

Articles by Henry "Hy" Pickering

Henry "Hy" Pickering

All material used by permission of the author, as published on
plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at <https://plymouthbrethren.org/author/158>

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Which One is the Heathen?

In the Franco-Prussian War, there was then a great International Hospital in the town of Sedan, at the head of which was a distinguished doctor from St. Bartholomew's Hospital. He died there from confluent smallpox caught from a patient and was so much beloved that he was given a military funeral which was followed by the troops of both armies and headed by the Mayor of Sedan.

This distinguished physician was Dr. C. J. Davis, generally known as "the good black doctor." He came from Barbados; his father was a European, his mother a Barbadian. He himself was as black as ebony, a tall and distinguished-looking man. A few days before his death, he sent to Mr. Hy Pickering the following account of his last journey, one week before he succumbed to this fatal disease.

He had been staying with friends in Yorkshire, and came up to London to cross over by the tidal express from Folkestone Harbor, there being then no pier. At Charing Cross, he walked slowly along the platform looking for a seat, for the train was very full. At last he found one next to the platform and facing the engine in a first class carriage. Opposite to him sat a little old lady with very bright eyes, busily engaged in knitting. Next to her was her somewhat stolid and burly husband. In the far corner, a gentleman sat reading *The Times* while at Dr. Davis' side were two elderly and prim ladies.

The doctor, being tired with his long journey from the North, put his hat on the rack, and donned a dark velvet smoking cap, whose blue tassel and gold embroidery

gave him a striking appearance. He leaned back in the seat, and with closed eyes, heard the following conversation, for the train had hardly cleared the platform when the little lady opposite began. She turned to her husband:

"What a handsome man, John!"

"Hush, my dear, he may hear what you say."

"And what if he does?" retorted the lady, "He can't understand a single word."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"Oh, John, you are so foolish. Can't you see who he is?"

"Well, no, my dear; I can't say that I do."

"Why, he's one of those African princes you read about that have come over to see the Queen. He's as black as coal."

"You can't be sure, my dear, who he is," said John feebly.

"I tell you he's an African prince," said his little wife with decision. "Isn't it awful, John, to think that that poor heathen is now leaving this country, and probably doesn't even know he's got a soul? I call it disgraceful."

Just then the train was passing the Crystal Palace on the right. Its panes of glass were shining like diamonds in the rays of the afternoon sun.

The lady remarked, "These huge palaces of amusement do a lot of harm. Boys and girls do pretty much as they like now; while as for morality, the less said the better."

Dr. Davis saw his opportunity, and in the purest English, said, as he slowly opened his eyes and leaned forward, "Morality, ma'am?"

The little lady nearly had a fit. She sprang right off her seat, and as she came down again, said faintly, "Oh, sir, I'm so sorry. I'd no idea you understood our language. I don't know what you must think of me!"

"I think you said 'morality,' ma'am?" repeated Dr. Davis.

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And what is morality, ma'am?"

"Morality, sir, is a very good thing. We couldn't do without it, could we, John?"

"Well, no, my dear, I don't think we could. At any rate, sir, we are not going to try."

"Morality, sir, is a very good thing for both worlds," added his wife.

"For both worlds?" he inquired.

"For both worlds, sir. There is another besides ours. Indeed, there are two; one is called heaven, and the other is called hell."

"And what are they like, ma'am?"

"Heaven, sir," replied the woman, delighted that she had actually got into conversation with "the African Prince," "is where the angels go, and all the good people go—all gold and glass, and harps and happiness; and hell, sir, is where the Devil is, and is a dreadful place, where all the bad and wicked people are—all flames and horrid darkness; and we must go to one or another when we die."

The "African Prince" leaned forward, full of interest.

"And how can we get to heaven, ma'am?"

"Well, sir," said the little lady, with a triumphant look at John, "it's quite easy. Of course you must be good, and kind to all, and forgive every one their offenses. And you must be baptized and sorry for your sins, and go to Church and take the sacrament, and love your enemies, and help the poor, and do as you would be done by, and—and that's the way to heaven, isn't it, John?"

"Quite right, my dear," and then in a low voice, "but if you go on with this conversation you're sure to get into a mess." And then to Dr. Davis, who was still politely listening: "I might say, sir, if you wish any further information on these matters, we have a most excellent clergyman at Folkestone, who will tell you all you wish to know. I can give you his address."

"Sir," replied the black doctor, "we are travelling at fifty miles an hour, and I should like to be sure now of the way to heaven."

"Well, sir," interposed the little lady, rather piqued, "haven't I just told you word for word, just as it's written in the Bible?"

"The Bible, ma'am?"

"The Bible, sir. The Bible is God's Book, written to tell us the way to heaven. You'll find it all there exactly as I've said, and of course, as my husband told you, if you would like to see our clergyman, you will find he knows all about it as well."

