelligence—I see signs of a brighter future for him. These are elements of power that will make themselves felt. You may deprive a poor and ignorant people of their rights, and succeed in keeping them deprived of them, but you can't hope to do that when these conditions are changed; and the point to which I am directing attention here, is that this change is taking place. All that has been done, and is being done to stimulate in the Negro this principle of acquisitiveness, and to increase his thirst for knowledge, is a harbinger

of a better day. Every dollar saved, or properly invested; every atom of brain power that is developed, is a John the Baptist in the wilderness, crying, Make straight the pathway of the Negro. In proportion as the race rises in intelligence and wealth, the valleys will be filled and the mountains will be leveled, that now stand in the way of his progress, in the way of the complete recognition of all of his rights. Ignatius Donnelly, in that remarkable book of his, "Doctor Huguet," which some of you, doubtless, have read, would seem to teach the opposite of this. He attempts to show that never mind what the intellectual attainments of the Negro may be—he may be a Doctor Huguet, learned with all the learning of the schools, and cultured with all the culture of the ages—still there is no chance for him, there is no hope of his being recognized. The story as told by him is, at first, quite staggering and terribly depressing. But when we remember that, according to the story, there was but one Doctor Huguet with a black skin, and that he was poor, and that all the rest of his race were poor and ignorant, light breaks in upon the darkness, the awful pall which it casts upon us, is at once lifted. How will it be when instead of one Doctor Huguet there are hundreds and thousands of them, scholarly men and women, cultivated men and women, men and women of wealth, of large resources? It will be very different. If the Negro was indifferent to education; if he was actually getting poorer, then we might lose heart; but, thank God, the very opposite is true. His face is in the right direction. He may not be pressing on as rapidly as he might towards the goal, as rapidly as some of us might wish to see him, but it is a matter for congratulation, that he is not retrograding, nor even standing still, but is moving on. Poor? Yes, but he isn't always going to be poor. Ignorant? Yes, but he isn't always going to be ignorant. The progress that he has already made in these directions shows clearly what the future is to be. Knowledge is power; wealth is power, and that power the Negro is getting. He is not always going to be a mere hewer of wood and a drawer of water; he is not always going to be crude, ignorant. American prejudice is strong, I know; it is full of infernal hate, I know, but in the long run it will be found to be no match for the power which comes from wealth and intelligence.

(3.) I am hopeful because I have faith in the ultimate triumph of right. You remember what Lowell says in his "Elegy on the Death of Dr. Channing:"

“ Truth needs no champions: in the infinite deep
 Of everlasting Soul her strength abides,
 From Nature’s heart her mighty pulses leap,
 Through Nature’s veins her strength, undying tides.

* * * * *

“ I watch the circle of the eternal years,
 And read forever in the storied page
 One lengthened roll of blood, and wrong, and tears—
 One onward step of Truth from age to age.

“ The poor are crushed; the tyrants link their chain;
 The poet sings through narrow dungeon-grates;
 Man’s hope lies quenched;—and, lo! with steadfast gain
 Freedom doth forge her mail of adverse fates.

“ Men slay the prophets; fagot, rack, and cross
 Make up the groaning records of the past;
 But Evil’s triumphs are her endless loss,
 And sovereign Beauty wins the soul at last.”

* * * * *

“ From off the starry mountain-peak of song,
 The spirit shows me, in the coming time,
 An earth unwithered by the foot of wrong,
 A race revering its own soul sublime.”

And in the “Ode to France,” from which I quoted on last Sabbath, the same glorious thought is expressed:—

“And surely never did thine altars glance
 With purer fires than now in France;
 While, in their bright white flashes,
 Wrong’s shadow, backward cast,
 Waves covering o’er the ashes
 Of the dead, blaspheming past,
 O’er the shapes of fallen giants,
 His own unburied brood,
 Whose dead hands clench defiance
 At the overpowering good:
 And down the happy future runs a flood
 Of prophesying light;
 It shows an Earth no longer stained with blood,
 Blossom and fruit where now we see the bud
 Of Brotherhood and Right.”

That is my faith. The wrong may triumph for the moment, but in its very triumph is its death-knell; it cannot always prevail. God has so constituted the moral universe, has so planted in the human heart the sense of right, that ultimately justice is sure to be done. "Ever the Right comes uppermost," is no mere poetic fancy, but one of God's great laws. In the light of that law, I am hopeful. I know that things cannot go on as they are going on now, that the outrageous manner in which we are at present treated cannot always continue. It is bound to end sooner or later.

