

ARTICLE IV.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AS AFFECTED BY
RACE.

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THE United States is the great meeting place of races. The material riches of our territory have invited the needy and the ambitious. The rapid improvement in means of communication has made our borders so accessible that a generation has been sufficient for greater migrations than were possible in a century of earlier time. The political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence has been no unimportant factor conspiring with these material forces to make us in one respect like heaven:—we have gathered well-nigh every kindred, tribe, and tongue. The problem of the relation of the races is upon us. Our solution will dominate history for coming centuries. The attitude of the Christian church to the problem must profoundly influence the answer.

With a single exception, Christian fellowship among us gives little heed to the lines that separate these different races. The many churches made up of a single nationality or race, as German, Welsh, or Swede, are segregated by the practical influence of language, rather than by the sentiment of race. Whenever such churches attempt to hold the second and third generations to services in what has become to them a foreign tongue the attempt is at best slow suicide. The Christian fellowship of the young people reaches out for the sympathy of churches that worship in the English language, and this desire is seldom repelled by English-speaking churches.

So there are churches which at first glance might seem

to be drawn together by the tie of nationality, whose bond on close inspection will be found to be doctrinal rather than racial. These churches welcome to their membership those who agree with their views of truth, without asking in what country they learned so to view the truth.

A similar remark applies to churches whose membership has been consciously or unconsciously sorted by education, or tastes, or habits of thought, or methods of Christian work. The liberty to join the church where one can receive the best spiritual impulse, and can work most freely and efficiently, tends to bring together in each church of a large town those whose similarity of manner and thought promises the largest mutual helpfulness in the Christian life.

The danger of using this liberty so far as to turn the church of Christ into a social club is, however, generally realized by thoughtful, earnest Christians. In country places and small villages, a healthy church life is not possible, unless "all classes and conditions of men" can find fellowship in one church. The recent achievements of "college settlements" in tenement house city quarters emphasize on the positive side the same truth uttered negatively a generation ago by Dr. Leonard Bacon when he protested against the "stratification of churches."

In spite of satirists finding plenty of instances of social exclusiveness marring our church life, the principle prevails among us that the church should give the help of its spiritual fellowship to whoever sincerely desires it. The church is to preach the gospel, not to any one set, but to all mankind, and especially to the poor. In whatever man it finds Christian faith, showing itself in Christian life, it is to recognize a brother. It is to receive even him that is weak in the faith, if satisfied that he has faith at all.

The only serious exception to the prevalence of this principle in the United States is found in the relation of white Christians to negro Christians. Both in the South and in the

North, nearly all the negro Christians are in churches by themselves. The white churches are few that have any negro members. Even in Ohio, in a Congregational church, the application of a candidate for admission who was partly negro, has been known to occasion heated debate before the decision was reached to receive him whom Christ had received.

It should be remarked, in passing, that most Congregational churches in the United States would receive a negro candidate without any regard to his race. The same is true of probably the great majority of churches of every name in the North. It is only in the former slave-holding States of the Union, and in other localities where some shadow still falls from the influence of American slavery, that negro blood is a bar to church, or school, or hotel privileges. The great world knows nothing of this standard of discrimination. Europe has it not, nor the South American Republics, nor Mexico, nor the West Indies, but only a little corner of the world embracing a part of the United States.

To present in its breadth the Southern view, here is a quotation from a man who may be called representative, though exceptionally favorable to the advancement of the negroes. Judge A. A. Gundy, of Louisiana, at the Southern Teachers' Association at Atlanta, Ga., in July, 1892, made a powerful plea for the better and higher education of the negroes. This he published soon after, with some revision, in the *American Journal of Politics*. In the midst of appeals to the highest Christian motives, and assertions that no one can foretell how rapidly and how far a negro may advance, we find such emphatic sentences as these:—

“There is a public sentiment which demands that the races be kept absolutely distinct, and forbids the least approach to equal association. . . . Say what you will, this public opinion is founded in the deepest philosophy. The races were made distinct by the Creator and it would be impiety to efface the distinction. The one way to keep the races in the South

distinct is to provide separate schools, separate churches, separate social walks, separate customs, and separate coaches, and he who censures these provisions is a traitor to nature, and a rebel against divine wisdom."¹

