

Africo-American Presbyterian

"AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE."—John viii. 32.

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VOL. LII. CHARLOTTE, N. C., THURSDAY, JULY 16, 1931. NO. 28.

WHAT THE NEGRO THINKS

By Rev. Walter L. Lingo, D. D., LL. D.,
in The Christian Observer

This is the title of a book which was recently published by Principal Robert E. Moton of Tuskegee Institute, the successor of Booker T. Washington. Principal Moton is one of the most distinguished and most thoughtful Negroes in this country, and is pre-eminently qualified to write on the subject of what the Negro thinks. It is not my purpose to write a review or criticism of the book, but in passing I may say that it is a book that deserves the serious consideration of all thoughtful men and women. It is my purpose to take the title of the book as the subject of this article and jot down some reflections which have come to me as I read the book and as I have tried to think my way through the many problems which it presents.

My observation has been that when a writer begins to discuss this question in an open and frank way somebody at once begins to cry that he is advocating the inter-marriage of the two races. A year or two ago in writing an article I raised the question as to whether Jesus would draw the color line in His Church if He were here on earth. I did not even undertake to answer this question, but put it down that my readers and I might face it squarely. A brother minister and missionary in China promptly wrote me up, or down, as advocating inter-marriage. I suppose that the absurdity of his position never occurred to him. He attends church and sits at the same communion table with the Chinese. He does not draw any color line in the Church in China. He no doubt interchanges social visits with them and sits down at their tables and they at his, and yet I do not suppose that anybody ever thought of his advocating the inter-marriage of Americans and Chinese. I mention this subject in order that I may say at the beginning that I am opposed to the inter-marriage of the races.

It is not necessary to marry people just because one is trying to think his way through a maze of problems in order to discover his Christian duty towards a whole race of people.

What do Negroes think? It has never dawned upon some perfectly good people that they think at all. There are some people who still think of the whole Negro race in terms of the illiterate Negro laborer on the farm or the cook in the kitchen, or the old time Negro mammy. They have not realized that there are hundreds and thousands of intelligent young Negroes graduating from high grade colleges and universities every year. Even illiterate Negroes do a great deal of thinking, but these college and university graduates do a great deal more.

We Southern people have always boasted that we know the Negro. We never have known what the Negroes were thinking down in their inmost souls. We know little or nothing of what these thousands of educated Negroes are thinking. Worse than that, we have no way of finding out. They do not confide in us. Principal Moton devotes a whole chapter in his book to the subject: "I Know the Negro." He takes the position that those who boast the least about the real inward thoughts of the Negro. He goes even further and says that the Negro knows the white people a great deal better than the white man knows the Negro.

Here is a quotation from the book worthy of our consideration: "Any one who would un-

derstand the Negro of today must take account of the continuous progress of the race, most rapid since the emancipation and accelerating with each generation. Of the nature and extent of this progress the overwhelming majority of white people in America are, practically speaking, entirely ignorant—only a few people outside the race know actually what is going on within the race, and indeed only a relatively small number within the race know the solid facts of progress."

What does the intelligent, educated Negro think of the many discriminations that are practiced against his race? If you will go to the Negro section of any city, town or village, you will observe it has been neglected by the city authorities. There are few, if any, well-paved streets or sidewalks. Many of the modern conveniences and comforts are conspicuous by their absence. In many states the laws require that the railroads have separate coaches for the whites and Negroes. It does not take close observation to notice that the coaches and accommodations for Negroes are usually inferior to those provided for the white people. If a Negro travels at night it is almost impossible for him to get a Pullman or even a place to lie down. When a Negro who travels wishes to spend a night in a town or city it is often impossible for him to find decent accommodations. Even in North Carolina the best hotels are closed to him. When a Negro sends his children to school he discovers that the buildings are as a rule inferior to those for the white children. An educated Negro teacher receives much less salary than a white teacher with the same education. It is often difficult for a Negro to receive justice in the courts. By various processes he has been deprived of his constitutional right to vote. When it comes to the house of God, the Negro may attend a white church if he will take a seat in the gallery especially provided for him. When a church court meets the white ministers and elders are handsomely entertained. The Negro receives entertainment that is much inferior. These are a few of the discriminations that may be noted. Many more of a similar nature might be cited.

What does the intelligent, educated Negro think of these discriminations? What does the illiterate Negro, who is not supposed to have any thoughts, think of them? They think a plenty, if we may be allowed to use a current phrase.

Principal Moton's book gives us some very clear intimations as to what they think. This is a question of first-rate importance to the Church. Here are ten to twelve millions of people living in our very midst. We want them to be Christians. Many of them are devout Christians. We want the thoughtful, educated Negroes to remain true and loyal to Christianity. If we are really in earnest about this we will have to treat them in a Christian way. These discriminations are driving the iron into the souls of thoughtful Negroes. If our way of acting is Christian they do not want to be Christians. Many educated Negroes have already grown lukewarm toward Christianity.