"Oh, ma'am," said the doctor, "I should much like to see it in the Bible."

"And so you shall, sir," replied the little lady, who proceeded to hunt in her bag. After she had rummaged

in it for some time without success, she turned to the unsympathetic John, "Have you got a Bible anywhere?"

"No, my dear, I haven't; and you had much better leave the gentleman alone."

Nothing, however, could daunt the lady's missionary zeal. "Excuse me, sir," addressing the gentleman in the corner, "Have you a Bible?"

"No, I have not, ma'am; and I consider these religious conversations in railway cars most improper."

"Have you a Bible?" pursued the little lady, nothing daunted, turning to the two spinster ladies in turn.

"No," replied each one in succession, "I'm afraid we have not."

"Dear me," said the lady, "I fear, sir, we haven't a Bible in the carriage. I'm so sorry. But I have told you word for word the way to heaven; and as John, my husband, says, our vicar will be most pleased to see you at Folkestone."

"I wish I could see the passage now," said Dr. Davis with a sigh, as he leaned back again and closed his eyes.

The little lady gazed earnestly for a time at her hearer, and then she gave a little sigh, as she took up her knitting once more, and retired from the mission field. There was a silence again in the carriage as the train roared through the dusk of the evening.

After a while, Dr. Davis slowly felt in his coat pocket, and drew out a small book. Leaning forward once more, and holding it out, he said to the lady, "Was that what you were looking for?"

"Oh, dear, yes, sir. Why, that's the Testament—the very book."

"The Testament, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir. The Bible has two Testaments; there is the Old Testament and the New."

"And which is this, ma'am?"

"This, sir, is the New."

"And which tells us the way to heaven?"

"Why, the New, sir; that's the very book."

"Would you kindly show me the passage you spoke of, ma'am?"

"With pleasure, sir," said the lady, bright again with missionary zeal, taking the book in her hands.

She rapidly turned its pages, first one way and then the other. Then, after casting her gaze on the ceiling for inspiration, she turned them over again, the doctor's eyes being fixed on her all the time.

After fumbling in vain for some minutes, and getting very red, she turned to her husband, "John!"

"Yes, my dear."

"Do you know where that passage is that tells us the way to heaven?"

"No, I don't, Maria; and you see what a mess you've got into. I haven't the least idea where it is."

In despair, the lady rapidly turned over the pages once more, but all in vain. "I'm afraid, sir, I can't lay my hands on the exact passage. I know it's just about here. My poor head is not so young as it once was, and I can't think of the verse. But it's all there, sir, exactly as I told you, for I know it by heart."

“Would you allow me, ma’am?” said Dr. Davis very politely, gently taking the Testament out of her hands, and turning the leaves over to the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16, which he indicated with his finger. “Was that the passage?”

“Oh, dear, yes, sir; why, they are the very words. Just as I said. Now, sir, you can read it for yourself, and see it’s all true,” and she lay back triumphantly.

“Would you allow me to read this passage aloud, ma’am?”

“Certainly, sir, do.”

So Dr. Davis read: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“There, sir,” said the lady, in high spirits and evidently without any suspicion of the storm about to burst, “the very words I told you. I’m so glad you’ve found it. I knew it was there.”

“One moment, ma’am. I should first like to say a word to the gentleman in the corner. Sir, I don’t know who you are, or what you call yourself, but of one thing I am sure. The man that says that a British railway carnage is not a place where a supposed heathen (which I thank God I am not) may learn the way to heaven is unworthy of the name of Englishman!”

The little lady quietly applauded.

“But as for you, ma’am,” he continued, “are you not ten times worse? I came into this carriage and you believed me to be a heathen Prince, and seemed anxious to tell me the way to heaven; so I asked you, and you told me I had to do this, and that, and the other, and you have

never opened your mouth to tell me one word of what Christ has done for me. Not one syllable of all you told me is to be found in this glorious text; and no word that it contains has passed your lips. You have utterly misled me. Your religion is two letters short. It is 'D-O,' do; and mine is 'D-O-N-E,' done; and this makes all the difference."

The poor missionary collapsed, while the supposed heathen proclaimed the glorious gospel of the Cross to a now attentive audience, until the train drew up at Folkestone Harbor Station.

On his way to the boat, Dr. Davis felt a slight tug at his overcoat. Turning round, he found the two spinster ladies at his heels. "Oh, sir," said the one who had given the pull, "you will excuse us, but we could not let you go without thanking you for the blessing your words have been to us. We always thought we had to do our best to get to heaven, and never understood that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had done all the work of atonement for us, and that we can now know that we are saved."

"Sir," she continued, her eyes full of tears, "we shall have to thank God to all eternity for this afternoon."

In a week, Dr. Davis himself had passed away to his eternal rest. The journey had been an arduous one, but the destination had long since been assured.

Copyright Uplook, Used by Permission

-->