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FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

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MASSACHUSETTS

EPISCOPAL SOCIETY

FOR THE

Religious Instruction of Freedmen,

HELD IN

TRINITY CHURCH, BOSTON, ON ASH WEDNESDAY
EVENING, MARCH 1, 1865.

BOSTON:

PRESS OF GEO. C. RAND & AVERY, 3 CORNHILL.

1865.

who are without the knowledge of Him whom to know is life eternal. On this broad Christian ground we come before you, asking you to co-operate with us in the plans which shall be submitted to your inspection for supplying these poor creatures with the knowledge of that Redeemer who for them as well as us was made a perfect sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction. I can only invoke God's blessing on this meeting, and pray that he may put it into the hearts of his people to do their part in hastening that blessed day, when all nations, kindreds, and tongues shall be gathered as faithful subjects of Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords."

The Rev. FRANCIS WHARTON then spoke in substance as follows:—

"As has been already said, the very nature of the demand made upon us by the condition of the colored people in the South calls upon us imperatively to come forward at once to their religious aid. In no branch of the African family does the religious element exist more fully than in those whose case we are now called upon to consider; and it would seem as if God had thus placed a great engine in our hands, not only for their own evangelization, but, ultimately, for the evangelization of myriads in Africa, whom, without this aid, we would not be able to reach. With proper religious instruction the colored man must achieve a high and useful position in the community; while without it he can only be productive of great danger to the State, and become a curse and a trouble both to himself and to those by whom he is surrounded. If this great work can be carried on; if we can plant in this people the principles of the Gospel according to the formularies of our church, with which so large a portion of them are already acquainted; if religion can thus be brought practically home to them,—they will not only be a most beneficent agent in society, but will become the greatest

means of evangelization that the church has yet found. But by whom is this work to be carried on? I am far from detracting from the usefulness of those agencies which are now devising means to supply their temporal and intellectual wants; but from the very structure of these societies, and the general character that they are compelled to assume, it is impossible for them to teach distinctively religious-truth. This work of religious instruction must therefore be undertaken by voluntary organizations connected with the Christian Church. It is to institute such an organization that this movement is designed; and to bring the question practically before this meeting, I now offer the following preamble and resolution:—

“*Whereas*, There are now collected in the South and South-west large numbers of freedmen and other colored persons who are accustomed to the worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church, but who are without the means of religious instruction:

“*Resolved*, That it is the duty of this church to take measures not only for the temporal relief of this large and interesting class, but for their further instruction in those religious principles which are essential to their welfare both in this world and the next.”

The Rev. Dr. NICHOLSON, in seconding the resolutions, remarked, “That the duty in this case seemed so plain as to shut off the possibility of any argument, and almost of any appeal. The resolution just read contemplates three things as the duty of our church towards the people thus providentially thrown upon our hands. The first is the contributing to their temporal relief. On this part of the subject we do not need to dwell; for all over the country the people are united in feeling the force of such appeals as this, and nowhere are there so many organizations for administering re-

trines which we as Episcopalians love and cherish so highly. There is, therefore, an undoubted obligation resting on our church to continue this work with the specific purpose of ministering to the souls of these men. They, as well as we, have been redeemed by the ever-precious blood of the Son of God; to them, as to us, belong the blessed promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and these considerations should lead us to address ourselves energetically to this work, with a deep feeling of its importance, and with an assured confidence that God's blessing will rest upon our efforts."

The Rev. Dr. HUNTINGTON, as one of the committee appointed to draw up a constitution and plan for the society, then read the following declaration and constitution:—

DECLARATION.