The practical application of this principle has illustrations at hand everywhere in the South. The former slaveholding States have public schools with two sets of districts covering their territory, but prohibit any child procuring an education in a school of the other race, even though the nearest school of his own race be ten miles or more distant. Eight of these States forbid, under penalty, riding in a railway car or apartment assigned to the other race.² Southern white academies, colleges, and professional schools are hermetically sealed, by a white heat of sentiment, against pupils that show any trace of negro blood. At the same time some of these colleges boast of having educated Indians.³

State Sunday-school conventions in the South, while interdenominational, are purely white gatherings, although in several of the States there is more negro than white material on which the Sunday-school should naturally operate. Young Men's Christian Associations in the South are, as a rule, for the whites, and scarcely one of them will allow any negro to make any use of its reading-room. Christian Endeavor Societies growing up in local churches naturally follow the same lines of separation that prevail in churches. It may indicate no lack of fellowship when a local Christian Endeavor Society is made up of a single race; but is not Christian fellowship plainly sinned against when the committee in charge of arrangements for a state convention of Christian Endeavor So-

¹ American Journal of Politics, September, 1892, p. 306.

² These are Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. The Carolinas and Virginia have thus far refused to pass similar laws.

³ See this boast, in announcements of Randolph and Roanoke College, in advertising pages of early numbers of the Forum.

cieties, refuses to permit the attendance of negro delegates?¹

These are the consistent results of Judge Gundy's doctrine. The separate church is more than a co-ordinate part of the scheme. It is the central point, holding the rest as the hub holds the spokes. Only from a region where the white churches have no cordial welcome for negro members, can we believe there could ever come such a horrible story as lies before me in a slip from a recent Memphis paper. It relates the burial of a negro woman in a white cemetery at Germantown, Tenn., by white friends who esteemed her. But there were some in that community who regarded separate burial places as essential to the right relation of the races. They dug up the body, and scattered the bones and flesh about the mouth of the desecrated grave.

The separate church means more than permission for those who are like minded to associate themselves in church fellowship. Who dare gainsay that liberty to his fellow-disciples? When negro church-members in Oberlin preferred to form a church by themselves, and to make it Baptist or Methodist, instead of Congregational, who could forbid them? In the city of Cleveland, where teachers of negro blood are freely appointed to public school work, and negro members are freely received in all churches, and no race discrimination guards the door of reading-room, or lecture hall, who can say that it has been unchristian for enough of the negroes who were Congregationalists to come together and form a church

¹ See correspondence in full in Berea College Reporter, Berea, Ky., June, 1892. The following quotation gives the core of the final letter from the secretary: "Whether rightly or wrongly, the prevalent opinion of the South decides against social intercourse on a basis of equality between white and black. The State Convention of the Y. P. S. C. E. is distinctly a social gathering, and the only business it transacts is the election of officers. Were it known that colored delegates were received at its gatherings, it could not fail to injure the cause of the South. Last year, it is true, a colored delegate was received, but Louisville is a large city, and more cosmopolitan than our smaller Kentucky towns, and there were probably not a dozen in the convention who were aware that a colored brother sat among its members."

that has wrought the excellent Christian work of the Mt. Zion Congregational Church? The principle of Christian liberty may command us to bid God-speed to our brethren in organizing themselves as they are led of the Spirit. It is a very different thing to bar any church door against a brother in Christ, with either a positive rule of race discrimination, or positive advice against crossing a race line unknown to the gospel, or a silent pressure of discriminating treatment at the communion table.

