

I have known people under most advantageous conditions to live twenty-seven years without having accomplished much in life. Twenty-seven years are both swift and short for a people to emerge from the bogs of servitude, in low-down life, in absolute poverty of estate of body, mind, and soul, to acquire true ideas of what Christianity really is, to get away from the inheritances of heathenism, to overcome habits of thought and conduct which had entrenched themselves so as to be ingrained and a part of their natures.

The four millions of people have now become more than seven millions. What has been accomplished?

It may be right first of all to observe what has not been accomplished.

There is a great residuum of the race which has accomplished nothing. Millions still remain in darkness, whose common lot is poverty, whose intellectual and moral condition is but little if any better than it was in slavery. When left to himself and his old-time surroundings the negro is not improving. The degradation and misery among those as yet unsaved are appalling. This is so evident that the superficial observer who forgets that the present is deeply rooted in history, and who speaks from a present impression made by seeing the multitudes of ragged, shiftless, thriftless, idle negroes who crowd into towns and cities, will not hesitate to say that the former times were better than these, and that the negro of to-day has in many ways degenerated from the negro of slavery. In some part it is true that his progress is retrogression, and that his last state is worse than his first. In towns and cities saloons prosper through negro patronage. The evil is incalculable. In slavery days there was a law and a lash for black drinkers. Now a thousand dollars are spent by them in drinking and drunkenness where one was before emancipation.

In the rural communities, also, in many places the degradation could scarcely have been worse in slavery days, and idleness, which was not then possible, is now so common as to become destructive to the negro and a public peril. Slavery never taught self-care nor promoted forethought, and a more thoughtless and improvident creature than the negro who has been left to himself lives nowhere short of absolute heathenism. The blacks who cannot read to-day are in excess of the original four millions when they were set free. Their churches—so called—which existed before the war can be but little better than they then were. The old-time negro religion, which one could hold without virtue or morality, has not ceased to be. That which so easily fitted in with the generations of slave life continues with the untaught generations. There are millions to-day in density of ignorance, in depths of superstition, poor, thoughtless, mentally and morally weak.

It was immediately realized by those who felt called to this missionary work, that a Christian faith could make no real gain among this people by merely proclaiming to them that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, and that now God commanded them to repent. It is not possible to save a vacuum. People with vacant minds cannot honor Christ. Curses brood