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THOUGHTS ON THE NEGRO PROBLEM.

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AMONG the problems which the people and government of the United States have to deal with, there are three which observers from the old world are apt to think grave beyond all others. These three are the attitude and demands of the labor party, the power which the suffrage vests in recent immigrants from the least civilized parts of Europe, and the position of the colored population at the South. And of these three, the last, if not the most urgent, is the most serious, the one whose roots lie deepest, and which is most likely to stand a source of anxiety, perhaps of danger, for generations to come. Compared with it, those tariff questions and currency questions and railway questions with which politicians busy themselves sink almost to insignificance. It is a large and complicated problem: nor can I, in the few pages which the editor of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW asks me to devote to it, attempt more than to sketch briefly some of the salient features which it presents to a European who revisits the South after an interval of seven years, and who, while knowing far less of the details than well-informed Americans know, has the advantage of being free from sectional feeling or political prepossession.

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Let us see what are the broad facts of the position as it stands to-day at the South.

The total population of the sixteen States in which slavery existed up to the Civil War, together with Kansas and the District of Columbia, is now 23,875,259, of whom 16,868,305 are white and 6,996,166 colored. In the Gulf States, together with Arkansas and South Carolina, there are 4,519,005 colored, against 6,139,295 white. In three States, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana, the colored people are in a majority over the whites (2,003,116, against 1,552,869), while in the more northerly and hilly States, such as West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, the whites greatly outnumber the colored. A comparison of the last few censuses shows that the colored population is gradually shifting from the higher and colder regions to the hot semi-tropical lands that border on the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. It is an even more important fact that the rate of increase of the colored population appears by the census of 1890 to be much lower than that of the whites. In the above sixteen States the white rate of increase from 1880 to 1890 was 24.67 per cent.; colored rate, only 13.90 per cent. In the above eight States the white rate was 29.63 per cent.; colored, 19.10 per cent. In South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana the white rate was 17.24 per cent.; colored, 15.31 per cent. Although, therefore, the colored race grows, it grows only in regions to which it is climatically adapted, and it grows, except in a few places, much more slowly than the white race. Time is on the side of the latter.

Both in the middle Southern and in the semi-tropical States, and alike in the cities and in the rural districts, the colored people form the lower stratum of the population. In the lower and hotter parts of the Gulf States and of South Carolina they do all the field work; in the cities and in the mining and manufacturing regions their labor is almost entirely (though less so from year to year) unskilled labor. Very different descriptions of their condition, especially in the agricultural districts, are given by different observers. But two facts stand out. The one is that few, in proportion to the total number, have acquired wealth by commerce, or have risen to any sort of eminence in the professions. The other is that, unlike the negroes of the West India islands, they are generally industrious, working pretty

steadily, whether as hired laborers or as the tenants of small farms, and that they are, though no doubt by slow degrees, learning thrift and self-control.

When it is remembered that the grandparents or great-grandparents of many of them were African savages,—for the importation of slaves was not forbidden till 1808,—we must not be surprised that large masses, especially in Louisiana and Mississippi, remain at a low level of intelligence and morality, with rudimentary notions of comfort and still dominated by gross superstitions. Still less is it strange, considering that only twenty-five years have passed since they were slaves,—slaves to whom it was an offence to teach reading,—that the great majority should lack even the elements of education. So far from finding these facts discouraging, he who travels through the South now is surprised at the progress that has been made since 1865. History and science tell us that social and moral advancement is an extremely slow process, because it issues from a change in the physical as well as mental nature of a race. Compare the negroes even of the semi-tropical States with the negroes of the coast of Guinea or the lower Congo or of Hayti, and the advancement is undeniable. Something may be ascribed to the difference of climate, which makes labor both easier and more necessary; but much is also due to the influence of the white people and, indirectly, to the spirit and tendency of American institutions. The best proof of progress is the fact that the negroes have begun to help themselves; that they are supporting their own churches and schools more liberally, organizing charitable societies for their own benefit, showing an increased desire for education, and profiting by it. They have proved the truth of the converse proposition to Homer's famous saying that a man loses half his worth when he is enslaved. Freedom has done for them in twenty-six years more than any one who knew how slavery left them had a right to expect.

