

TWENTIETH CENTURY NEGRO LITERATURE

OR
A CYCLOPEDIA OF THOUGHT
ON THE
**VITAL TOPICS RELATING
TO THE AMERICAN NEGRO**

BY
ONE HUNDRED OF AMERICA'S
G R E A T E S T N E G R O E S

EDITED AND ARRANGED
and
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WILLIAM E. PARTEE, D.D.

Rev. William E. Partee, D. D., was born at Concord, N. C., of Christian parents in the year 1860 and at an early age placed in the common schools of his native town. He was left an orphan at the age of ten, but by determination and the help of friends he gained an education. When but sixteen years of age he taught a country school. He was graduated from the collegiate and theological departments of Biddle University and was licensed to preach in 1883 and ordained in 1884 by the Presbytery of Catawba and entered upon his life work by serving as pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church at Concord, N. C., for more than three years, among his early playmates and companions.

In the year 1887 he took charge of a mission church and school at Gainesville, Fla., serving acceptably in that work for more than four years and standing faithfully by his people during that memorable epidemic of yellow fever in 1888. In 1892 he was called to the pastorate of Laura Street Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Fla., which position he occupied for nearly seven years. During two years of that time he was also principal of one of the city graded schools. In 1896 he was sent as commissioner from the Presbytery of East Florida to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church at Saratoga.

In 1898 he resigned from his work in Jacksonville to take charge of the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, Va. Thus he has been engaged for many years in the active work of the ministry, always doing earnest and faithful work and held in high esteem by the people of every community in which he has labored.

He was married in 1886 to Miss Edith I. Smith, of Lynchburg, Va., who proved a worthy and efficient helper in his work, and uncomplainingly shared with him the trials and vicissitudes which fall to the preacher's lot in life for fourteen years. Then the Master called her to rest from her labors.

TOPIC XX.

THE NEGRO AS A CHRISTIAN.

BY REV. WILLIAM E. PARTEE, D. D.

To form a correct estimate of the Negro as a Christian we must take into account the "depths from which he came."

Back of his forty years of freedom lie more than two hundred years of bondage, in which he was forced to obey the will of another absolutely and kept in ignorance. All real manhood was repressed and every ambition curbed. Though under the control of the Christian Church and people of the South, and living on the farms and in the homes and families of their masters, mingling in their lives and their society, and subject to their moulding influence, yet, as a rule, the moral principles and qualities necessary to a religious life were not taught him, neither was he encouraged to cultivate them.

There was no lawful marriage, no true home, but husband and wife were the property of a master who used or abused either as he chose; their children grew up under the same conditions and were encouraged or forced into unchastity, lying, stealing and betraying of one another under the teaching that there was no moral wrong to them since they were the property of another who was responsible for their acts. There could be no growth in morals, and there can be no true religion without morals. To say the least they came out of bondage with a dwarfed moral nature, and to this day suffer more or less from the effects of it. The carnality of slavery has not yet ceased to bear fruit, as we all know. Ever and anon it shows itself in those horrible acts which the newspapers report in full.

It takes long and weary years to root out of a race or nation evils that have become fixed in its nature. But while there is much to be deplored as to laxity in morals among the masses there has been constant and steady improvement in this regard. It is no doubt true that any race, kept in bondage under similar conditions, and for the same length of time as the Negro was, would come out of it in no better condition, and would, perhaps, show no better record in forty years than this race has shown, and especially so if that bondage were preceded by heathenism.

Dr. Haygood has said, "The hope of the African race in this country is largely in its pulpit. No people can rise above their religion; no people's religion can rise above the doctrines preached and lived by their ministry."

The Negro began almost unaided and alone in this particular. As to their religion they were very largely left to themselves during slavery. Their ministers were ignorant and unlettered. Many of them were pious, but many were ungodly and unscrupulous. So theirs was a religion largely without the Bible. It consisted of bits of Scripture here and there, of glowing imaginations, of dreams and of superstitions; yet it was the best they knew.

Then many years of freedom had passed by before fully equipped ministers could be provided them. During those years faithful servants of God, unlettered, did their best to be the true religious leaders of the people (all honor to them), but they necessarily came short in many respects and could not carry the people up to the higher plane of religious life.

