

Abolitionists of Ontario



Fugitives and Freemen

Voice of the Fugitive, March 12 1851, page 1
by J. E. Ambrose

Colored People in Canada - Grants of Land to them - Settlements - Difficulties - Advantages, &c.

Donation of Land.

The first, and only donation of land, made to them by the British Government, was somewhere about the year 1820. When General Simco became Governor of Canada, he requested the home government to lay out, and donate to the colored people, a township of land lying on lake Simco. It was granted, and called Oro.

Land lying on Owen's Sound is now given away, not to colored persons exclusively, but to any person who will settle upon it. By improving it, he can have 50 acres and the privilege of buying the adjoining 50 acres.

Settlements.

About 1820, twelve families started for Oro Township and made a commencement, but they all left except one man by the name of Overall, who is now living there, has eight children, and 800 acres of land. The first public proclamation by the Governor, that there was such a township, was made in 1827. In 1829 thirty-three families settled upon it. There is supposed to be about that number now. It is not however known now by those with whom I have conversed whether this land has reverted back to Government or whether it might still be occupied by the colored

people.

Some colored persons have recently gone up to Owen's Sound, and are making an effort to settle upon the land in that section. The distance north, and the deep snows during the winter, are objections in the mind of those who have been fanned by southern breezes. Still, to those raised in the northern states, these objections cannot weigh much, for the probability is, that the winters there are no colder, nor the snows deeper than they were formerly in the New England, or the northern part of the state of New York. The land is said to be good and the timber superior.

There is also a small settlement at Greensbush, but there is not much prospect of any increase.

In 1824, 460 individuals contracted with the Canada Company for the township of Biddolph, and were to pay for it in ten years. They only paid for 1100 acres. It lies near London; is thickly settled, and is called the Wilberforce Settlement.

King's settlement lies about twelve miles south of Chatham. Mr. King is a Scotchman, a Presbyterian minister, and was a short time since, a slaveholder in one of the southern states. True to the dictates of conscience, reason, and the Word of God, he refused places of honor and profit, freed his slaves, went to Canada, and in company with others, bought a large tract of land comprising nine thousand acres. This land in lots of fifty acres, Mr. King sells only to colored men of industrious habits, allowing them ten years to pay for it, at two

"Self-reliance is the True Road to Independence"

dollars and fifty cents per acre, with six per cent interest. This first payment down is twelve dollars and fifty cents. I had the pleasure of forming a short acquaintance with Mr. King. He is emphatically the man for such a movement. Learned, talented, energetic, adapted to any situation, loving God and man; determined to stand by the colored man unto death; the settlement with God's blessing must prosper. The land is sold to them for the same as it cost.

There are a large number settled in and about Chatham village, also in the town of Dawn. In these places, land can be bought of individuals for three and four dollars per acre.

At Sandwich, Malden and Colchester, on the Detroit River and Lake Erie, there are large settlements. Besides these, they are scattered over various other parts of Upper Canada. It is about sixty years since they first began to emigrated to Canada.

Difficulties With Which They Have To Contend.

To any extent they have not been accustomed to plan for themselves, others laid out the work, and they have performed it. In this respect they are like children. A large portion of them never cleared up land. Hence, after they planted themselves in Canada, and commenced clearing a piece of land, no one need be surprised when he learns that some of them become discouraged, and give it up as hopeless. Most of the colored people are wanting in firmness and independence. This is owing to the crushing influence of slavery upon them. They have been made to bow their backs to the burden, and their necks to the yoke, and taught to regard the whites as their superiors. This want of knowledge in planning, and lack of firmness and perseverance in execution has operated very much against their prosperity.

In connection with above, consider their extreme ignorance of the first rudiments of the English Language. Intelligence and improvement join hand in hand, so do ignorance and sloth. The colored people will progress in the agricultural

pursuits, and in the Arts, no faster than their knowledge of the sciences increases. This ignorance has subjected them to the base designs of white men. They have gone among them in the character of ministers, teacher and politicians, not to benefit, but to devour them. This has been one of the greatest obstacles in the way of their progress.

Added to this, may be the wicked and cruel prejudice exercised towards them to some extent, even in Canada. While the whites have looked upon their multiplied sorrows, arising from their circumstances, instead of extending the helping hand, sympathising look, and speaking a word of encouragement, they with few exception, have increased their afflictions by saying, "see how badly they manage, we have always know that they could not take care of themselves!" They have not only suffered from the prejudice in Canada, but the same which pervades almost all classes in the States, has prevented teachers from going among them, and missionary societies, with one exception, from doing any thing for their temporal or spiritual welfare. Thus they have been left alone to make their way the best they could. But, notwithstanding all their difficulties, thousands have become freeholders, and are good livers.

Advantages.

His political advantages are the same as the white man; The laws of England or her province know no such distinction as white or colored. In the light of her law, "a man is a man for all that."

