

ARTICLE VII.

THE NEGRO SOUTH AND NORTH.

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It has been my good fortune in the last ten years to have the opportunity of studying with some care the negro problems of two large cities, Atlanta and Philadelphia; and I want in this article to institute some comparisons between the social problems that surround these groups of negroes.

First of all, we must not forget how different a social and economic revolution the Southern city is passing through from the conditions of things in the North. From the plantation economy of the slave *régime* to the elaborately organized industrial city of modern times is a far step, and when taken in haste gives rise to grave social disturbances. All along the way from Philadelphia to Atlanta one may see rising the bare ugly walls of factories; from Atlanta to New Orleans appear smoking mines and foundries, from New Orleans to Galveston, and from Galveston back to Savannah, are the broad white fields of cotton to clothe the world; and in the midst of all this industry are the growing network of railways, the expanding trade, the spreading cities, and the more and more eager race for the new wealth. One has but to contrast this with the stately languor, the half-shabby gentility, of the old plantation life, to realize how vast a social upheaval is here beginning. The old economy, manner of life, ways of earning a living, and ways of thinking are slowly changing. The sons of the masters are crowding elbows with the poor whites; the

poor whites are rushing to town, into the mills and factories, behind the counters, in the counting-rooms, and in the legislative halls. Old social conventions, exclusive social classes, and the more ceremonious etiquette, all are falling before the rule of business and commerce and the leadership of the newly rich. Here are social problems enough—problems of birth and breeding, of education and technical training, of business ethics, of municipal administration, of political expediency. There is necessarily the moral ferment that must accompany economic change—the vaster questions of right and wrong in man and neighbor and city and nation.

I do not mean to say that the economic stage of development in Georgia makes it altogether different and distinct from Pennsylvania. They have much in common, many similar questions and equally puzzling duties; and yet, without doubt, measured by the historical evolution of social groups, they stand full fifty years apart, and the same forces that in the forties changed Philadelphia from a provincial capital to a modern city are to-day at work in Atlanta.

But there is one great likeness: forty thousand strangers have been placed in both Philadelphia and Atlanta. But Philadelphia with her more than million souls almost forgets their presence, save when the sweat of their writhing disturbs the more fastidious. In Atlanta it is different: there the negroes are not four, but forty, per cent of the population, and may not be ignored or forgotten. What now is the attitude of these cities toward these dark strangers? what is their antecedent judgment of them, their state of mind toward them? Here is the most striking difference between the Northern and the Southern city, and the place where mutual understanding is most difficult. To the Northerner, the vindictive race hatred of which the South's actions so often give evidence

seems, at first, proof of thorough rascality and down-right meanness; but when he meets honest and intelligent Southern white men, and still finds the deep-seated negro prejudice, he changes his opinions, and transfers the rascality and meanness to the Southern negro. And so too with the Southern white man: with his education and training he cannot understand the theoretical attitude of the North as to the equality of black and white when he finds this theory accompanied with exclusion from work and many other disabilities, and so he explains the whole thing either by imputing hypocrisy to the Northern whites or concluding that they do not know the negro as Southerners do.

Now it is manifest that neither of these explanations really touches the root of the matter. The man who thinks that the attitude of the white South toward the negro is based primarily on a rational study of his low social condition will find that the major part of the Southern problem is simply inexplicable on that thesis. So too the industrial exclusion and neglect of the Northern negro is not wholly accounted for by the crime and laziness of the negro or the hypocrisy of the whites. All such attempts to explain the negro problem leave out of sight the main decisive factor, namely, the enormous influence of those preconceived notions of what the negro is, and can be, into which the average white American is born, which are persistently implanted in his mind throughout his childhood and youth, and which, both consciously and unconsciously, have tremendous influence over all his opinions of, and actions toward, the negro. This psychological fact must not be ignored or unduly minimized by sane and honest students, but must be dealt with as one of the most decisive factors in the whole situation. Take, for instance, the great mass of the white population of the South,—leave out the lawless and grossly

ignorant, and the small politicians who fatten on the South's misfortunes, and take the mass of honest, decent, and sincere men who really wish their country's best good,—how has their judgment of the negro been formed? by a calm, dispassionate study of the facts? Certainly not, but rather in the midst of war and pillage and political rascality,—in excitement and hatred, in poverty and strife. Out of this unfavorable environment these men have gained their opinion of the negro. Not primarily from observation, but from their cradles they have been taught to believe, and to-day they do believe, that negroes are not men in the same sense that white people are; that they are good-natured and faithful creatures, and in their proper spheres useful to the community, but that the mass of them, by reason of small natural ability, low moral responsibility, and physical build, are doomed to be always the servants and inferiors of the whites.

