THE "NEGRO PEW"; BEING AN INQUIRY CONCERNING THE PROPRIETY OF DISTINCTIONS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD, ON ACCOUNT OF COLOR

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The "Negro Pew"; Being an Inquiry Concerning the Propriety of Distinctions in the House of God, on Account of Color by Harvey Newcomb

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PREFACE.

It is no pleasant thing to attack the prejudices of mankind; especially when they appear under the guise of gray-headed custom. It is no easy matter to perceive the propriety or injustice of manners and habits, to which we have been long accustomed. These are received by most men as the legacy of their fathers: and they forget to apply to them the touchstone of truth—the GOLDEN RULE of human society. If all the customs of *civilized life* were brought up to this ordeal, how few could stand? For example, suppose the church should set apart a seat in the extreme corner of the gallery, for all those who have *red hair;* and it should be generally understood that no such person would be allowed to occupy any other seat: Would a *red-haired* man or woman ever be found in the church? What opinion would they form of the religion which makes such invidious distinctions in the worship of the Great God? Yet, this is only asking red-haired people whether they would like to be subject to to the same rule that is applied to those who have *black faces.*

No man would be willing that his constitutional peculiarities, which God gave him, should exclude him from equal privileges in the house of God. It therefore follows, that no one ought to desire any of his fellow-beings to be subject to such exclusion, for a similar cause. To prove, illustrate, and enforce this point, is the object of the following pages. The author has taken up his pen, not for the purpose of finding fault, or railing at his brethren; but from a firm conviction that justice requires this at his hand, in behalf of an oppressed and injured people, whom he is not ashamed to call his brethren, though the fancy of some may prefer white to black. He has aimed to approach the subject in the spirit of candid inquiry; and he hopes no one, in reading these pages, will have occasion to accuse him of exhibiting a *belligerant* spirit, or of indulging *bitterness* of feeling. He would not *denounce as no Christians*, all those who have silently fallen into an old custom, founded in unrighteousness and the spirit of oppression; but he would *entreat them as brethren*, to lay aside prejudice, place themselves, in imagination, in the condition of these people, and in a spirit of meekness and prayer, ask whether they can reconcile this practice with the law of love, by which our Saviour has required us to be governed in all our intercourse with others.

The author is an uncompromising advocate of EQUAL RIGHTS: by which he does not mean *Agra-*

rianism, which would make an equal distribution of property; for this would be rank injustice, and it would take away one of the motives to industry, implanted in our nature. Nor does he mean that all men, without respect to character and qualifications, should be compelled to mingle in social intercourse, or be permitted to occupy the same station; for this would be also unjust, and would remove one of the strongest earthly motives to mental and moral elevation. But he means, that every man is entitled TO BE ESTEEMED AND TREATED ACCORDING TO HIS SOCIAL, MORAL, AND INTELLECTUAL WORTH; and that no other test of character can be either just, or consistent with the spirit of the Christian religion. This may be called *radicalism*, *ultraism*, or what not. But it is the true spirit of the Bible. It is the dictate of nature. The spirit which excludes the colored man, who possesses intelligence, refinement, and piety, from equal privileges in the house of God, in our parlors, and at our tables, would exclude him from heaven, if it could enter that holy place. But, thanks be to God, he is 'no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.'

Boston, January, 1837.

THE 'NEGRO PEW,' &c.

CHAPTER I.

PREJUDICE: Its origin; its influence on the minds and consciences of men; its effects upon the rights and interests of others.

'Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.' JOHN vii, 24.

As *Prejudice* is the root of the evil designed to be reached in this work, it may not be amiss to devote the Introductory Chapter to a consideration of this mischievous principle. I propose, therefore, to examine its origin, its influence over men's minds and conduct, and its effects upon the rights and interests of others. And

1. *Its origin.* Prejudice is one of the fruits of the general wreck of human nature, consequent upon the fall; by which the higher and more noble powers of the soul have come into subjection

to the corrupt inclinations of the heart. Hence, in relation to some things, with men of cultivated intellects, and sometimes even with good men, reason is dethroned, and the decisions of the mind are controlled by caprice, or by the summary determinations of the will, under the influence of wrong principles. This judging according to first impressions, outward appearance, inclination, or feeling, without thorough examination, is very properly denominated *prejudice*, or *pre-judging;* because it is judging before the case is fully understood, and upon false principles. It is this that is expressly condemned by our Saviour, in the passage which stands at the head of this chapter. 'Judge not *according to the appearance*, but judge *righteous judgment*.' That is, the case must be thoroughly examined and understood, before we pass judgment; and then our decision must be made according to truth and equity, without regard to our own feelings, partialities, or private interests.

2. *The influence of Prejudice over the minds and conduct of men.* Prejudice, in its various forms, modifications, and degrees, pervades all classes of men; and to a greater or less extent, influences all their decisions and conduct; and this will probably continue to be the case, so long as