

SECOND MOHONK CONFERENCE

ON THE

NEGRO QUESTION

HELD AT

LAKE MOHONK, ULSTER COUNTY, NEW YORK,
JUNE 3, 4, 5, 1891.

REPORTED AND EDITED BY ISABEL C. BARROWS

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Preliminary Meeting.

THE SITUATION OF THE NEGRO, AND THE NEGRO'S VIEW OF THE SITUATION.

BY SAMUEL J. BARROWS, BOSTON.

Mr. President, and Ladies and Gentlemen:

There is one advantage I have in addressing the Mohonk Conference before it is formally organized; it is that I am not responsible for the Conference, and, what is more important, the Conference is not responsible for me. There is only one other time in which it is better to address a conference than the time before it formally exists: it is when it has formally adjourned. Then you are secure from all contradiction and refutation. I am willing, however, to accept this early opportunity that you have kindly given me, with all the perils of criticism it involves.

I went to the South the past spring simply and solely to study what is called the Negro Problem. Before the war the Negro was a slave, during it he was a "contraband," immediately after it he was a "freedman," and now he is a "problem." In the course of time we shall lay more accent on the "Negro," less on the "problem." Then the problem will disappear, and the improved Negro will remain.

To report upon the condition of the Negro, one must have some point of comparison. Those who see the Negro in the South for the first time may be impressed with what remains to be done for him. Those who saw him a quarter of a century ago may be impressed with what has been done by him and for him. My point of comparison in studying the condition of the Negro to-day is furnished by his condition immediately after the war. Living in Washington then, I saw and labored among the thousands of Negroes in and about that city, who had come from Virginia, North Carolina, and further South. I need not describe the state of destitution and ignorance which existed. It is familiar to many. Destitute as the Negro was, he did not come out of slavery without bringing something with him. It is twenty-eight years since he received his freedom. Up to that time he was merely a piece of property. He did not own anything, not even himself. Though there were laws against his education, his

Newman, Rev. Dr. A. W. Pitzer, Mr. Philip Garrett, Rev. Dr. William Hayes Ward, Mr. A. K. Smiley.

Treasurer, Mr. Augustus Taber, New York.

Publication Committee, Mr. H. O. Houghton, Boston, Mr. Frank Wood, Boston.

On motion of Dr. W. Hayes Ward, the rules of order adopted at the First Conference were adopted for the present one. The rules were as follows:—

1. This Conference shall be known as the Mohonk Conference on the Negro Question.

2. No speaker in debate shall occupy more than ten minutes, or speak more than once upon the same question without unanimous consent, and it shall be within the power of the Chair, and under his discretion at any time during the debate, to reduce the limit of time to five minutes for each speaker.

3. The time to be assigned to any paper or address shall not exceed twenty minutes, unless there be some very exceptional reason for asking a speaker to occupy more than that time.

4. The hours of the session shall be in the morning from 10 A.M. until 1 P.M., and in the evening from 7.45 P.M. until 10 P.M.

Hon. Edward L. Pierce, of Boston, moved that the time of the speakers should not be extended except on the motion of some member of the Executive Committee. Voted.

The topic for the morning reported by the Executive Committee was, "What has been done for the Negro in this Country?" The first speaker was Rev. A. W. Pitzer, D.D., Washington, D.C.

ADDRESS OF DR. A. W. PITZER.

Mr. President and Friends,—A year ago I came among you from the old Confederate South, a perfect stranger, not knowing what treatment I should receive, but your cordial Christian greeting won my heart, so I come back to-day not as a stranger. I come among friends: I come to meet beloved brethren. I believe I am treated and received with the same feeling which I entertain towards you. A few weeks ago I attended the meeting of the Southern General Assembly at Birmingham, Ala., and I took the liberty of telling about the Mohonk Conference. When I left there with my good friend, Brother Phillips, though we did not bring official greetings, we did bring cordial Christian greetings from the members of that Assembly. Not less than twenty said they were happy that we were coming to this Conference, and hoped we would do all we could to bring about co-operation between the best men and women of the North and South.

We may differ as to our methods of work, some working upon one line and some upon another; but we all agree here that by God's providence we intend to do all in our power for the elevation of the Negro as a man, as a citizen, and as a Christian, and we can give cordial greetings to any man who will join us in this work.

The topic assigned me is a large one. I am going to begin by going back the other side of history. Mr. Barrows last night told a story about the origin of races. I have tried to find out something on that subject. I must say that, after all my research, I do not know any more about it than I did; but this I do know, that God made of one blood all the nations of the earth. The evidence for this is so palpable and overwhelming that I think nothing is necessary but to state the proposition that the human family is of one blood. There are inferior races: there are dominant races. Why it is I do not know, save that it is the overruling providence of that personal God who orders all this according to the counsel of his own will. I think this is true so far as we know: the Negro has not been dominant. He has occupied a position of subjection. In the June number of the *Missionary Review* an account is given of the slave-trade as it exists in Africa to-day, and as it has existed there as far back as we know anything about it. It is most horrible. My whole soul thrilled as I read the account. In order to get ten per cent. of the prisoners of a village, the other ninety per cent. would be destroyed. Now let us remember that it was from that condition of slavery as the normal condition of the people that those slaves were brought to this land. We are not talking about whether the men who brought them here meant it for good or not, but in human history it is not the first time that what men meant for evil in the providence of God has been wrought into good. It was so in the case of Joseph and his brethren. They meant it for evil: God made it for good.