This deep-seated belief of the average Southern white man is not due to any careful study of his black neighbors, but is received, like his religious creed, from his parental discipline, education, and environment. When now, grown to mature years, he looks about for facts to illustrate and support this belief, he has no difficulty in finding them among a poverty-stricken and proscribed horde of freedmen. It is therefore this antecedent prejudice of honest and candid men—this ingrained and long-taught belief in the inferiority of certain persons—that is the kernel of the problem in the South, and must be dealt with as such, and not lightly or dishonestly explained away.

Turning now from the South to the North, we find still in cities like Philadelphia unmistakable traces of this same mental attitude. How many Philadelphians hold their opinions of the negro as a result of inquiry, study, or personal investigation?

Rather these opinions are a legacy from their fathers, or the currency of their social set, or the result of their dyspepsia. Nor is this strange—most of our stock beliefs and ordinary knowledge is, and must be, of this order. But the test of successful civilization is the ability, in a man or city or a nation, to put his opinions or prejudices to the severe test of truth when occasion calls, or discard the worse for the better. This, most intelligent inhabitants of a great modern city will when aroused at least try to do; and here lies then the difference in attitude between the North and the South. Not that the prejudice of the South is based on rational knowledge, or that prejudice in the North has disappeared, but that in both sections there exist those deep-seated preconceptions of the negro and his ability; but that in the South, owing to the gravity and weight of the problem, and its entwinement with a bitter past, these prejudices are more deep-seated, and more difficult to influence by reason and investigation; while, in the North, an appeal to reason and fact has a larger chance of at least being listened to.

So much for the attitude of mind toward the forty thousand strangers that are to be found in these two cities—in the North, some prejudice and much passive indifference; in the South, deep-seated and active prejudice, strengthened by home training and education, adopted like a creed, and later in life fortified by the social misfortunes of a large negro population. This then is the social environment. Let us now turn to the group itself. It is an interesting thing in any Southern town to notice where the negro population lives; sometimes, as in Savannah, the distribution of the population resembles a great O, with the whites in the center and the blacks in the circle around; in Albany, Georgia, the straight central street divides the town almost into a black and white half; in Atlanta we may picture

the negro population as stretched like a great dumb-bell across the city, with one great center in the east and a smaller one in the west, connected by a narrow belt. The homes of the colored people are, on the whole, less pretentious than those of the average Philadelphia negro; perhaps thirty-five per cent of the colored people of the latter city live in one- and two-room tenements, while over sixty per cent of those in Atlanta are thus crowded together. The houses, like most Southern homes, are frail boxes, poorly protected from the weather, but, so far as dirt and sanitation are concerned, they are not very bad. The average negro family of Atlanta lives in two or three rooms and pays from three to eight dollars a month rent. Out of five thousand Atlanta negroes, males, three thousand are laborers, one thousand artisans, and five hundred servants. Of the remaining five hundred, two hundred are clerks, mail agents, proprietors of hack lines, etc., one hundred and fifty are teachers and professional men, and one hundred and fifty business men. Compared with Philadelphia, there are proportionately fewer servants and more laborers; twice as many artisans and a few more business men. The range of work among the laborers too is wider, but less remunerative; they are employed on the railways, in laying street-car tracks, around stores and mills, sometimes as telegraph and telephone linemen, and the like. While their sphere of employment is broad, it is nevertheless strictly limited; they are rarely given positions of authority, such as those of foreman or director, and never if this would bring white persons under them. Moreover, there is a sort of color line in employments, and those occupied by negroes are seldom entered by whites, and *vice versa*. The great exception to this is among some classes of artisans, and more especially in the building trades.

The wages received by negroes in Atlanta are low. Let

me cite some instances: Here is a cook—tall, well-clad, can read and write, and is twenty-seven years old. She has been at her place five years, and receives five dollars a month; another cook of twenty-five has worked three years for eight dollars a month. In general, wages of women servants vary from five dollars to ten dollars a month; male servants earn from ten dollars to twenty dollars. A hod-carrier gets seventy-five cents a day, and is employed a little over half the time. A common laborer on the streets gets four dollars and a half a week; a carpenter gets one dollar and twenty-five cents a day; a good baker six dollars a week; a good shoemaker one dollar a day; an extra good painter two dollars a day.

The cost of living in the South is, for a certain common grade of existence, low. The rent, as I have said, rises from two dollars a month for a single room to six dollars or eight dollars for three rooms, and seven dollars to ten dollars for four. About one-eighth of the families own their own homes,—mostly three-, four- and five-room cottages. The items of food vary, of course. Here is a family of two who spend six dollars a month for food, another eight dollars; a family of five, fifteen dollars a month; a family of three, six dollars a month, and so on for the ordinary laborers. Among the better class here is a wheelwright with four in the family who spends fifteen dollars a month for food, and a carpenter who spends thirty dollars monthly for the feeding of a family of six.

