

AN OLD-TIME  
WATCH-MEETING

## "Dar's de Watch"

AMONG THE  
COLORED PEOPLE

—DESCRIBED BY PRES. A. A. E. TAYLOR, D.D.—

UPON the New Year's Eve, attended by a friend, we went to the largest of the old colored churches of Georgetown, a building that would contain seven or eight hundred persons. The house below and the heavy galleries running around three sides of the room were literally packed, new and old, balustrade and altar, with a dense mass of coal-black humanity, whose intense darkness, relieved only by gleaming whites of eyes and glittering rows of teeth, well-nigh neutralized the effect of the few lamps attached to the front of the galleries or fixed behind the high box-pulpit. The peculiar effect of the utter darkness of such an audience can be appreciated only by those who have seen it.

It was about ten o'clock when we entered. The pulpit was occupied by five or six colored preachers, who cast ominous glances at the few white faces in the rear gallery, being somewhat fearful of ridicule. The exercises were just opening with one of their characteristic hymns, rendered so universally and with such gusto as to shake the roof. Strongly earnest and quaint prayer followed, and the ministers alternately preached sermons, each of from fifteen to twenty minutes in length, the generous intervals being filled in with singing and prayer and evidently a good deal of making ready for the crisis. We shall not essay to reproduce all the discourses, nor to describe the travesties upon pulpit oratory that it would have rendered many a white preacher so much personal benefit to have seen.

The concluding sermon of the evening we shall, however, state in brief, from notes carefully written down upon the following day, our object not being in the least to ridicule, but to make a simple record of facts as they occurred. The sketch is far more under-drawn than over-drawn; and as the sermon occupied fully twenty minutes in delivery, the outline must be filled up in large part by the imagination of the reader, making plentiful repetition of the sentences we have recorded.

The speaker, who was formally announced as "Brother" Kyarter, from Rockbridge County, Virginia, was a tall, slender, grave man, about sixty years of age, with spare, smooth face, and a full brush of bushy white hair standing out, like a halo, around his head. He was very black, apparently a full-blooded African, and as solemn as only a Negro can be upon occasion. His deep voice, as he opened, fell on the audience like the tolling of a midnight bell, with painfully monotonous cadences. Standing perfectly straight and motionless, with stately manner, he thus began:

"Beubed Brethren! Sesen. De words ob de ter 's foun' in de Gospel accordin' ter Luke. I disremember jes' de percise pershush; but it stans as follers: Wot er sez ontar one ob yer, er sez ontar all ob yer: Watch!" Pausing significantly at this point, he lifted his left hand to his watch pocket, quietly drew out a very large, old-fashioned silver watch, then held it out at arm's length, before all eyes, and, pointing at it tragically with the extended fore-finger of his other hand, he disjunctively and solemnly exclaimed: "An dars de watch!"

After waiting a moment for the full effect, he proceeded: "Brethren an' sester, dis yar is de watch-meetin', an' dar's de watch: an' by dat ar watch der is only twenty minutes ob de ole yeah lef. De ole yeah, wid all hits joys an'

all hits sorrows; wid all der good an' all der bad, an' all der measuably indifferin' is fas gwine out ob de Irreboicable pas' inter der Inebiturble futuh. De ole yeah's fas' gwine, an' totin' ebery critter wot blong ter hit, no matter wot Woteb'er yer's done, if yer's done any good to ary pussion, if yer's done ary obil ter no pussion, if yer's lef' ary sals' er 'spressions behind yer, wot yer oughtn't ter done ter ary pussion, be he poah er be she rich, be he high er be she low; woteb'er yer done, hits all fas' gwine wid de ole yeah, an' hit wid mighty soon be good; sho' nuff, fer eber and eber. Amen. An' wot sez de tex? 'Wot er sez ontar one ob yer er sez ontar all ob yer: Watch! An' dar's de watch!'"

Holding out as at the beginning, as if he had been reach, the watch, which he had, meanwhile, been concealing in the palm of his hand by his side, and which he now slowly turned with its face full towards the audience. There was a visible sensation all over the house at this tragical movement, after pausing again for which, he proceeded:

"Woteb'er yer's done, if er watch der's only fifteen minutes ob de ole yeah lef. Tink ob dat, brethern an' sester, tink ob dat! Only fifteen minutes ob de ole yeah lef! Quarter'nour, quarter'nour!"