With these things before our minds we say that the race has shown a remarkable growth in the essentials of true Christian manhood. Their notions may, in some things, be crude; their conceptions of truth may be realistic; they may be more emotional than ethical; they may show many imperfections in their religious development; nevertheless is it true that their religion is their most striking formative characteristic. So susceptible are they that no other influence has had so much to do in shaping their better character, and what they are to become in their future development will be largely determined by their religion.

While in their church and social life there are some elements of evil and superstition, some of which are the inheritance of past ages in the fatherland, while others have been developed in this country by the conditions of life during the years of slavery, still any fairminded person who takes the pains to correctly inform himself will acknowledge that these are being gradually but surely eradicated.

As a Christian he commends himself in his faith and devotion. Though his religion may sometimes be defective in its practical application to the principles of right conduct and living, God, heaven, hell and the judgment day are realities to him. He believes the truths of the Bible to be real, and thus he is sound in the faith so far as he understands it, and that is more than can be said of many who are better informed

than he. What a rare thing to find one an infidel! Where can you find a people more susceptible to religious teaching?

The emotional nature is highly developed, and they are quick to respond to whatever appeals to their sympathies and affections. Emotion has its place in religion and is not to be ignored, but to be properly used and controlled and directed. To move any one we must first reach the feelings; if these can be aroused they may develop into a conviction that the subject of them should adopt a given course of action, and he accordingly does so. I am not sure after all that we should seek to repress such to any great extent. It may be a point in his favor, for since he is easily and powerfully impressed by strong appeals, he is the more readily brought under the influence of the wise teacher or leader. It is true in some cases that mere physical excitement is mistaken for being "filled with the spirit," and thus some swing to the extreme in this direction. It is noticeable, however, that this is being rapidly outgrown and more self-control is being practiced. After all it does seem that being easily moved and swayed may furnish the lever by which the wise and prudent may begin to lift them to the higher ground of religious life. No doubt in most cases there is deep down beneath the easily overwrought feelings a true religious disposition, with much spirituality and divine energy.

Benevolence is rightly regarded as an important matter in Christian living. In proportion to his means the Negro excels in this. Hundreds of churches, and many schools and colleges have been built out of their poverty. To sum up and place on record their gifts for the extension of Christ's kingdom would perhaps show to the world an unequalled record of self-sacrifice and devotion to a cause. Show that a cause is a worthy one and they are ready to give according to their ability to help that cause. To give help to ministers of the gospel and other Christian workers is not only regarded as a duty but as an honor and a pleasure. On the whole they are kind at heart, generous to the distressed, obliging and considerate. Love to friends and forgiveness of enemies are marked characteristics.