One day I asked a friend of mine, a minister in the Presbyterian Church, if he really knew what his Christian duty toward the Negro is. He was doubtful. Then I asked if he knew it would he be willing to do it. He replied that he was

not boasting. We do well to face these two questions.

But let us come a little closer home. The Southern Presbyterian Church has fewer Negro members today than it had in 1860. Why? Largely because we have never troubled ourselves to find out what the Negro thinks. For example, our General Assembly in 1865 urged our colored members to continue their membership in the white churches and to continue to attend the white churches. Of course, they were to sit in the gallery. But if they felt they must have their own churches, then the Assembly proposed that they should have white pastors and white elders until they could raise up an intelligent ministry and eldership of their own. That all sounds eminently sensible, but it did not take into consideration Negro psychology at that moment. That Assembly evidently did not stop to inquire what the Negro was thinking. They had just been given their freedom and the right of franchise. Many of them sat in the legislative halls in those terrible days of reconstruction. With their new freedom they were in no frame of mind to submit themselves to the government of white pastors and elders. After that, our Church, over a period of many years, tried many other experiments with the Negro churches, but never seeming to take into consideration what the Negroes themselves thought about it. In fact it was difficult to discover what they really did think. Finally in 1916 we set our Negro churches off into a separate Synod and called it "The Africo-American Synod." The very name was unacceptable. The next year the Negroes themselves petitioned that the name might be changed to "Snedecor Memorial Synod." It was all so tactfully done that many of us did not even suspect one of the underlying reasons.

At the present time the four Presbyteries of the Snedecor Memorial Synod send four Negro ministers and four ruling elders to the General Assembly each year. I do not think that it would take very close scrutiny to observe that the entertainment provided for them is very inferior to that provided for the white commissioners. Nor would it take a keen observer to discover that they are not active members of the Assembly. For fifteen years they have sat there as silent observers. When the question of Church union comes up some brother invariably talks about the Negro question in a way that wounds the sensibilities of these Negro commissioners. Within the past few years one of these Negro commissioners returned from our General Assembly, resigned the pastorate, and left the Presbyterian Church. I saw a letter from his pen in which he poured out his soul, and said that he could not remain in a Church where he was treated as if he were less than a man. If we will think of it we will discover that our whole attitude toward our Negro commissioners is paternal rather than fraternal. If we want any considerable number of self-respecting, educated Negroes to come into our Church or remain in it we will have to change our whole attitude towards them. It is high time for us to study seriously two or three such central questions as these: What does the Negro think? What is our Christian duty towards the Negro? What would be the attitude of Jesus if He were here again in the flesh?

We must not be misled by the claim that the source of all wisdom is in the government.—President Hoover.

Colleges in this country teach everything but style.—Frank Crownshield.

ONLY THE TRAIL BLAZERS IN BUSINESS SUCCEED

By Dr. Carter G. Woodson

A few days ago a friend of mine lamented the fact that after investing his life's earnings in the drug business and making every effort to stimulate the enterprise, he has failed. I took occasion, thereupon, to remind him that men have grown rich, as a rule, not by doing what thousands of others are doing, but by undertaking something new. If instead of going into the retail dispensing of drugs, he had conceived and carried out the idea of the chain-drug store, he would have become an independently rich man.

There is always a chance to do this because the large majority of people do not think and, therefore, leave the field wide open for those who have something new with which to please the public. Negroes even found this possible during the days of slavery when the race supposedly had no chance at all.

About a hundred years ago Thomas Day, a North Carolina Negro, realized that the rough furniture of the people in his community did not meet the requirements of those of modern taste. He, therefore, worked out a style of ornate and beautiful furniture which attracted the attention of the most aristocratic people of the State and built up for himself a most successful business. Persons in that State are still talking about the Day furniture, and not long ago it became the subject of a magazine article. If North Carolina would turn out more Negroes of this type today, instead of the rather large number who are going to teach and preach, some of its present economic problems might thereby be solved.

About a century ago another Negro showed himself to be equally as ingenious. This was Henry Boyd. After buying himself in Kentucky, he went to Cincinnati to start life as a free man. There he encountered so much prejudice against Negro labor, that he could not find employment at his trade of cabinet-making. A new thought came to him, however, and in this way he solved his own problem.

Boyd conceived the idea that people had been sleeping long enough on straw ticks and wooden slats, and he invented the corded bed, the most comfortable bed prior to the use of springs in beds. Boyd's corded bed became popular throughout the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, and he built up a profitable trade which required the employment of twenty-five white and black artisans. Other enterprising Negro business men like Boyd gave the Negro element of Cincinnati more of an aspect of progress before the Civil War than it has today. Has the Negro less chance today than he had a century ago?

For about thirty years I knew an old Negro lady at Gordonsville, Va., who gave the world something new in frying chicken. She discovered the art of doing this thing in the way that others could not, and she made a good living selling her exceptionally prepared chicken and fried puffs at the windows of the cars when the trains stopped at the station. I have seen well-to-do men and women of both races leave the Pullman cars with its modern diner attached and go out and supply themselves and their friends with this old lady's tastefully made up lunches.