Then warming up somewhat, and quickening his pace and beginning to step slowly from side to side: "De ole yeah, wid all hits joys an' all hits sorrows; wid all der good an' all der bad an' all der measuably indifferin' es fas' gwine away—gwine far away out ob de Irreboicable pas' inter der Inebiturble futuh. Woteb'er sins and 'spressions yer done ter pussion, no matter wot yer done ter ole story; ef yer done tuck wot der didn't blong ter yo'sef; ef yer done one mean'es wotsemeber ter one pussion, white er color'd, be he rich er be she poah, be she high er be she low, wedder man, er 'oman, er chile; ef yer done any good 'ligion woteb'er; if yer gib any gif, no matter how much, or no matter how leetle, to one poah folks er put hit inter der hat w'en dey pass roun' der c'lection; ef yer help de sick er clode der naked er feed der 'ongry, er water der thirsty, er bury de dead, er jine de ch'ch, er ten' de weddin', er tuck chuk ob de orph'n al de widder in dare 'flickshun; er ef yer haul water fer de ole man, er peck up cheps fer de ole 'oman, woteb'er yer done wotsemeber, shu' nuff hit an' all fas' gwine away wid de ole yeah, er be seen no moah agin fer eber an' eber. Amen. An' wot sez de tex? 'Wot er sez ontar one ob yer dat same er sez to de res' ob yer: Watch! An' dar's de watch!'"

Reproducing the former motion while letting his voice suddenly fall into sepulchral tones; then repeating very slowly and emphatically: "Sho' nuff an' dar's de watch!"

Here he paused much longer than usual before resuming the old strain, as if he were in deep meditation. The house was intensely thrilled. Some started to their feet, others glanced nervously around the audience, as if expecting to see the "spirit" of the watch; the galleries stirred excitedly for a moment, while a few of the older members ventured an experimental "Amen."

Then the speaker suddenly broke out still more rapidly and with increased gesture, pitching his voice a tone higher:

"An' by dat ar watch dars only ten minutes ob de ole yeah lef! Ten minutes! Ten minutes! Tink ob dat, brethern and sester! Ten minutes, sho'

'nuff!" Then cooling down somewhat and speaking apologetically, carefully eyeing his audience from side to side: "Beubed brethern and sester, sure an sartain some ob yer may b'lieve quar dat de venerable watch should er come inter de hans ob a 'spectable colored pussion, like de speakah. Hit may be some ob yer hits talkin' ter yerself in yer mou' like dis, dat der preachah become disposes' ob dat yer watch en a dis'onest mannah. Well, an' ef yer es, yer's mightly mestaken, yer es. Dat er watch on account ob wheech der tex' speaks, woteb'er gub es er gif' ter der brudder dat war 'dresin' yer by er dyin' sojer ob his cudentry, er may say by der decessen sojer ob his cudentry. De poah feller wer layen' wen er foun' em en der cyornor ob der fence, agen der fence' pose, jes war de gorillars' shot en down; en he wos er holden' er dis yer genuine allah watch en as hef han like holden' er hit close; an an er look he wos holden hit out like an hayen es plain as could be sed, sez say: 'whoever fine me, please jes tuck dis yer watch, an' er gub my poah body 'freet' burl' en de groun'." An so he gub hit ter me, woteb'er pussion hit wer; an er was mightly skeered, er wos, w'en er tuck hit from his han, 'cause er was fear'd les de gorillars would come arter mese; an' so er jes' throwed er heap er grass an' bresh an' coverin' dat er handy ober der poah creater, an tuck der watch wot he'd gub me, jes' as 'd'ed askar me ter an' went on de way rej'clin' mighty fas', sho' nuff; ended on double, er ded. An er allays felt boun' ter keep dat er watch. An dar's de watch now, sho' nuff!"

Then, pausing a moment, he watched, the prolonged pause and moments of profound meditation, the excitement rising higher than ever and whites of eyes rolling anxiously in every direction; and he literally jumps in, body and soul, speaking very rapidly now, in a still higher key, growing higher and wilder, gathering impetus toward the close, in the climax of which he fairly raves and roars, rushing on madly like a whirlwind. "An' by dat ar watch, brethern an' sester, dar's only five minutes ob der ole yeah lef! Five minutes! Look at dat yer watch fer yersef—Oh yer disbelieve. Five minutes! ob der ole yeah lef. De ole yeah wid all er joys an' all er sorrows; wid all der good an' all der bad. Woteb'er yer done; wheched yer done any jestice, or wheched yer done any enjestice; wedder yer done wot yer oughter er done, or wheched yer done wot yer oughter er not er done, de ole yeah, wid all er tribulation an' all er 'flection an' all er pleasan' an' all er 'joyments—der ole yeah's fas' gwine; sallin' away out ob de Inebiturble pas' inter der Irreboicable futuh. An' wot sez de tex? 'Wot er sez ontar one ob yer dat same er sez to de res' ob yer: Watch! An' dar's de watch!'"

Holding it out from this time to the end, in full view of all, steadily, the rest of his body all in motion, the preacher went on to say: "An' by dat ar watch dars only tree minutes ob de ole yeah lef. De ole yeah's gwine fas'—mighty fas' sho' nuff—out er der Inebiturble pas inter der Irreboicable futuh. No hits toder way. No time ter stop fer c'rections—hits' gwine. Soon it will be de 'end' ob de watch-meetin', an' der watch twist! An' dar's de watch, sho' nuff! An' by dat ar watch dars only t-wo minutes ob der ole yeah lef; only t-wo minutes, sho' nuff." Now after the man-