Now, was not the condition of the Negro when he came to this country a far better condition? Was not his American master, whether he lived in Massachusetts or South Carolina, a far better one? I will tell you what has been done for him here. He has been brought into contact with the best race of people in the world. The average American is generally willing to accept a statement of that kind. If there is a great race on the globe to-day, I suppose this Mohonk Conference would be willing to say of it, "Quorum magna pars fui." They were brought into contact with our civilization. They were elevated by it. A missionary once said that, if he could get an African Negro to sit on a three-legged stool and wear a hat, he would think that he had elevated him a thousand miles in civilization. They were brought here, and became a part of us. They were brought into contact with a dominant race. Perhaps it is not known to many of you here that in 1861 there were enrolled as communicants in churches in the South somewhere between one and two millions of Christian converts. While I have not the statistics to-day, I think the number of Negro Christians is in the region of two millions. Now I ask, Has there ever been on this globe such Christian work as that wrought anywhere? Well, you may say, "You Southern people did not do it." Well, you Northern people did not do it. The providence of God did it. You may say that these are right sorry men and women. I am inclined to think that they are as good as some of the Christians there were in Corinth. You remember what Paul said of them: "Let him that steals, steal no more." I say here that these redeemed persons,—redeemed from savagery, paganism, and brought into the Church of

Jesus Christ,—though many of them had black skins, they had, thank God, white hearts, and they are in glory now. I just wanted to say how in the wonderful workings of God's providence what was so dark and inscrutable has been made to work good. I hope nobody will say, "Are you in favor of slavery?" No more than Dr. Hayes. I did not like slavery. I disliked it so much that, in order to get away from it, I, as a young man, went out to Leavenworth, Kan., and began my ministry there. I am not here to make any apology for slavery or for harsh or cruel laws that were enacted concerning it. But I can see now, as I look over the past, how wonderful was the working of God.

Now I come to something that we did do for the Negro. We have had a great many grand men in this country from Washington down. As I look back in the past, of all the grand figures that tower there is none more impressive to my mind than the figure of that grand man, Abraham Lincoln. The South lost irreparably in the death of that grand man with the grand heart. Of all the great men of this country who came out to Kansas in those troublous times, there was none greater than Abraham Lincoln. I heard him speak, and I shall never forget his plea for righteousness; and, when that man signed his name to the proclamation that broke the shackles of the slave and made him a free man, he did an act of righteousness in the fear of God. I thank God that he did issue the proclamation. As a Southern man, coming from the South, if I had occupied Mr. Lincoln's place and God had given me grace, I would have signed the proclamation, too.

Well, what has been done for the Negro? He was brought from Africa to this country. He changed masters. He was benefited by the change. He was brought into contact with our civilization. He was confirmed and enrolled in our churches. He was made a citizen. The Republicans in this Conference may say, "We did that." Well, have all the credit that belongs to you. You made him a citizen. He will be nothing but a citizen. You are not going to get the American people to take the franchise from a man who has once had it. If we could have a moral, an educational, and a property qualification, we would be the better for it; but we are to have universal suffrage. That is not all. We have not only made him a citizen, but we have passed a civil rights bill for his benefit. We say to him: "You shall have all the legal rights that the white man has. You have the right to hold office. You may go to the Senate of the United States. You may be made Justice of the Supreme Court. There is nothing that we legally withhold from you." We have said to the Negro in this country, "Every door to usefulness and honor is wide open to you,—the door to the medical profession, to the ministerial profession, to the legal profession." We say to him: "Come up, brother, and make the very best of yourself that you can. Go just as high and just as far as you can go by the help of man and by the grace of God." God forbid that any man should wish to repress the brother in black. The man is not here, I think, in this assembly, who would do it.

Nor is that all that we have done. Pardon me if I mention something that we Southerners have done. The statement has been made,

I think, that ninety-five per cent. of the tax levied in the South for the support of public education comes out of white pockets and comes from white property, and yet the money goes to the equal benefit of all. After the war, we were impoverished and subjected; yet in our poverty and distress we have taxed ourselves to the extent of fifty millions of dollars.

One other thing: the noble Christian people of the North have sent some of your best people down in the South to organize schools, colleges, and seminaries, and you have poured out your wealth to sustain them. Dr. Strieby will tell us how many millions the American Missionary Association has given to the colored race.

Dr. STRIEBY.— Ten millions.

Dr. PITZER.— Do you think that twenty millions would cover it from the North?

President WOODWORTH.— Thirty-five millions are the figures given.

Dr. PITZER.— Now look over the past. Look whence the Negro was taken,— from sad, dark Africa. Look at him now. Can you tell me of any dominant, superior race in any period that has ever done as much or half as much for an inferior race as the American people have done for this? If there is, anywhere in history, I have never found it. But let us not say that we have done enough. We are not going to quit. There is a great work for us to do. This race needs our help and our counsel; it needs our support. We must not be weary in well-doing. I was chairman of the committee on colored evangelization in the recent meeting of the Southern General Assembly,— it is no mean assembly, if it is not as large as the Northern General Assembly.

Dr. STRIEBY.— It is more orthodox, anyway.

Dr. PITZER.— We have about 170,000 communicants, 70 presbyteries, and 11 synods. To my great joy, that General Assembly, by a unanimous vote, accepted a report that my committee offered, saying that we would enlarge the work for the colored man. We have created a separate executive committee, and put it on the same plane as our other executive committees. Then we have laid hands upon one of our young men, one of our ablest and wisest of them, and have appointed Brother Phillips secretary; and we have said: "Go out to the colored churches and to the colored presbyteries, and see them, and see what can be done to help them. We send you with God-speed." And Brother Phillips is here to speak for himself by and by.

In closing, I wish to say that I believe one of the best things that we can do for the colored man in this world is for us, as white brethren North and South, to come together in mutual love and confidence and confer one with the other as to the best methods of dealing with him.

Dr. STRIEBY.— I want to call attention to this illustration of the value of the last Mohonk Conference. If Brother Phillips had not been here and become fired up, the Southern General Assembly would not have taken up that topic.