On the whole, these people present more uniform conditions of life than the same people in a Northern city, and at the same time evidence of more primitive development. It would be impossible in Atlanta to find worse negro slums than exist in the fifth and seventh wards of Philadelphia. On the other hand, one cannot find as many educated and cultivated families

as in the North. And yet, between these extremes, there is in a city like Atlanta perhaps the best exemplification of the potential development of the great middle class of negroes,—the artisans and small merchants, with a sprinkling of teachers, ministers, and physicians who go to make up the leavening mass of modern society. They are a free-hearted, kindly, and unconventional group, given to gossip and small talk, divided into cliques and circles with and without reason, aspiring but walled in, and above all laboring under a deep and all-pervasive and yet half-complacent sense of wrong; they expect to be wronged and oppressed in some way, and their usual attitude of mind is not whether they are going to be deprived of some present right or privilege, but, rather, which right will go next. It is hard for one who has not lived in this peculiar atmosphere to realize just exactly its strange psychological effect,—the sort of dull fatalism that creeps over you and half paralyzes you; the calm way in which you come to discuss matters which under other circumstances would make your blood boil; the sort of dumb silent antagonism that fills and darkens the very air, even while the sun shines, and the merchant sells, and the drivers laugh and yell at their mules.

To illustrate better what I mean, let me again remind you that here we have between thirty and forty thousand negroes brought into close contact with fifty or sixty thousand whites. Our task is now to see at just what points this contact takes place, and what its character is. First, as to the city government: if you examine the officials of the city you will find no black face; if you go into the city council there are no black members. Now this is not in itself as remarkable as a further fact, which you will learn later, and that is, no member of the city council represents a black constituency; or, *vice versa*, the thirty-five thousand blacks are absolutely without representa-

tion in the city government. Now see what curious results this brings about. In the first place, it gets rid of a part of the more ignorant and venal voters, but it does not stop there. It places the intelligent and thrifty negroes of Atlanta, who pay taxes on a million and a quarter dollars' worth of property, absolutely at the mercies of the worst class in the community, which commands a vote. Now this point is so often forgotten that it needs emphasis. If in a community there are three voters and one person without a vote; and if, of the three voters, two are honest men and one is a rascal, then, in the absence of special ties binding the honest men to the non-voter, that disfranchised man is at the mercy of the rascal in the majority of cases; for his vote, being sought for by the other two, could gain as to its price almost any measure of oppression against the outcast. This would have been the very A B C of politics to an American audience of fifty years ago, but our ideas of the primary meaning of the franchise have become so muddled in recent years that some explanations are often necessary. Now substitute, in my example, for the two honest voters, the great mass of honest and well-meaning business and professional men of a city like Atlanta. Let the rascal be typified by the mass of selfish and narrow-minded citizens, with a large percentage of illiteracy and an inherited dislike for the negroes. Under such circumstances the oppression to which the disfranchised negro is liable is peculiar. Take, for instance, the schools. Atlanta has about nine thousand negro children of school age. In the negro public schools there is seating capacity for perhaps three thousand of these; by cutting the school day in two, and letting one set of children come in the forenoon and another in the afternoon, possibly five thousand are accommodated, leaving three or four thousand to roam the streets and grace the

chaingang. Now how are new school-houses to be obtained? They cannot "agitate," for their agitation is not backed by votes; they must simply sit and wait until every interest backed by a vote has had its inning before their turn comes, and naturally they have been waiting some ten years, and they may wait ten more. Or take another instance: here is a city officer who hires negro laborers or lets a contract to a negro contractor; the next election placards fly about the city, and the white labor vote snows the official so deep that his successor only gives negroes work that no white man wants. There is in Georgia permissive legislation which allows cities to separate the races on street-cars by giving the negroes the rear end of the car, and the whites the front. This is, however, seldom enforced, as the self-interest of street-car companies forbids it. Recently, however, we have had a curious experience in Atlanta. The old street-car line which covered the main part of the city was thought to be getting rich, and the city council chartered a rival line. The rival line bid for public favor by announcing that it would follow the state law, and separate the races on its cars. The only effect of this at first was to drive the negro patrons to the old line. Then the new line, which had meantime "influenced" a few extra councilmen, put through a city ordinance compelling all street-cars to discriminate. The result is to-day that the black population of Atlanta must walk, or ride in the rear.