Any man in Canada, who as the saying is "boils the pots" or is a house-holder, can vote in the election of all dominion officers. To be qualified to vote for a member of Parliament, he must live there seven years; so that the colored man not only possesses the invaluable privilege of the Elective Franchise, but is eligible to office. It is amusing to me, said a settler at Dawn, to see white persons who are candidates for some office, previous to election, bowing to colored men, and enquiring after their health. Surely the vote of a colored man is as mighty as that of a white man. I was informed that around Chatham, the colored people hold the

balance of power between the Conservatives and the Radicals. Under these circumstances any person can see that office holders will work for the interest of the colored people, when otherwise they would not.

The educational advantages are as good as can be expected under these circumstances. Mr. King of whom I have spoken, has, at his settlement, built a commodious log house, where a school under a competent teacher is constantly kept. The house is occupied for religious worship, and Mr. King preaches to the people.

At Dawn, on the Sydnephane river, there is a school in operation under the control of the Board of America Baptist Free Mission Society. Mr. Fuller, now dead, obtained money of the Quakers in England, and purchased 300 acres of land on this river for the purpose of establishing a manual labor school for the education of colored people and the Indians, but it was not exclusive in regard to any. I was informed by many persons in Canada, and in Detroit, that at various times, large sums of money had been collected for the institution; but there is very little about the premises to answer as receipts for the money. The house occupied for a school and meeting house is made of logs, besides this there are some four other buildings, log and frame - poor things at best. A steam saw-mill and a frame barn complete the number. The location is a beautiful one: a navigable river for a large class of boats, and the land is of the first quality.

For some time past there has been no school in operation. Last fall the institution, by the trustees, was placed under the control of the Baptist Free Mission Society, and in December Elder Davis commenced a school. I think the success of the Society in projecting and putting into successful operation the New York Central College during the last four years, is a sufficient guarantee to the public that the Society will spare no labor necessary to put the school in flourishing circumstances. There are also private schools taught by individuals and by missionaries in different places. I cannot say whether there is any common school system with extends to them.

What They Need.

Among many things which they need for their benefit, are talented and efficient men and women, laboring with them as teachers and ministers. They have suffered much in years past for a sufficient number of them. They have also suffered much from divisions and distractions, occasioned as I believe, more by ignorant colored men, and some not so ignorant; and designing white men, who aspire to be leaders among them, than all other causes put together.

There is nothing strange in this, that persons who have been enslaved all their lives, when freed, should aspire to lead. It is a natural result, taking human nature as it is. I was somewhat amused at the reply of a colored brother when I took him by the hand and enquired his name, and whether he was a member of the Church. Said he, giving me his name, "I am a deacon of this church, and it is my business to keep things in order." It was spoken very modestly. He was very honest in speaking his feelings. There is no doubt many a white deacon, who thinks as did this colored brother, if he does not speak it.

This desire to lead, which is manifested by colored people when associated together, and which no doubt is the cause of much disunion in their churches, will be overcome by the increase of knowledge among them. That this knowledge may be increased, they must have true men and women among them. In Elder W. P. Newman, Elder David, Elder Wm. King, before named, they have talent, education, energy, piety and genuine integrity, men who would not refuse to hazard their lives for the true interests of those among whom they are laboring. These are no doubt others, but not being acquainted with them, of them I cannot speak.

The Agricultural advantages are as good in Canada West as they are in the states. Land is cheap, and there is no difficulty in the way of an industrious colored man in obtaining 50 acres of land.

Advice.

My advice to all the colored people living in the states, the laws of which do not recognize them as citizens, is to emigrate to Canada. I believe it will be for their interest, for the following reasons:

1 It will be a long time if ever before the wicked laws concerning colored people which disgraces the statute books of these States will be erased and righteous ones occupy their place. The political hostility to them is so great, and the prejudice so deeply rooted, I solemnly believe that a change will not take place for the better without a revolution.

2 The law of Canada respects them as men. There the elective franchise is theirs and they may in a few years, if industrious and persevering in the acquisition of knowledge, send one of their own number to represent them in the Provincial Parliament. Although there is some prejudice there, yet the laws being with the colored man, the prejudice must give way. A corrupt public sentiment formed the unjust laws which deprive them of citizenship in the States, and these laws now make a formidable obstacle in the way of reforming public sentiment.

Let them go then where the majesty of the law will be thrown around them, and under the support of these laws be elevated to the dignity of men and women. But if any choose not to go, I beg of them to leave the cities and villages, and locate in the country on farms, and bring their children

up to habits of industry and economy. They never can live in cities. Let those who have some means and have enjoyed the advantages of an education, set the example by taking the lead. They cannot do their own people a more temporal good.

A quaint writer once observed “that God made the country, but men made the cities.” He might have said with as much truthfulness, the Devil instead of man. With but few exceptions it is impossible to any extent to diffuse among the inhabitants, principles of reform. Why, I ask, do they linger where their hopes of elevation and true prosperity are entombed forever?

J. E. Ambrose, Elgin, Ill., Feb 8, 1851

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