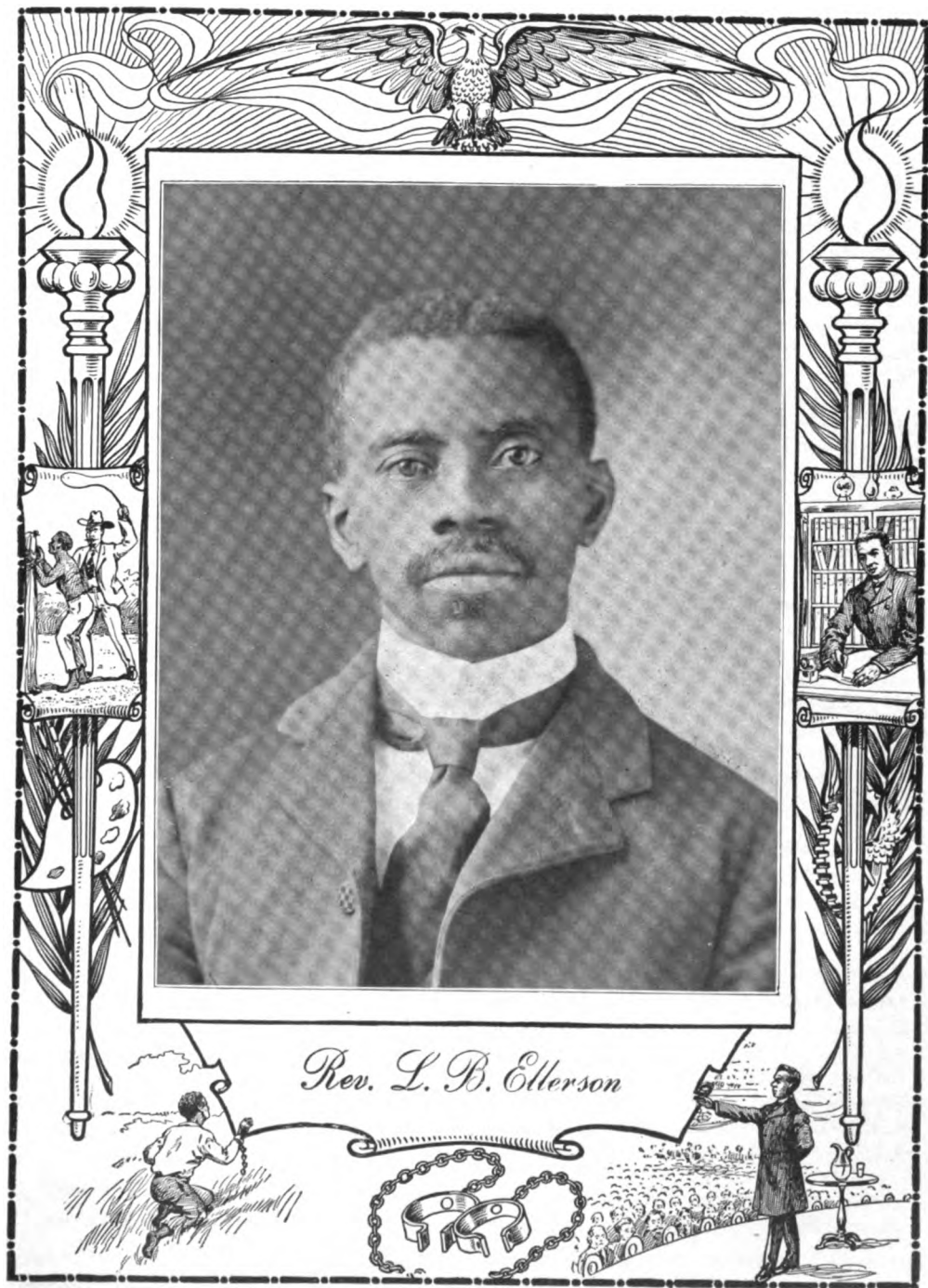
The statement has been often made that loose notions as to morals are held. To some extent this may be true. Let us bear in mind that the large majority are poor and are common laborers, and more than half the race are illiterate. Compare them with this class of any race in this or any other country and I dare say they will suffer but little by the com-

parison. Some have made much of the fact that in many places whole families by necessity live in one or two-room cabins. While this is unfortunate and to be regretted, it is nevertheless true that you can find even in such conditions in the majority of instances that purity and virtue are as much respected as among those who live in roomy homes where every privacy is afforded. They are not any worse, certainly, and, perhaps, are better in this respect than the multitudes of other races who live in the cellars and attics of crowded tenements in our great cities.

Let us not make the mistake of including all in one general class, and *that* the worst, but while acknowledging that there is great room for improvement, let us recognize in the vast mass of multitude who, in education, morals and religion, are the equals of any people.

The correspondence between the profession of the heart and the outward life is often not what it should be, but is not that true also of many Christians of any race? There are Christians of highest education who enjoy abundant and varied opportunities of enlightenment and culture who fail to show in all their outward life what they profess in their heart to be. Some do fall into the error of trying to separate between the religion of the heart and that of the life, but generally they are learning the better way. Where so large a percentage of the people cannot read and write, how can you expect of them the highest degree of moral and religious life? Taking into account the disadvantages and limitations under which they labor, you rather wonder that they have reached so high as they have in Christian living. We must consider the past history of the race, its present disadvantages, environment and opportunity, if we would justly estimate its Christianity. We must base our judgment upon the developed Negro if we would be fair. Education helps us to be better Christians just as it helps others and, and as we get more knowledge of Bible truths such as education can give us we will be better Christians. Educated ministers are fast displacing the uneducated, and those whose moral and Christian character fall below the standard are being crowded out, and schools and colleges are sending out every year hundreds of educated Christian men and women who raise the standard of right living in any community where their lot is cast.

The material prosperity of the Negro may be placed in evidence as to his Christianity. With all the odds against them and starting up from absolute poverty, the race now owns farms, homes, schools, churches, bank accounts and personal property amounting to five hundred and fifty mil-



Rev. L. B. Ellerson

REV. L. B. ELLERSON.

