

THE EQUALITY OF THE RACES.

A Sermon Preached recently in St. Thomas' Protestant Episcopal Church, by the Rev. William J. Alston.

The Rev. William J. Alston, the Rector of St. Thomas' Protestant Episcopal Church (colored), is a man of thorough culture and considerable pulpit eloquence. A short time since he delivered an able sermon on "The Equality of the Races," taking for his text the following passage.

"God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Acts x. 28.

Within the past two weeks our attention was attracted by the following words on a bulletin board on Chestnut street:—"Negroes in the City—Important Decision of the Supreme Court. The Rights of Public Carriers—The Impious Doctrine of Social Equality Condemned. Opinion of Judge Agnew—The Judgment of the Lower Courts Reversed." The case in point was that of a Christian lady, a widow, by name Mrs. Miles—a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church above-mentioned, and a zealous and ardent supporter of the cause of her Saviour may be inferred from the fact that for some years she labored as a missionary to the heathen on the coast of Africa, and that she is now engaged in teaching the freedmen of the South, under the auspices of the Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania. She having occasion to travel on the West Chester Railroad line, was by a conductor of the train, which was directed to the station in the city, refused to be seated in one of the lower cars and decided in her favor. Thence on a writ of error it was carried to the Supreme Court of this State, and there the decision was reversed, as reported in the Bulletin. The case was decided in accordance with the law of the State on matters of this kind, as expanded by high judicial authority, previous to the Legislative enactment of March, 1867, viz.:—"Declaring it an offense for any person to make any distinction between passengers on account of race or color." In which the ground taken by the Court, and endorsed by the Judge, is—(a). That the carrier has a right to control his own property for the protection of his interests and the proper performance of his duty. (b). Upon the ground of public interest, viz.:—"That there should be a separation of passengers according to color." (c). N. B. The Judge's statement that the white and black races are distinct naturally, that God has made them distinct, and meant they should be separate upon the face of the globe.

And here, at the outset, to answer you who may ask, "Why have these legal decisions to do with the clearly-defined work of the preacher of the Gospel?" We answer they are, or should be, actuated by the following Divine command, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, Ezekiel 33, 7, "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me." This respecting the spirit of the words of the Judge in his comments in the decision of the case under consideration, we feel bound, by our ministerial position, as also from the fact that we are identified with the oppressed and despised race of the South, to speak in behalf of the colored people, and as such were bought and sold in Ireland and Rome. (See life and remains of Rev. B. B. Edwards, D. D., late of Andover Theological Seminary).

And that we may profit by the contract, let us look at England to-day in the scale of civilization, as compared with England about the end of the sixteenth century. Then Christianity was introduced in the country by St. Augustine, or, as he is commonly called, St. Austin. Then he saw little Britons out upon the islands, whom he said "looked more like angels than human beings." This wonderful transformation we owe to the influence of Christianity. Next came over the things which are branded, and that if a man hates his brother, he is a murderer, and by persisting in which will be excluded from eternal life. But strange to say, one of the best of those who still endorse the sentiments of a late Judge of the Supreme Court of the United States, viz: "colored men have no rights which white men are bound to respect." Soon after the Rev. Philip was preaching the Word in Samaria, the Spirit said unto him, "Go near and join thyself unto this chariot." Acts 8, 29. Strange to say that the occupant of that chariot was an Ethiopian, that through the preaching of Philip he converted to the faith, and then was made an heir of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, through faith in the Son of God as the common Saviour of sinners. This proves the Scripture assertion, viz: that God is no respecter of persons, but every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him. And by it we, like St. Peter, are taught to "call no man common or unclean."

And this brings to the more immediate consideration of the text, viz:—"God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." St. Peter being a Jew—with all of the cherished prejudices of his nation towards the Gentile world—was, by the Saviour, taken away from his nets and constituted a fisher of men. And God miraculously prepared him as an effective messenger-bearer of these glad tidings to the Gentile world; and also miraculously prepared the Gentile world, through Cornelius, the Roman centurion, for the reception of the same.