So far I have, without explanation, simply said that the Atlanta negro is disfranchised; and yet, so far as the letter of the law is concerned, he can vote. To understand this apparent contradiction, one must remember that in Georgia the white primary and the boycott stand in front of the law. In the primary election, which is the real election, all white men, no matter what their politics are, are admitted, and no

negro is admitted. The primary nominates a man, and his nomination is ratified by a formal election, at which few take the trouble to vote. The mayor of Atlanta is usually elected in a total poll of seven hundred votes. Now in such a system there are obvious flaws: first, it would seem possible for a black Democrat to compel the party managers to admit him to the primary by recourse to the courts; and, secondly, the negroes could flock to the polls on the legal election-day, and either cause the white voters the trouble of two elections or the triumph of a rival to the party nominee. These things and many others are *possible*, but they do not happen by reason of the tremendous force of crystallized public opinion. The social standing, the business credit, the ultimate success, of the white men depend on their bowing to this unwritten law; while the negro is held by the fact that his bread and butter, his home and the protection of his family, depend solely on the good-will of the white employers, and this good-will he cannot afford to jeopardize by vainly flying in the face of public opinion.

This public opinion in a city like Atlanta has some foundation. A considerable proportion of the negro electorate is naturally ignorant and venal. The great mistake of Atlanta, however, and the central mistake of the South, is to draw race lines, instead of lines against ignorance and bribery. Honest restriction of the right of suffrage to those mentally and morally fit to use it is to-day the need of the South. But the way to accomplish this end is not to appeal to and fan the flame of race prejudice, and thus eliminate a part of the ignorance by eliminating all black voters. The politicians and social philosophers who are to-day using and deepening race prejudice in the South, for this and other more selfish ends, must remember that the worst and gravest result of this cam-

paing is the discouragement and weakening of the best class of negroes. Even granting all that is charged as to the poverty, laziness, and crime of the unrisen mass of the freedmen, a system of human government which makes this an excuse for their exclusion, and at the same time excludes with them the thrifty honest and intelligent, is a contradiction and a lie.

More than this, the isolation and exclusion of the best is the very thing that makes the best fewer in number and weaker in influence. In a city like Atlanta nearly every good social influence like that of the church, the public library, lectures, and the best theaters is either entirely closed to negroes or allowed to them under conditions which no self-respecting man or woman could accept. On the other hand, in the saloons and gambling-hells, in the bawdy houses and jails, and the slums and alleys, the color line wavers and almost disappears.

A system which *discourages* aspiration and endeavor, *encourages* crime and laziness. What can the South expect from the policy which, under her trying and difficult position, she persistently pursues—what can she expect but a large harvest of crime?

Just how much negro crime there is in the South, and what its exact characteristics are, is hard to say. Certainly it is not particularly crime against womanhood. Such a charge is the natural exaggeration of a community which is passionately fearful of race amalgamation between negro men and white women. On the other hand, it is untrue to suppose that the jails full of black folk throughout the South represent *only* prejudiced courts. That negroes are punished where white men go free; that no negro's testimony weighs as much as a white man's; that an elective judiciary militates especially against the negro—all this is true. It is also true that the

negroes, as a mass, are guilty of stealing, brawling and fighting, burglary, and gambling; that numbers of their young men drift into dissoluteness, and their young women into lewdness—all this is too true. And yet is it strange? Is it a peculiar race characteristic? Is there any set of human beings on earth who, if enslaved, and then proscribed and discouraged and persistently hemmed in like the Southern negro, would not find an outlet for its animal energy in crime?

I have dwelt at length upon the situation in Atlanta and the South, because that of Philadelphia and the North is better known to us, and needs less explanation. One thing must not be forgotten, however, and that is the intimate connection between Northern and Southern conditions on account of migration. Migration has been the great weapon of the negro against oppression and distress. The movement to the black belt in the seventies was a huddling for self-protection far more than a climatic wandering, as it is so often described; the rush to town in the eighties was a movement to escape the oppression of the country districts; and in both these decades, and in the present one, every check and discouragement has meant a migration northward, and indeed the whole negro population of Philadelphia and similar cities is largely a search for fairer conditions of life than the South affords. Philadelphia, then, has an interest in the negro problems far broader than that centering in her own forty-five thousand black citizens. If the South fails to settle the negro problem, she will hand it over to the North, and if the North cannot deal justly and fairly with present negro problems, what will she do with those of the future.

And even beyond that, as we scan the world to-day, it is plainly manifest that the attitude of the civilized world toward the darker peoples in Asia, Africa, America, and the islands

of the sea is to form the master problem of the twentieth century—the world-problem of the color line. And those who hope to see out of the shame and oppression of the past a new and broader humanity arise and cover these dark millions, are looking westward for the first signs of promise.