Another woman of color living in Columbia, Missouri, recently gave the world another

new idea. She had learned cooking, especially baking, but saw no exceptional opportunity in the usual application of the trade. After studying her situation and the environment in which she had to live, she hit upon the scheme of popularizing her savorous sweet potato biscuits, beaten whiter than all others by an invention of her own; and the people of both races made a well beaten path to her home to enjoy these delicious biscuits. In this way she has made herself and her relatives independent.

This is the way fortunes are made, but Negroes, who are conscientiously doing their best to rise in the economic sphere, do not follow the noble examples of those who had less opportunity than we have today. We spend much time in slavish imitation, but our white friends strike out along new lines. Almost all of the large fortunes in America have been made in this way.

John D. Rockefeller did not set out in life to imitate Vanderbilt. Rockefeller saw his opportunity in developing the oil industry. Schwab had better sense than to imitate Rockefeller, for that task was already well done, and he consolidated the steel interests. Henry Ford knew better than to take up what Schwab had exploited, for there appeared a still larger possibility for industrial achievement in giving the world the facility of cheap transportation in the low-priced car.

Radical Negroes, however, object to holding up to the youth such examples as these, for only a few of such a large number can thus succeed. The radicals say that these men represent the capitalistic class which must be overthrown before the ills of society can be cured. What the Negro needs, they say, is not capitalism but socialism or communism. In other words you can revolutionize the social and economic order so as to place all people alike on the same level and at the same time miraculously retain the initiative and invention which have developed the wealth of the country.

It would be a most happy situation to be in such an ideal environment, and no sane man would oppose the coming of such a millennium; but history shows that such a golden age can never be reached by the imperfect human beings with whom we have to work.

What these radicals say does not amount to any more than the usual clamor in the past for revolution. Their ideas have been tried out in the cycles of government. The despotic kings claiming the rule by divine right were overthrown by the leaders of an aristocracy, who claimed that they represented the best in the State; and when the aristocracy degenerated into an oligarchy, which exploited and oppressed the people, the masses rose up against them and established democracy, the government of the people. Democracy, however, like anything else, has its imperfections, and in it develops the usual element of decay, for a government of all of the people, by all the people, and for all the people is an impossibility.

France, therefore, did not long remain radically democratic when it was passing through these very cycles of government during the French Revolution. Napoleon availed himself of the opportunity to establish there a greater despotism than it had ever had under kings and queens. Russia is violently democratic today, but persons are seeing there new evidences of another tendency.

The inevitable rise of certain men to power is due to the weakness of mankind. All men are not equal. In every group you will find a superman, and

in the long run he will dominate his weaker associates. You can not make some men free because immediately they will sell their freedom as the Negroes have done to the Republican machine. You can not equally apportion the wealth of the country among its citizens and expect each one to keep his share, and you can not set a limit for the amount of wealth each member of society shall accumulate and expect men of the ability to develop and promote such interests to show the same enterprise which they have under individual control.

The idea that all men are created free and equal is all nonsense. We know that all men are subject to some restriction; and if all men were equal, this world would be so monotonous that most of us would commit suicide for a change. Races are very much alike, but individuals in races differ. What the Negroes need to do is to produce their share of exceptional individuals that these may help those far down.

The problems of the Negro may not be solved so easily by revolution as you may think. In the first place, property values would be shattered and we would have to fall back largely on natural resources for the development of which there might not be an immediate demand. In the free-for-all battle of life, following such an upheaval, the Negroes would have as good a chance as others; but if the Negroes did not produce their share of super-men who, according to the cycle of revolutions, finally get control, the race would come to be regarded as inferior to others and would have an inferior status.

In the long run every race gets what it deserves. People can not expect to solve all of their problems at once, but if they, too, continue to struggle against obstacles, they will eventually find some way to surmount them. If the Negroes permit foreigners to impoverish them by establishing and controlling businesses which Negroes support, such Negroes ought to starve. If Negroes have no influence in politics because they misuse their political power through politicians and bosses, they deserve to be eliminated from the personnel of the government. If they permit themselves to be lynched without organizing and working to overthrow such a reign of terror, they deserve such a fate. Every race gets what it deserves.

IMPORTANT

Dr. J. A. Savage, of Franklin, N. C., President of Albion Academy, where the Catawba School of Methods meets in August, has notified us that he will cut the board bill this year from \$4.00 to \$3.50. He believes the scarcity of funds warrants this. He also hopes this will stimulate a large attendance.

Dr. Savage made this suggestion of his own accord and we thank him for his fine cooperation.

We are going to join in with the above suggestion by reducing the registration fee from \$2.00 to \$1.50. This will be a saving of \$1.00 on the expense of the delegate.

There are some who are going to think the times are too hard to attend the Convention this year. That's in your mind. Pull yourself together and come. You'll feel better. Not only come yourself but bring some one with you.

H. C. MILLER, President.
F. C. SHIRLEY, Dean.
A. B. MCCOY, Director.

A good republic is better than a bad monarchy and a good monarchy is better than a bad republic.—Adolf Hitler.