A FINE LECTURE.

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REV. J. C. SIMMONS’ TRUTHFUL

AND LIFE-LIKE PICTURE

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Of Religious Zeal, Superstitions and

Plantation Life of the “Negro

Before the War.”

The M.E. Church, South was well

filled Friday evening by an appreciative audience that assembled to listen to a lecture by that venerable old patriarch among the ministries of the Pacific Coast, Rev. J. C. Simmons.

As a preliminary Miss Josephine Brown rendered a very pretty guitar solo. As soon as she had concluded Mr. Simmons arose, and after an apology for his voice, somewhat impaired by the grip, immediately began one of the most entertaining and instructive lectures ever heard in this city.

His theme was “The Negro Before the War,” and nobody who heard him can doubt for a moment that the picture

he presented was from real life and drawn with a master hand.

Mr. Simmons is thoroughly equipped as a successful lecturer. He is capable of sublime flights of eloquence, possesses wonderful descriptive and imitative powers, tells a story well and alternates pathos and humor in a manner that pleases and fascinates.

He began by a very amusing description of the fashions that prevailed half a century ago, and in contrasting them with those that prevail today declared that if young people were to dress now as they did then the spectacle would be better than a monkey show.

This allusion suggested the thought that the order of things as well as fashion is constantly changing, and led up to a discussion of the social and industrial changes in the condition of the negro.

The lecturer was born in the South and his father was a minister and a slave-owner. As his early days were passed on the plantation he had ample opportunity to study negro character and familiarizes himself with negro customs and traditions.

The lecturer declared that in those days the people of the South did not regard slave-holding as harmful. He caused something of a stir when he declared that the origin of the institution of slavery was in the North, but the people of the section found it unprofitable and sold their slaves to the South.

Concerning the abolition of slavery, the lecturer declared that during a recent trip through the South he did not find a single person who regretted that the negro is free. The would not return them to servitude if they had the opportunity to do so.

The speaker described the negro before the war as a simple, impulsive and excitable race, but declared that there were no happier or more contented class of laborers on the face of the earth. They were without a care in the world. They had plenty to eat, worked leisurely and when they were sick had the best of attention. An owner would no more think of abusing or overworking a negro than he would of abusing or overworking a horse he prized.

Many people of the North associated with the thought of slavery the lash, the merciless master and cruel driver. This idea is erroneous, the speaker declared. There were as cruel men in the South as there were elsewhere, but they were the exception and not the rule. During his thirty-four years’ residence in the south be never saw but one negro whipped.

In describing the warm attachment that as a rule existed between the white families of the South and their slaves Mr. Simmons related his own experience; the sorrow at parting when he turned his face to the great West, the joy upon his return twenty-six years, and the great love with which his old nurse and the colored children with whom he played in childhood received him. His description of the scene that occurred at the grave of his father and mother, between himself and a former slave who for eighteen years had cared for those graves, was touching and pathetic.

Mr. Simmons declared that it is easy to preach to negroes because they are trusting, confiding and very sympathetic. It is easy to excite

much religious fervor and zeal among them and such a thing as infidels among the negroes is unknown.

The lecturer related a great many incidents tending to illustrate the religious enthusiasm of the negro race, some of his descriptions of revival meetings among the race were in the nature of a revelation to the audience. He declared that the only ma n who ever brought him unceremoniously to his feet by the power of eloquence was

a negro exhorter who did not know a letter in the book.

The speaker described the singing of the negro as marvelous in rhythm, time and melody. There was something about their own compositions which no white person could imitate. Their superstitions and implicit belief in ghost stories were dwelt upon at considerable length.

Perhaps the most realistic feature of the lecture was the description of a ”corn shucking.” There were no corn

b\_\_\_\_ in those days. These shuckings invariably occurred at night. The corn was first picked from stalks and thrown in a big pile about the cribs. The clapboards were removed so that the corn could be thrown into the crib. Then the negroes on all the farms for miles around were invited. They divided inti two squads, each having a captain. The pile of corn was divided as nearly equal as possible by means of a long board or rail. Each squad would take a half of a pile and then the contest began. From start to finish the negroes sang corn-shucking songs, the two captains in the meantime standing on the pile of corn and encouraging their men. To the winning side was accorded the honor of carrying the owner of the farm on their shoulders. They would seat him in a cane-bottom chair and, bearing him aloft, march in procession around the house, singing plantation melodies. The ceremony finally concluded in the dining-room, where the negroes feasted on the best that the farm afforded. We can vouch for the correctness in every detail of Mr. Simmons’ description of a corn-shacking, for we have witnessed many of them.

We regret that lack of space makes it necessary for us to pass over many interesting features of the lecture. It ought to be published in full for preservation. It is a chapter in the literature of slavery days that should not be lost. It is impossible to do it justice in the limits of a newspaper synopsis.

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January 19, 1901, *Woodland Daily Democrat,* p.1