

The Negro as He Is.

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To those who understands ~~them~~^{him}, the Negro is a source of continuous interest and amusement. Born and raised in the "Black Belt" of Southern Alabama, I grew up with them and they had no "company manners" with me, but lived natural lives, "in the open" as it were. One who has had less experience with that race can never fully understand the negro. It is one of the things one must grow into. The Negro is never his real self to one who has not had the experience to intuitively understand him. If a white begins to study and reason about a negro, that negro will know it, just as a dog knows a friend.

The limitations of that race are queer. While a few of them grasp the spirit of higher moral life, to the masses, to them as a race, the spirit of civilization and Christianity is a sealed book. It passes clear over their heads. I have known them at church revivals, "get religion" as they call it; that is, get into a state of hysterical exaltation that led them to cry, laugh, shout and perform unusual physical acts, and an hour or so later, on the way home, rob a hen-roost or a pig-stye. They were sincere when they "got religion" and as equally sincere later about the chicken or the pig. Each was a phase of Negro nature.

Near where I was raised was a negro church, the members of which were of the usual negro intelligence and standing. Quite a number of them were fairly good citizens, industrious and reasonably successful. The pastor of the church was a tall, black negro, about forty years of age, named Bager. He preached only once a month, that is, on one Saturday night, Sunday and Sunday night each month. The rest of the month they had no services. Parson Bager was indicted

by the Grand Jury for a moral irregularity with a sister of the flock; was tried, convicted and sentenced to a year in jail.

The following Sunday was the regular Church Day, but, of course, as Parson Bager was in jail he could not officiate. I had learned that the church would that day try Brother Bager for the same offense and I concluded to attend and hear it. They invited another negro preacher to fill the pulpit that day, and when he arose to do so, he flashed his eyes around and began with impressive slowness --

"Bredren, I has been conjuncted to come har to experminate "the Scripters, as yoor reglar paster, Brother Bager, is somewhat "indisposed today".

The negroes all understood what he meant though he did not say it.

The church was crowded as word had gone out that they were to try the pastor, and no one loves "a show" more than a negro. The preacher talked a while about "the sperit" and the "elestial city", but it soon became apparent that he was hastening on to get to the trial as soon as possible. When he concluded the sermon the congregation woke up, as it were, to a livelier life.

They were soon organized for the trial, the church members present sitting as a jury. A young lawyer had been called on to prepare the charge against Brother Bager, and so well had he absorbed the spirit of such a trial that when the charge was read Bager was not to be tried for what he had done, ^{but} for being "caught" in the act. Whether any negro of all that congregation saw the point of this I cannot determine. They all seemed to think the charge all right, and proceeded with the trial. All the evidence introduced in court on the trial of Bager was introduced in the church trial, and then

after some discussion the entire congregation proceeded to vote. Only a few old folks voted to ~~ac~~quit, presumably on the ground stated by one old gray-wooled patriarch, - "dat de flesh is weak and the spirit not always strong; dat the pitfalls afore us is 'thick and de Good Book expounds to us to fergib the errin'. If we 'is to fergib better begin now, fur if we don't we may die befo' "we gits anoder chance to fergib".

But it would not do; the vote was overwhelming for conviction. Then came up the question of what penalty should be applied. One moved that Bager be expelled from church and pulpit; another offered an amendment that he be suspended till the further order of the church, and several other modifications were proposed. This brought on a lively debate. Finally a sister moved as a substitute for all the motions that Bager be suspended as pastor for two weeks. This motion prevailed by an almost unanimous vote. The real point lay in the fact that the two weeks suspension would be over and Bager ^{be} in full fellowship as pastor before the next monthly meeting.

After Bager served his year in jail he went back to his pulpit cleansed like a washed garment, so far as one might judge from the reception given him.

A few years after the close of the Civil War, a spasm for educating their children swept over the negroes. One was tried in Dallas County for murder; eleven of the twelve jurymen were negroes. The case was very weak, there being scarcely any evidence against the defendant. To the surprise of everybody the jury brought in a verdict of guilty as charged, with the death penalty. Next day a white man got into conversation with one of the negro jurymen about the case.

White - "Bob, how could you convict Dick; there was really no evidence

"against him?"

Bob - "Yessir, dats so; de evidence was mighty slim."

White - "Then why did you sentence him to hang?"

Bob - "Well, sir, it was dis way. I has a fambly of children growin'

"up and dey haint ever seen a hanging and I couldn't jest let

"dem grow up in ignorance like dat".

And so it is in many ways made apparent that the great spirit of civilization is a sealed book to the negro. He grasps the forms of Church and State, of morals and civilization, while the essence of all of them passes him by. It is not his fault; it is his misfortune. This is not solely because of a lack of education; the whites administered institutions with reasonable skill and with a fine discernment of greater ethics while still densely unlettered. The ^{uneducated} ~~ignorant~~ whites felt stirring in them the formless forces of moral impulses long before they were able to formulate them into written rules. That was the voice of a higher nature struggling for expression. No ~~such~~ ^{not} can be said of the negro. He conforms to the forms of the white men, because he is imitative; he would drop those forms as soon as the whites stopped using them, and for a reason he would not say, because the form carries nothing of the essence, but simply "dey don't do dat "any mo'."

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