Rev. L. B. Ellerson, A. M., was born at Cheraw, S. C., in 1869. Mr. Ellerson's father having died when the son was but an infant, Mr. Ellerson was left to be reared under the fostering care of his mother alone. He spent his youthful days in the public schools of his native town until he was sixteen years old. At that time he was happily converted to Christ and received the impressions that he was called to the gospel ministry. At the same time he united with the Presbyterian Church. In 1886, Mr. Ellerson entered Biddle University at Charlotte, N. C., to pursue such a course as would prepare him for the ministry. He remained at Biddle University until 1893, when he graduated from the classical course with honor, taking the Philosophical Oration. In '92 Mr. Ellerson was the successful contestant for the medal given by the Alumni to the Junior Class. During his course at Biddle, Mr. Ellerson spent his summer vacations, teaching in the district schools of North and South Carolina. In June, 1893, Mr. Ellerson was employed to do missionary work near Asheville, N. C. He continued in this work until September, 1893, at which time he entered the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church at Princeton, N. J., for the purpose of completing his course for the ministry. During the first two years of his course of Theology at Princeton he continued to come South in summer and engage in teaching during vacations. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1896. He and two others being the only colored students in a class of sixty-nine young men. Besides keeping up the studies of the last year, Mr. Ellerson supplied the pulpit of Dwight's Chapel at Englewood, New Jersey. Here he remained until September, 1896, when he came to South Carolina and was ordained to the full work of the gospel ministry by the Fairfield Presbytery, the same Presbytery having licensed him the preceding year.

During Rev. Ellerson's course at Princeton he was at one time engaged to supply the pulpit of Siloam Presbyterian Church at Elizabeth, N. J. At another time he was employed to assist the Rev. H. G. Miller, pastor of Mt. Taber Presbyterian Church, in New York City, during the illness of the pastor. Upon his ordination by Fairfield Presbytery in 1896, Rev. Ellerson was placed in charge of the church and school work at Manning, S. C. Here he worked very successfully preaching and teaching until November, 1898, when he was called to the pastorate of Berean Presbyterian Church at Beaufort, S. C. At the same time he was made principal of Harblison Institute. Rev. Ellerson labored with a marked degree of success on the Beaufort field from November, 1898, to April, 1901, when he was urged to accept a call from the Laura Street Presbyterian Church at Jacksonville, Fla., where he is at present prosecuting the work of his church with success. For a young man of his age, Rev. Ellerson evidently stands high in the estimation of his fellow Presbyters. This is evinced by the fact that he has already filled some of the highest offices in the gift of his brethren. In 1898 he was unanimously chosen moderator of Fairfield Presbytery at Camden, S. C. In 1899 he was made the choice of Atlantic Synod for moderator at Columbia, S. C., and in 1900 he was unanimously elected to represent the Presbytery of Atlantic in the General Assembly which met in St. Louis, Mo.

He has filled each of these offices with credit and ability. The degree of A. M. was conferred upon him by Biddle University, his Alma Mater in 1900.

lion dollars. It is remarkable that this has been acquired in forty years. God's word teaches that nations prosper in material things as they get close to God.

Thus looking upon the brighter side we are led to commend in many things the Christianity of the Negro race and to believe that as a people higher ground is aimed at. Though yet a long way off from perfection, yet ever onward and upward are they tending.

SECOND PAPER.

THE NEGRO AS A CHRISTIAN.

BY REV. L. B. ELLERSON, A. B., A. M.

If it is true that man is naturally a religious being, then it is pre-eminently true in the case of the Negro. If the Negro is anything at all he is religious. It matters not in what walk of life you find him or what may be his personal or individual character, it is a very rare case indeed when you find a Negro who indulges in doubt as to the existence of a supreme being or the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments. With him these are fixed points of belief. But as much as may be justly said regarding the Negro's natural piety, it must be observed and admitted by all who know the Negro best that his religion is very much defective in its practical application to the principles of right conduct and living. And this, we perceive, is the main point at issue, for when we discuss the Negro as a Christian we must of necessity feel called upon to distinguish between his native piety and his applied Christianity. We wish it understood, too, that the general observations made here refer to the masses of Negroes rather than to the individual.

We unhesitatingly affirm that individuals of our race have risen to as true and as high a Christian status as has mankind anywhere. And although we know and confess that the masses of our race have not yet come up to the genuine standard of the New Testament Christianity—even in apprehension—yet it must be observed that their religion contains many features that are highly commendable. Chief among these features are, first, his simple, child-like, unwavering faith in God. Nor can this condition be wholly attributed to ignorance or thoughtlessness, as some might hold; for, indeed, we have produced some men of as rare