THIS Association is formed under a conviction that all Christians owe a special and immediate duty to the large class of colored persons now thrown upon the public care in poverty and ignorance, and, in their helplessness, rendered accessible to a Christian civilization. While a great part of the efforts expended in their behalf must of course contemplate their physical and mental improvement, it appears to be quite clear that these efforts must be accompanied by a distinct and faithful ministrations of the truth and the ordinances of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Christian religion is the source of all welfare and hope to the human family. All true education must aim to make men Christian believers and disciples. The instructions and influences of such an enterprise as this must, therefore, fully acknowledge the authority of a divine revelation, and the

great fundamental doctrines of "the faith once delivered to the saints." We frankly and cordially invite all our Christian brethren of every name, who agree in this conviction, and can extend to us their confidence, to co-operate in the relief and salvation of this suffering class of our fellow-creatures by contributing to our Treasury.

CONSTITUTION.

I. This Society shall be called "The Massachusetts Episcopal Association for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge among the Freedmen and other Colored Persons of the South and South-west."

II. The officers of this Association shall consist of a President, seventeen Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary, and three General Committees.

III. The Bishop of the Diocese shall be, *ex officio*, the President.

IV. The other officers shall be annually elected by a majority of the members present at the annual meeting, of which public notice shall be duly given.

V. The General Committees shall consist of five members each, and their duties shall be designated as follows:—

- (1.) A committee on Teachers and Publications.
- (2.) A committee on Correspondence and the Investigations of the Field.
- (3.) A committee on Finance.

VI. These officers together shall constitute an Executive Board, which shall control all the operations of the Association, — nine members constituting a quorum. They shall hold meetings as often as once a quarter, and shall render a

- of their doings at the Annual Meeting of the Association.
- VII. The Annual Meeting shall be held on the day after Ash Wednesday.
- VIII. A special meeting may be called by the President at any time, at the request of the Board.
- IX. Any person may become a member of the Association by contributing three or more dollars yearly to its funds.
- X. This Constitution may be amended at any annual meeting by a vote of two-thirds of the members present.

The Hon. ROBERT C. WINTHROP, in moving the adoption of the Constitution as presented, said, —

“I must be excused from attempting any formal address this evening. I came here to listen rather than to speak. I can add nothing to what has already been so well said by those who have preceded me. I fear I should only weaken, by repetition, the impression which they cannot fail to have produced on all who have heard them; but I am unwilling that the voice of the laity should be wholly unheard here tonight; and I cannot refuse to comply with the request of the Committee by whom the meeting has been arranged, so far at least as to express, in a very few plain words, the deep sense which I entertain of the interest and of the importance of the subject which has called us together.

“The terrible war which has afflicted our land for four years past has given occasion for many signal manifestations of philanthropy as well as of patriotism. It has opened new and noble fields of humanity in every direction; and nobly have they all been occupied and improved. Every year, every month, every week, I had almost said every day, has presented a new one to us; and the right men and

not imagine such a thing of a congregation gathered between the tropics, or among the descendants of tropical races. I have seen the workings of what may be called the extemporaneous system of worship among such people, and it has generally seemed to me to be a failure. On the other hand, if such a system as ours is not presented to them, and they still take an active part in the worship, they are exposed to the influences of a wild, ungoverned excitement, whose results are always injurious. Our system gives them sound doctrines and sound words to be learned, and makes them actors in the public worship. They learn with ease, for their memory is comparatively good, all those parts of the public worship in which the congregation join, and take great satisfaction in performing their share; while their excitement is regulated, and takes proper channels for its exercise. Nor do I rely on my own observation in this matter. I might have a bias. I have been struck with the testimony given by Mr. Frederick Law Olmstead, who travelled freely among them, and took especial notice of their religious meetings. In his work on the Slave States, he says substantially (I quote from memory), 'I am not an Episcopalian, but, after seeing a great deal of the religious worship of the negroes, I am satisfied that the discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church is eminently suited to their character; for if they are left entirely free to take what part they please, they become disorderly, and the victims of a purely animal excitement; and, if they have no part to take, their interest flags: so that the system of the Episcopal Church, as a happy medium between two extremes, is especially adapted to their needs.' This testimony is certainly impartial. I have the utmost confidence that such a system as we can present to them, with the instructions of educated men such as we can send among them, is just what they require; and therefore it is not merely from a sense