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THE ANGLO-AMERICAN PULPIT AND SOUTHERN OUTRAGES

By the Rev. Francis J. Grimke

The attitude of the Anglo-American pulpit in relation to Southern outrages is one of the most discouraging features of the so-called Negro problem. There are more than seventy-five thousand white ministers in this country. These are all, according to their profession, God's representatives; and the function of the ministry, as set forth in God's Word, is to cry aloud and spare not, to lift up a standard for the people; and yet, as a matter of fact, it is the rarest thing in the world to hear one word from these pulpits against the terrible crimes that are being daily perpetrated against the Negro. Whether this is the result of cowardice, whether these ministers are afraid of offending those to whom they preach, and thus of endangering their position or their support, or whether it is because they see nothing to condemn, because they think the Negro is receiving just what he deserves, or whether it is the result of indifference, I do not know.

This may be said, however--not infrequently, when a word is heard, it is rather in the tone of palliation or justification than of condemnation. We have, as an illustration of this, the utterances of Bishop Fitzgerald, of the Southern Church, which were so justly criticized in THE INDEPENDENT at the time. Where the pulpit is not absolutely silent, it is found almost invariably just where the Bishop is found, throwing the weight of its influence in favor of oppressors and law-breakers and murderers. We hear a great deal today from these same pulpits about suppressing the liquor traffic, about gambling, about Sabbath desecration. When the question of overthrowing polygamy in Utah was up they had a great deal to say. When the suppression of the Louisiana Lottery was in question they had a great deal to say, and from many of them rang out eloquent appeals in favor of stamping out that great gambling scheme.

What a tremendous protest has been heard from pulpits all over the land against opening the Columbian Exposition on the Sabbath.

But not even a whisper has been heard on Southern outrages. It is not because the pulpit is ignorant of the actual condition of things. Ministers are men of intelligence; they take the papers; they read the news; they are more careful to do that often than they are to read their Bibles; they are, as a class, well informed. And yet, as a general thing, not a word is ever uttered by them, either in their sermons or in their prayers, that would lead any one unacquainted with the facts to suppose that there was anything wrong in this country in reference to the treatment that is accorded to the black man. Read the sermons that are published every Monday in the daily press, and in the weekly papers; read the homiletical magazines, with their long lists of sermons and synopses of sermons by the great lights of the pulpit, and show me a line, if you can, in which there is any evidence to be found that anything is being done by the religious leaders, with very few exceptions, to call attention to these wrongs and to create a public sentiment that will right them. It is true that at the meeting of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at Omaha, a series of resolutions was passed condemning these outrages. Thank God for that! But what will these men do now that they have returned home? Has the spirit of these resolutions remained with them? Will anything be heard on this subject from their pulpits? Will there be any effort made by them to arouse the public conscience, to influence public sentiment to right these wrongs? At the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, at Portland, Ore., a similar series of resolutions was introduced. For this, also, thank God. But what did these men, who spoke in behalf of Northern Presbyterianism, do after they ^{had} returned home? There are more than seven thousand churches on the roll of the General Assembly. Will anything be heard in these seven thousand pul-

pits on the subject of Southern outrages and protection to the Negro? Do these resolutions mean anything? Have they back of them an honest purpose and a resolute determination to work for the suppression of the crimes which they condemn, and which are a standing reproach to our country and a disgrace to our boasted Christian civilization?

The fact that these terrible outrages continue in the South; that lawlessness is increasing instead of diminishing; that the spirit of bitterness against the Negro is more pronounced and vindictive now than ever before, notwithstanding the fact that there are hundreds and thousands of ministers in that land of blood preaching Sabbath after Sabbath to the very people who are either directly guilty of these crimes or who are in sympathy with them, is proof positive that the Southern pulpit, at least, has been and is recreant to duty, and false to the God whom it professes to represent. And the fact that the North looks on in silence and sees these wrongs without any serious effort to right them, is proof positive that the Northern pulpit has been equally recreant to duty. The power for good of seventy-five thousand men of the intelligence and social standing and influence of our ministers, in virtue of their position as the spiritual leaders of the people, representing a constituency of fully twelve millions of professing Christians and an equally large constituency of non-professing but congregational members, cannot be over-estimated when properly exercised. This, I believe, has not been done. If these seventy-five thousand men had done their duty, had taken the pains to set clearly before their people their duty in this matter, in view of the requirements of God's Word and the principles of justice and right, which require us to render to every man his due, to do by others as we would be done by, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, the outlook for the Negro would be very much more promising than it is today; his condition in every respect--material, social, political--would be far better than it is at

present. The Anglo-American pulpit is very largely responsible for much of the suffering and indignity to which he has been subjected, and is still being subjected. Its silence, as the representative of religion, as the highest exponent of morality, and as set for the defence of the faith, and of all that that faith implies and requires in the way of righteousness and truth and purity, is a tacit admission on the part of the ministers that these outbreaks of lawlessness, these invidious distinctions, and the insults that are heaped upon us are right; that they see nothing to condemn, nothing inconsistent with the religion which they profess; or else that, altho they see these things to be wrong, they are afraid to lift up their voices against them. In either case, whether their inaction is the result of cowardice or of blunted moral sensibility, their silence has operated equally against us. This is the charge that I make against the Anglo-American pulpit today. Its silence has been interpreted as approval; bad men have been encouraged to continue in their lawlessness and inhumanity. As long as the pulpits are silent it is in vain to expect the people to take any deeper interest in the matter than they are now taking. And, therefore, it seems to me that while we are praying it would be well if our prayers for the Southern whites could be followed by a day of special prayer for the pulpits of this land; that God would put into them a little more backbone and strength of character and conscientiousness; that he would fill them with men who love righteousness and hate iniquity, who are not afraid to do their duty, or afraid of suffering, if need be, in the cause of truth and justice. A cowardly ministry is a curse to any nation, and always makes it more difficult for an oppressed people to overcome oppression.

With a brave and conscientious ministry, with the pulpits of our land filled with men who are penetrated by the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, in less than a decade there would be a revolution in pub-

lic sentiment; this terrible flood-tide of iniquity, this deluge of
crime and violence would be arrested, and the Negro be treated as a
man and a brother.

Washington, D. C.