The question before Congress, a consideration of the debates and final action by Congress upon various phases of the race question in the United States

Mitchell George Washington
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THE QUESTION
BEFORE CONGRESS

A CONSIDERATION OF THE DEBATES
AND FINAL ACTION BY CONGRESS
UPON VARIOUS PHASES OF
THE RACE QUESTION IN
THE UNITED STATES

By GEO. W. MITCHELL

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Foreword

It is difficult for one to write an unbiased history of the events in which he himself took part. And the cold, unvarnished truth, whether told by the historian or otherwise, is seldom popular. Most popular histories, therefore, are written, not to record the truth as it is found, but rather to boost or to disparage the memory of some party or cause. Being desirous of learning the truth concerning the events of which this volume treats, and finding that the historians differed widely among themselves in many particular cases, the author was led to examine the original records of Congress page by page. A few of the notes taken in connection with this reading have been put in the shape of the following pages and offered as a contribution to the literature on this particular subject to any who may be interested in knowing the whole truth as we found it. "Nothing to extenuate, and set down naught in malice."

G. W. M.
Introduction

The world has always had a so-called race question, which is but another name for the struggle on the part of one mass, class or individual for mastery over another, or the attempt to adjust relations to their mutual advantage while striving to achieve group ideals. The history of the world is but the story of this struggle which is hoary with age, yet always new, because the old oppressor of to-day becomes the latest victim of to-morrow. Perhaps it is putting it a little strongly to speak of oppressor and oppressed; it might be fairer to say that the never-ending battle is between those in power and those seeking to dislodge them; and, after all, the man on top occupies the more precarious position for the reason that his sleepless antagonist beneath will surely get the upper hand some day, as there is no way for him to move but upward; and move he must or be ground to pieces and disappear, which is itself movement. All the great nations have what we call a race problem due to the presence of so-called foreign elements in their midst. England has its Irishmen; France, its Jews; Germany, its many branches of broken races; Russia, its Poles and Jews. The statute books are filled with laws expressive of the aims of one element to maintain first place and of another to resist encroachments upon what it regards as its rights. Each side has its champions in legislative halls or upon the hustings and the record of their combats constitutes the history of the times. For, however crude the age or however barbarous and strong the master class, the oppressed have never been without a champion. Slavery is universally regarded as the lowest position a man can occupy in human society. Three hundred years ago, this institution in the eyes of many in possession of power, did not seem monstrous nor even altogether unkind.
INTRODUCTION

The desire to live is common and overwhelming. Ease and comfort seem to hold out the alluring promise of long life, and philosophical or religious sentiment has never been sufficiently universal or strong enough to prevent men from seeking the good things of life at any cost. Those who confederate in this search can see no wrong in what they may do to others provided the desired end is accomplished. The pious New Englanders were wont to thank God that they were able to save some “Negro and Indian heathens from the devyl by making slaves of them.” That these were more or less genuine efforts at benevolent assimilation in the first instance, in view of the privileges and immunities extended to those who were baptized, may be admitted. Nevertheless, as we now look back, we regard these notions as crude and entirely out of harmony with our modern views of Christianity. But they were a Bible-reading people—these New Englanders—and doubtless believed that they had cornered the very heathen which the Bible speaks of as being “given as their possession.” With such texts upon their lips in connection with the scarcity of labor, their relish for benevolent assimilation was kept sharp. The Indians absolutely refused to enter into the scheme and took to the woods; and the baptized Negro was far from being happy. This, however, made but little difference, as it was regarded as mere heathen ingratitude. Then again, these masters themselves had been accustomed to tyranny. Many of them were only now fleeing from a condition in Europe bordering on slavery. They had been used to seeing the poor and weak abused by the powerful. With scant supplies, they had just pitched their tent in this trackless forest. Force and strength of arms were the only capital that had any real value. Under such conditions the social pet is the giant who is able to defend his hut against all comers. The ethics of the school-man become ridiculous.

The Puritan panting for religious liberty, the pioneer thirsting for political freedom, the adventurer in search of gold, were all affected by the hard conditions by which they found themselves surrounded—conditions that made help in