

JACK SPALDING'S READY RESPONSE ON THE SOUTHERN RACE PROBLEM

His Impromptu Talk Before the Independent Club,
of Buffalo, N. Y., on the Occasion of
Its Recent Banquet.

Mr. Jack J. Spalding, of Atlanta, who was with Mr. Howell at Buffalo, N. Y., and who was a guest at the Independent Club banquet, gave striking illustration of his ready wit in his informal response to a sentiment on which he was, only a few moments before the banquet, asked to speak.

President Bushnell asked Mr. Spalding to make an impromptu talk on "The Race Problem from the Southern Standpoint." He responded in a talk which was listened to with intense interest by the large audience. The speech was stenographically reported by the club and appeared in the Buffalo papers the next morning. It is so full of interest to southern readers that the following reference to it from The Buffalo Express is reproduced in full:

Mr. Spalding's Address.

From The Buffalo Express, December 22, 1899.

J. J. Spalding, a prominent attorney of the south, was asked to speak on the race question, and although Mr. Spalding had received less than an hour's notice that he would be called on, his address was intensely interesting. Mr. Spalding declared that there is no race problem, that the negro question lives simply in the imagination of the people of the north, who are not sufficiently familiar with the changes which time has wrought in the south to grasp the situation.

"In order that you may have an intelligent understanding of the situation in the south, it is necessary to know something of its history," said Mr. Spalding. "You all know that there was a time when slavery in this country was legal, and that the right of the slave owner to own and use his property was recognized and upheld. In its incipency, slavery was non-sectional. But it did not remain so. Because of the difference in climatic conditions and in the products and vocations of the north and the south, the time came when it was found that slavery was an unprofitable institution in the north, and a profitable institution in the south. That fact is what brought about the sectional condition and differences, and made slavery a sectional issue.

"It is an established fact in history now that the sentiment of the entire civilized world was roused against slavery. In order to break down the system, an intense amount of prejudice was engendered against the people who happened to own slaves at the time of the uprising against slavery. In doing that a false and unfair picture of the relations existing between the owner and the slave was stamped upon the world.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" was the textbook which stamped, as it then appeared, indelibly upon the public mind this false picture. The civil war followed. Very naturally, the result of that war left the south with its people impoverished and its social and industrial organization destroyed. Following the war came that period that always will remain as a nightmare to the south—the horrible days of the reconstruction, more horrible and burdensome even than the war itself. Those were the days when the carpetbagger came down from the north to administer the laws for the south. The carpetbaggers held all the municipal and state offices in the south, collected the taxes, ran the courts and administered all the laws. If you will give a moment's thought to the situation you will see what that meant. The carpetbagger was directly and immediately interested in keeping up the strife between the races, for the longer he could keep the races embroiled and the conditions turbulent, the longer he held on to his job. The carpetbagger was forever waving the bloody shirt, and as a natural and inevitable consequence the bloody shirt eventually passed into national politics.

"Another attack upon the southern states not generally understood or usually referred to in relation to the race question came from a purely commercial and business viewpoint. That attack arose in this way: At that time the railroad in the south were owned locally. They were built by southern capital and owned by the southern stockholder who built them. After the war the great trunk line railways north of the Ohio river and the great land grant railways began an attack upon the south for the purpose of diverting emigration from that section so that the emigrants might be induced to settle in the north and northwest and thus pass over the trunk lines. That attack permeated the business way back to Europe and all the northern railways and steamship lines were involved in it. As a result, the great west and northwest became almost the exclusive beneficiaries of the emigration to this country. The statements I make are borne out by history, and that attack upon the south wrought greater injury to the south and its effects lasted longer and struck deeper than any other movement ever made.

"Then there is another question which must be taken into consideration in considering the so-called race problem. It is a fact that it was and is the only instance in history where a race which, you might say, was physically prohibited from amalgamating or assimilating with another race was given equal rights and privileges by the law with that other race in the same community. You can't trace history back to a single instance of where two such opposite races ever were brought together under the same laws affecting both alike. You can't find a single recorded instance of where Africans and Caucasians, races impossible of mutual absorption or amalgamation, were accorded the same political, legal and social rights under the same government.

"Time, the great healer, has been at work in settling these questions. You see results of this in the negroes in the jury boxes and their employment in all the channels of skilled labor, in fact, they are now getting along peacefully, quietly and contentedly with the southern people.

"The most striking instance of this was shown when we went before congress to ask for an appropriation for our Cotton States and International exposition. Three of the most typical negroes of their race voluntarily appeared before the committee on appropriations and made powerful arguments on behalf of this appropriation. These were Bishop Gaines, of Georgia; Bishop Grant, of Texas, and Booker Washington, of Alabama. They pitched their arguments upon the key that the white people of the south and the negroes understood one another, and if left alone would get along peacefully and harmoniously.

