

THE AFRICO-AMERICAN AND THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS.

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By the term Africo-American it is intended to designate that large class of our American population of African descent, now numbering about 8,000,000; and by religious denominations it is designed to embrace the more influential bodies of believers made up almost wholly of white persons—as Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The nature and scope of this article does not require that the whole list be examined in detail, and here the greater may be regarded as including the less.

rear of the union armies. But the Africo-American churches of the north, prior to 1865, have been alluded to. Whence these churches? How came it to pass that race churches actually sprang up at the north, where the relation of master and slave had not existed for years prior to the establishment of such churches? Those who are acquainted with their history know that the bitter prejudices of the whites and the corresponding want of confidence on the part of the blacks constituted the occasion for the founding of these churches. Bishop Richard Allen, the founder and first bishop of the African Methodist church, 1786, detailing the events which led to the establishment of that church, says:

"A number of us usually attended St. George's Church in Fourth Street, Philadelphia, and when the colored people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on and placed us around the wall, and Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door and told us to go in the gallery. He told us to go and we would see where to sit. We expected to take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seats the elder said, 'Let us pray.' We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H. W., having hold of Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him off his knees and saying, 'You must get up—you must not kneel here.' Mr. Jones replied, 'Wait until prayer is over.' Mr. H. W. said, 'No, you must get up now or I will call for aid and force you away.' Mr. Jones said, 'Wait until prayer is over and I will get up and trouble you no more.' With that W. beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L. S., to come to his assistance. He came and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body and they were no more troubled with us in the church."

These proceedings led to the establishment of

imously resolved "that we consider the voluntary enslaving of one portion of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature, as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, * * and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ." "We rejoice that the church to which we belong commenced as early as any other in this country the good work of endeavoring to put an end to slavery." (Assembly's Digest, p. 312.) Other citations of the same tenor might be made.

"In 1801, John Chavis, a black man of prudence and piety, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Lexington, was commissioned by the Assembly as a missionary among people of his own color. In 1807, John Gloucester, a black man, was licensed and commissioned to the same work. Ten years later he appears in the Assembly as a member from the Presbytery of Philadelphia." (Presbyterian Law, p. 488.)

It is quite clear that the position of the Presbyterians with reference to the Africo-American was theoretically correct all along, but they were embarrassed by their connection with the slave-holders, by race prejudice to some extent, and by the influence of independent colored denominations, to whom reference has been made. The attempts to find a practical method of helping this needy class, under the peculiar difficulties of the situation, resulted in the establishment of less than a dozen Africo-American Presbyterian churches at the north in nearly a century; and, although the white Presbyterian churches were accessible, the colored people have not gone into them. These remarks also measure the extent of Presbyterianism at the north to-day, notwithstanding the larger liberty and the highly favorable attitude of the church toward them during the past quarter of a century. This is a most important and incontestable fact of history, which should receive some consideration at the hands of those sentimental eccle-

schools for secondary education and chapels for religious worship crown the hill-tops and decorate the valleys of our entire southern land, and before their brilliant rays of intensifying light and truth the dense cloud of ignorance, superstition and immorality is rapidly fleeing away. It is susceptible of proof to a demonstration that these spelling-book and Bible missionaries, endorsed by their respective denominations and held in their chosen fields by the benevolence of northern Christians, have not only secured results which could not be secured at the north, but have also directly or indirectly reached the great masses of this class in the south, whether in churches of their own denomination or not, and have elevated all to a higher and a truer Christianity. Lincoln University, Biddle University, Atlanta University, Shaw University, and in fact all of the great mission schools of the south, have swung wide their doors to all and to-day scores of the most active and successful laborers received their education in schools of a different denomination from the ones they are now serving.

Surely it must be patent to all that it would be a serious mistake for any of the great denominations represented on this southern field to set aside, without due consideration, this well-tried and successful plan of missionary work among so numerous and needy a population as the Africo-Americans of the south. In the light of history and under existing conditions an abandonment of this plan would soon result in either fusion or independency, both of which have been tried and found wanting.