

12. Samuel Robert Cassius (1853-1931)

Born a slave in Virginia, Cassius was the progeny of his enslaved mother and white owner. During the Civil War, his mother moved to Washington, D.C., and Cassius enrolled in the first school for African Americans in the capital.

Mr. Lincoln opened his receptions to the ex-slaves, and I can well remember my mother taking me by the hand and going to the White House to see the negroes Moses. I shook hands with Mr. Lincoln, and remember the scene as though it was yesterday. I saw old, grey-headed men and women not only shake hands with President Lincoln, and weep tears as they kissed his hand . . . [he] made no distinction in color, and the only comment ever made on it was one of commendation.

He married in 1874, moved to Brazil, Indiana, in the 1880s, and he became a member of the church of Christ in 1883. He began preaching in 1885 and moved to Iowa in 1889. In 1891, he moved to the Oklahoma Territory to share life with a community of blacks independent of white domination where he lived until 1922. He was an educator, minister, farmer, postmaster, and politician. He fathered 23 children (11 with his first wife, Effie, who died in 1895 and twelve with his second wife, Selina whom he married in 1898). Cassius, after living in Ohio, Minnesota, and Los Angeles from 1922-26, ultimately settled in Colorado Springs, Colorado where he died.

In the Oklahoma territory, he published a paper, *Industrial Christian*, and started as school Tohee Industrial School, which opened in 1899 but it did not survive but four months. He farmed, served as postmaster of Tohee, and served as a minister.

In 1920 (with an enlarged revision in 1925), Cassius responded to Thomas Dixon's racist novel *The Clansman* and to D. W. Griffith's movie *Birth of a Nation* with his own *The Third Birth of a Nation*.

There are churches that would not allow me to enter their pulpits, on no other ground than that I am a negro. There are church-members that would not eat at the table with me, nor take me in their houses. I know Christian elders that have paid my lodging at a common hotel, where cursings and swearings and vulgarity was all that I heard. All this I have had to endure, nor because I could not interpret the world of God, or was not as well recommended, or did not wear as good clothes as white men, but simply because I was a negro, and either himself, wife, daughter or son would not endure my presence for a single day or night. I say again, there is not a populated mile of ground on the earth that is not in need of evangelization.

I had to win my way through religious prejudice in my own race, and race prejudice among the brethren of my own faith.

I may arouse passions that will cause my people to be hung, shot and burned under every tree in the South, or I may start a wave of sympathy that will roll over the land which will make such common things impossible for these to occur again.

When a member of churches of Christ asked Cassius, "But what do you think of that 'fiend,' Sam Hose, whom the good people of Georgia burned?" He replied: "My brother, you had better ask what I think of the 'fiends' who did the 'burning'."

I hope you will again allow me to speak through your valuable paper, in order that I may defend my race because according to Bro. Moffett's report concerning colored missions, as it appears in last week's supplement; one could be inclined to think that the 'NEGRO' was so inferior from an intellectual point of view, and so weak from a spiritual stand-point, that it was a matter of impossibility to a colored man with enough common sense to do evangelistic work among his own people.

I never saw Brother Lipscomb but once; but he knew me and tried to draw from me the possibility of a writer, but I failed so completely . . . It was perhaps that failure to make good on that book, "The Negro a Beast," that awoke in me a desire to be ready at all times to give a reasonable reason for any thought on those things that affected me, or my religion . . . Lipscomb regarded the negro as a man, and a Negro Christian as a brother . . . In his death the colored disciples have lost one of their best friends."

I fully believe that the promoters of the plan were strictly honest, and were zealous toward my people as I am this day, but their zeal was not according to knowledge. They forgot that four hundred years of slavery and bred a prejudice that even zeal for the cause of Christ could not overcome, and that in the mind of every white man lurked the thought that the Negro was, in some way, inferior and that the Negro himself had been taught to suspect and fear the white man. If, as I then suggested, that the work had been placed in the hands of colored men, and our white brethren had simply encouraged and financed the work, I feel safe in saying that where we now have few hundred colored disciples we would have had tens of thousands.

I think I can claim originality in the race problem. I am positive that I am the first man to publicly proclaim the negro question as a problem. Also, when I was in my twenty-third year I took the stand that industrial training was the negro's greatest need [similar to Booker T. Washington], and in both of these issues I was hampered by the early training of that Christian woman. I could only see the accomplishment of such a work through the Church, and doubting the righteousness of all sectarian churches, I advocated the idea that the future of the American negro rested with the Church of Christ. It was this that got me in bad with my race and has kept me there.

I have been tried in the fire. Nine years ago [1896] I was tried by death: my wife, child, and five horses died. Then I was tried by hail and rain and wind, and lost three crops out of five. Now I am tried by fire, and if \$1,500 was placed in my hand, it would not replace all I lost in forty minutes last night. [His home was totally destroyed by fire.]

After forty-two years as a Christian minister...his greatest disappointment is to go into a new field, and labor among the unsaved until a real interest is worked up, and then go to the Churches of Christ of that state, county or town, and ask for help to continue the work, and to have the elders tell you that it is as much as they can do to look after their own congregations, and turn the poor preacher away without even a 'God bless you.' In nine cases out of ten these very brethren have encouraged the poor preacher to sacrifice his time, neglect his family and endure hardships.