(4.) I am hopeful, because I have faith in the power of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ to conquer all prejudices, to break down all walls of separation, and to weld together men of all races in one great brotherhood. It is a religion that teaches the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, a religion in which there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. And this religion is in this land. There are, according to the statistics of the churches for 1898, excluding Christian Scientists, Jews and Latter Day Saints, 135,667 ministers in the United States, 187,075 churches, and 26,100,884 communicants in these churches. This would seem to be a guarantee that every right belonging to the Negro would be secured to him; that in the struggle which he is making in this country for simple justice and fair play, for manhood recognition, for such treatment as his humanity and citizenship entitle him, back of him would be found these 135,667 ministers, 187,075 churches and 26,100,884 church members. But, alas, such is not the case. These professed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save the lost, who was the friend of publicans and sinners, whose gospel was a gospel of love, and who was all the time reaching down and seeking to befriend the lowly, those who were despised and who were being trampled upon by others;—the Christ of whom it is written, "And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth;" and who, in speaking of himself, said, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to comfort all that mourn; to give them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;"—these professed followers of this wonderfully glorious Christ,

instead of standing back of the poor Negro in the earnest, desperate struggle which he is making against this damnable race-prejudice, which curses him because he is down, branding him with vile epithets, calling him low, degraded, ignorant, besotted; and yet putting its heel upon his neck so as to prevent him from rising; despising him because he is down, and hating him when he manifests any disposition to throw off his ignorance and degradation and show himself a man;—in this struggle, I say, against this damnable race-prejudice, these professing Christians are often his worst enemies, his most malignant haters and traducers.

In saying that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is in this land, I do not therefore, base my assertion upon the fact, that there are 135,667 ministers in it, and 187,075 churches, and 26,100,884 professing Christians. No. The American Church as such is only an apology for a church. It is an apostate church, utterly unworthy of the name which it bears. Its spirit is a mean and cowardly and despicable spirit. "One shall chase a thousand," we are told in the good Book—and "two shall put ten thousand to flight." And yet with 135,667 preachers, and more than 2,000,000 church members in this land, this awful, black record of murder and lawlessness against a weak and defenseless race, still goes on. In the presence of this appalling fact, I can well understand the spirit which moved Theodore Parker—that pulpit Jupiter of his day—when in his great sermon on "The True Idea of a Christian Church," he said, "In the midst of all these wrongs and sins—the crimes of men, society and the state—amid popular ignorance, pauperism, crime and war, and slavery, too—is the church to say nothing, do nothing; nothing for the good of such as feel the wrong, nothing to save them who do the wrong? Men tell us so, in word and deed; that way alone is safe! If I thought so, I would never enter the church but once again, and then to bow my shoulders to their manliest work, to heave down its strong pillars, arch and dome, and roof, and wall, steeple and tower, though like Samson I buried myself under the ruins of that temple which profaned the worship of the God most high, of God most loved. I would do this in the name of men; in the name of Christ I would do it; yes, in the dear and blessed name of God." And I would do it, too.

But, in spite of the shallowness and emptiness and glaring hypocrisy of this thing which calls itself the church; this thing which is so timid, so cowardly that it dares not touch any sin that is unpopular, I still believe that Christianity is in this land. To-day it is like a little

grain of mustard seed, but it has entered the soil, has germinated, and is springing up. It is like the little lump of leaven which the woman hid in three measures of meal; but it has begun to work, and will go on working, diffusing itself, until the whole is leavened. God has promised to give to his Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; and in that promise this land is included. Christianity shall one day have sway even in Negro-hating America; the spirit which it inculcates, and which it is capable of producing, is sure, sooner or later, to prevail. I have, myself, here and there, seen its mighty transforming power. I have seen white men and women under its regenerating influence lose entirely the caste feeling, to whom the brother in black was as truly a brother as the brother in white. If Christianity were a mere world influence, I should have no such hope; but it is something more than a mere world influence; it is from above; back of it is the mighty power of God. The record is, "To as many as received him to them gave he power to become children of God, even to them that believed on his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." It can do what no mere human power can do. Jesus Christ is yet to reign in this land. I will not see it, you will not see it, but it is coming all the same. In the growth of Christianity, true, real, genuine Christianity in this land, I see the promise of better things for us as a race.