"Then, too, the same financial interests that own and control the great trunk lines of railroad, now own our southern roads. From a position of antagonism these financial interests have now swung around into an attitude of personal and selfish interest. Instead of fighting us as they formerly did, they are now doing their best to uphold the section which sustains and feeds these southern roads recently acquired by them.

"Another great source of relief has grown out of the late Spanish war. You see this gives us a new line of heroes to worship, breaks up the old sectional division and allows us to reform on a new basis.

"Besides, this Spanish war will result in giving us at least one, and perhaps two, new race questions to settle. This will inevitably result in the southern people receiving more consideration and juster judgment at the hands of the rest of the country in the way they handled the race question at the south.

"Perhaps the most powerful of all the agencies that has been and is bringing the true picture before the minds of the civilized world are the writings of Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page and a score of others of less repute.

"Without any studied effort to do so, by the very force of their genius, which enables them to paint the picture of the old life and civilization of the south as it really existed, they have wiped out the false picture and are substituting the reality. I consider this the most powerful agency that has been at work.

"Now, in regard to the question of the disfranchisement of the negro by the southern people, I utterly deny this. I have lived in the south for eighteen years and I have never seen or known of any sort of disfranchisement of the negro. You understand that it is impossible to dominate brains and property by ignorance and poverty. It is true regardless of locality or race.

"The white people of the south dominate their local affairs and always will, because they have the brains and the wealth. They dominate there just like brains and wealth dominate here. It is a combination that you cannot whip.

"What I mean is that no disfranchisement exists by virtue of any force or intimidation in the generally accepted sense in which it is viewed. I have known of some pretty smooth tricks being played upon negroes, by which they lost their votes, but nothing more than would have been here in Buffalo of anywhere else where there was a large class of ignorant voters.

"To give you an instance of this: On one occasion in a county in Georgia where a large number of the voting population were negroes, and a good many smooth devices have been resorted to to keep them from electing their candidates, the following was struck upon:

"Just before the election a very patriotic looking citizen came down through the back part of the county with a big red and white spotted horse hitched to a very highly colored buggy, the back of which was made into the form of a ballot box.

"This patriotic individual went around to the negro churches at night, this being the place and occasion of disseminating political information among the negroes, and quietly and secretly informed them that he had been sent down by General Grant to see that they had a fair chance, and that their ballots were fairly counted. That they must not go up to the regular polling place where the white people voted, as they would not get any showing there, but that he would have his ballot box out in a little pine thicket back of the church up until 12 o'clock, and in the afternoon he would be over in a little strip of woods near Antioch, another church.

"The negroes all followed him as they would any other outsider and interloper in political matters, promptly deposited their ballots as he directed, and he started off for Washington city with them to have them counted.

"His buggy must have broken down, or something happened to him, as he never was heard of again.

"You will observe that this citizen violated no law, used no violence or intimidation, but simply played upon the credulity and ignorance of a lot of slaves who had been freed and enfranchised without having the necessary intelligence to use the ballot.

"Matters sometimes come up in municipal affairs where the white people lay aside all political considerations both as to candidates and votes and hold what is known as a 'white man's primary.' In this way, as they have a legitimate right to do, the white people, irrespective of party, join together and choose their officers.

"You can pick twenty-five of your deepest dyed republicans and send them down to Atlanta, let them live there five years and they will just as inevitably join in with the rest of the white people in holding this primary and selecting the city officers as the other good republicans who now live there do.

"Lynchings are not a race problem, they are not a sectional problem. As I came through Pennsylvania the other day, I saw the papers out with great headlines, telling about the lynching of a negro in that state because he had killed his foreman. It wasn't long ago when a mob hanged four negroes in Illinois simply because they were sent to work in the places of white men. Now they wouldn't do that in the south. I challenge you to

go south and find a nigger lynched for offering to work. (Laughter.) Down south they hang them for one crime. They hang them there, they hang them here, they'd hang them anywhere on top of God's green earth for the same offense. And they hang such fiends in the south with absolute impartiality and without discrimination as to race or color. The first lynching I ever saw was when a white man was strung up between two niggers.

"I do not say lynching is right or justifiable, but the physical fact remains that wherever the Anglo-Saxon race predominates, the people are apt to rise in an outburst of rage and fury and make short work of the kind of criminals they lynch in the south.

"The negroes of the south are going forward rapidly, accumulating property and equipping themselves for skilled labor, acquiring education and otherwise qualifying themselves as conservative citizens. In my opinion they are among the best laborers in agricultural pursuits that the world has ever known, and if left alone and suffered to be led by such men as Bishop Gaines, Bishop Grant, Booker Washington and the like, they will continue in their development and progress, and will inevitably as the law of gravitation, settle down in the body politic to their appointed place."