The negro churches of the South may have arisen in a large measure from the choice of their members. But the presence of negro pupils in all the important schools of the North shows that something else than spontaneous choice keeps them away from Southern white schools. There are here and there negro members lingering in Southern white churches. Generally they are conspicuously absent. The circumstance is suggestive of a similar inference to that drawn by the fox when he could find no tracks of small animals leading away from the lion's den. Has some propulsive force from the white side emptied the Southern churches of negro members? A sufficient force may be discerned in the objection made in the South to anything more than the most distant fellowship between even ministers of the two races. In the summer of 1893 the daily papers of Atlanta, Ga., were enriched with numerous letters criticising two white ministers because they had attended an ecclesiastical organization with negro ministers of the same denomination, participated in a literary or theological programme, and even participated in a general luncheon between the other exercises. Another complaint urged in this correspondence was that one of these white ministers had actually exchanged pulpits with another white minister who was pastor of a negro church.¹

¹ The following quotations from the salutatory of the *Advocate*, a journal whose first issue is dated Atlanta, Ga., April 14, 1894, states distinctly the Southern attitude, and shows how central is this matter of Christian fellowship:

Such influence of race on Christian fellowship in the South is no unimportant matter. It is not transient, but tends to crystallize into a persistent element in our type of civilization. Its effects are not limited to ecclesiastical affairs, but are interwoven with the whole life of the South. The alarming increase of lynch law in dealing with negroes, and the open demand for a special criminal code for the negroes,¹ is of the same piece with the demand for enforced separation of races in church, and school, and railway train. These all rest on a theory that the negro race is less than human.² They are varied applications of Judge Taney's dictum that "negroes have no rights that white men are bound to respect."

The influence of race on Christian fellowship in the South is not a local question. Northern Christians are spending not less than a million dollars annually of missionary funds on churches and Christian schools in the South. They cannot avoid the responsibility of encouraging whatever custom or spirit they tolerate in the institutions they sustain. Times of

"It will stand for Congregationalism from a Southern standpoint.

"While it will recognize the rights of all citizens, it will oppose and expose all efforts looking to the amalgamation of the races in the line of church life and work, as well as that of social equality, believing that the one naturally leads up to the other, and thereby works a great injury to the cause of Christ and the progress of his kingdom.

"This will be a white man's paper.

"Believing that it has a mission, it goes forth to speak the truth and blaze the way for righteousness, for freedom and humanity."

¹ See C. H. Smith, in the *Forum*, for October, 1893. Also *Anthropology for the People: A Refutation of the Theory of the Adamic Origin of All Races*. By Caucasian. Richmond, Va., 1891. "In ecclesiastical legislation, the two races are almost entirely separated. A similar separation should be provided in state, so as to give the negro different laws, different institutions, and different legislative, executive, and judicial officers" (p. 306).

² This is the whole argument of "*Anthropology for the People*," referred to above. The writer defends slavery and caste, on the ground that the lower races have no spirits, and that they are without sin and need no Saviour (p. 215); that education makes them insolent (p. 310); and that labor and money spent for their elevation might as well be expended "in the training of monkeys" (p. 320); and so on, with the emphasis of more than three hundred pages of detail and reiteration.

ignorance may rightly be winked at only when processes of education are working the removal of the ignorance. Issues should never be raised unnecessarily with those we are seeking to lead into a larger and richer Christian life. When those for whom we labor raise the issue of human and Christian brotherhood we must meet it. If white pupils threaten to leave on the admission of a negro pupil, or negroes make the same threat on the admission of a white pupil; if churches conspicuously avoid fellowshipping other churches assisted from the same treasury, but of another race, the missionary administration supporting these schools and churches cannot avoid exerting an influence and giving a testimony on the question of Christian fellowship as affected by race.

Missionary societies laboring in India find the caste system of that country the chief obstacle to delay the progress of Christianity there. Those most closely in touch with foreign missions are most alert against the possible growth of any similar hindrance to the gospel at home. In the United States no race or class feeling must be suffered to develop forms or acquire strength that will nullify the gospel.

The open agreement of the Congregational Home Missionary Society and the American Missionary Association, that "neither Society will establish in any locality a church that will not admit to membership colored persons suitably qualified, nor will it sustain any church that will not fellowshipping the neighboring Congregational churches, or that will not unite with the local Congregational conference or association," is every way to be commended. The endorsement of this policy by every National Council that has in any way touched the question shows the strength of conviction in the Congregational churches that the gospel is for the whole world; that the rich and poor meet together in the kingdom of Christ; that in him there is neither bond nor free, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, but God hath made of one blood all nations and we may call no man common nor unclean.