The effect upon Peter—he was led to see that God was not partial, as he had hitherto supposed, to wards any one of the nations of men in the promulgation of His plan of redemption and salvation. For while endeavoring to solve the problem of the vision, behind the curtain that came from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called to him, and constituted him a man that should not call any man common or unclean." He then preached the gospel unto those assembled, viz.:—"Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth, perceiver thou art, that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him."

Therefore, we embrace this opportunity to state (with becoming deference to the Judge whose decision we enter by) that in this matter he has injuriously defamed the Almighty, who will hold him accountable; and at the same time failed to be guided by the oath and attributes of his office. It is generally known that in our Government every official, from the Chief Magistrate of the same to the humblest alderman in the State, pledges himself to support the Constitution of the United States, and to discharge the duties of his office with impartiality, and justly to render to every man his due. And now, in order that every man may be a Christian congregation, intelligently exercise an opinion upon the decision of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and the comments of the Judge. We would not for a moment direct your attention to a standard legal work (Bonvier's) to the definition of a Judge, etc. He is a public officer—lawfully appointed to decide litigated questions according to law. His qualifications are, that he must be a free man, and give an opinion to be sure he has no bias for or against either of the parties. Hear the author, "If he has the slightest bias this disqualifies him for judging the case. And not only must he be impartial, but he must also pay heed to the law, whether good or bad. (c) He is bound to declare what the law is, and not to make it, he being not an arbitrator, but an in-

terpreter of the law. And he closes this definition thus, viz:—"He (the Judge) ought always seriously to attend not to his own wishes, but to the requisitions of the law of justice and of religion. Such being the clearly defined duties and qualifications of a Judge—in view of the relation existing between Him who made the world and all things therein, and those who have or shall be professed through Him in the atoning blood of His dear Son, we tremble for many now occupying high official positions in the land, who by their personal acts and influence have, and are, offending some of God's "little ones" who are to be guilty of which, "be it that a millstone were hanged about their necks, and they cast into the depths of the sea!"

And the same great Being hath said—for the evidence of those filling the responsible positions of judges in the land, viz.:—"Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great. Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's; and the cause that is too hard for thee, be it unto me, and I will hear it." Deuteronomy 1, 17. Here, then, we may behold the impregnable fort of the pious orphan, widow, and the oppressed. When in prayer, they lift up their voices to Heaven in their behalf; the heart is wondrously agitated, and the earth shaken from centre to circumference.

In this way we, my Christian hearers, may see the nature of the disposition of God towards evildoers; those filling the responsible positions of judges in the land, viz.:—"Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great. Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's; and the cause that is too hard for thee, be it unto me, and I will hear it." Deuteronomy 1, 17. Here, then, we may behold the impregnable fort of the pious orphan, widow, and the oppressed. When in prayer, they lift up their voices to Heaven in their behalf; the heart is wondrously agitated, and the earth shaken from centre to circumference.

Further, it was from this view—the minister that caused us to look upon the Judge's comment, to be a violent and (its spiritual effect) a soul-ruining misrepresentation of the Divine character; to be a statement of the character of God and humanity; and, therefore, having itself left the infidel tendency of the Judge's language—we would endeavor to turn the attention of your minds from the decision of a finite and fallible man, to the character of the infinite and unchangeable in His being; wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, for He has declared by words, and demonstrated by deed, that He is no respecter of persons.

And we are reminded by the words of the Judge, that He is no respecter of persons, and giving a reason why we should call no man common or unclean."

But the "Judge" says He (God) meant that the white and colored people should be separate on the earth, i. e., in a social, religious, and political point of view. It may be that the Judge based his argument on the fact that we are identified with a race which has for over two hundred years worn the shackles of slavery.

But surely he is not ignorant of the fact that slavery is not peculiar to the negro race, as also of another fact, viz.:—"That servitude and slavery have been the condition of society, in all nations, in all countries, and at all periods of time." As history informs us that Turks, Poles, Russians, and that even Anglo-Saxons were, comparatively a short time ago, absolutely "goods and chattels" in the hands of the British and Americans. (See life and remains of Rev. B. B. Edwards, D. D., late of Andover Theological Seminary).

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