One thing, however, freedom has not done. It has not brought the colored people any nearer to the whites. Social intercourse is strictly confined to business, unless where the negro is a domestic servant; and is far less frequent and easy than in the days of slavery. Then in the home establishment and on the best plantations—plantations like that Dabney estate in Mississippi of which so pleasing a picture was lately given in Mrs. Smedes's

book—even the field hands were on familiar terms with the master and mistress, while the children of both colors played together. This has entirely ceased. In some States the negro is allowed to enter the same street-cars or railroad cars; in some he is less rigidly than in others kept apart in places of public resort. But everywhere in the South he is confined to schools and colleges for his own race; he worships in his own churches; he mingles in none of the amusements, he is admitted to none of the social or industrial organizations, which white people, even the humblest of them, enjoy or form. Most significant of all, his blood is never mixed with theirs. The intermarriage of the races is forbidden by law in all or nearly all* the Southern States, as well as in some Western States; but legal prohibition was scarcely needed, for public sentiment is universally opposed to such unions. Those illicit relations of white men with colored women which were not uncommon in the days of slavery have almost wholly disappeared; and it is now a rare thing for a child to be born with parents of different colors. No intermediate race grows up to link the other two together; for, though there are mulattoes and quadroons, born under the old state of things, they are all reckoned with the negroes.

This social separation does not spring from nor imply any enmity between the races. The attitude of the richer and more educated whites in the South is distinctly friendly to the negro. They like him for his many amiable qualities; and they remember that, when during the Civil War all the men fit to bear arms had gone off to fight the North, the white women and children, left unprotected behind upon the plantations, dwelt in perfect safety, with not even an insulting word to fear. The lower class of whites have somewhat less kindly feelings. The negroes used formerly to despise those whom they called "poor white trash"; and the poor whites, in their turn, were all the more proud of their skin because they had little else to be proud of. In the cities and mining districts the white laborer feels some jealousy of the negro, and is anxious to assert his superiority. Yet, even in these humbler ranks, it would be incorrect to speak of hostility. There is a strong feeling of separation, but there is also a desire to live peaceably and amicably together. Negroes are sometimes

* Mr. F. J. Stimson's valuable book, "American Statute Law," mentions such prohibitions in every Southern State except Louisiana. Whether such an enactment now exists there I am unable at this writing to ascertain.

lynched or shot by individual whites whom they have offended. But in the wilder parts of the South and West whites also are lynched, and though less frequently than negroes, yet sometimes with circumstances of barbarity.* Allowing for the lawlessness which prevails in the more backward districts, for the tendency to cruelty which the sense of power creates, and for the habits formed in Ku Klux days, the negro fares better than might have been expected. But race prejudice is very strong—far stronger than in the British or Spanish West Indies. It shows no signs of declining; it is unaffected by the merits of the individual. A negro who gains wealth or wins for himself a good position in the profession of medicine or law or teaching is no nearer to social equality than a negro blacking boots in the street; and this remark applies to the Northern as well as to the Southern States.

As regards civil rights, those rights of the citizen which the law gives and protects, equality is complete in the public as well as in the private sphere. The negro has not only the suffrage on the same terms as the white, but he has the same eligibility to every kind of office, State office equally with federal office. But although this equality has existed on paper for more than twenty years, the benefits which it has actually secured to the colored people have been so small that one may doubt whether they have substantially gained by those famous amendments of the federal constitution which secure these active civil rights. Since the carpet-bag governments fell, during the years between 1870 and 1876, few indeed have been the negroes who have been elected or appointed to any but the very humblest offices. Although they form in some States one-third, in others one-half or more, of the population, they are seldom elected to a State legislature, or to any post of consequence in State or city government.

It is the same with federal offices. Even the party which gave the negro civil rights, and has ever since advocated his cause, scarcely recognizes him for appointments. This may be explained or excused on the ground that so few negroes have the education required for the better sort of offices, though education is little enough regarded where the services of a white partisan have to be rewarded. It is the same at the North as at the South, although the much smaller proportion of negroes to the popula-

* There was a case some few months ago in which a white woman was flogged to death in the mountains of Tennessee.

tion makes the contrast between what is legally permitted and what is actually enjoyed less striking. The Northern people seem just as unwilling as the Southern people to have a negro set in a post of authority over them. In this exclusion, however, there is no legal wrong to any one. Being everywhere more influential, and in all States but three more numerous, the whites are entitled to prefer candidates of their own color.

It is otherwise as regards the exercise of the electoral suffrage. In the more northerly of the old slave States, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, the negroes are everywhere in such a minority as to cause no apprehension; and in these States, therefore, they can cast their ballot freely, like other citizens, and are said to use even more freely than other citizens the privilege of getting something for it. But in most of the Southern States, though less so in Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Texas than in the States which have the largest colored population, their vote is very largely suppressed. In the days between 1870 and 1880 this suppression was mostly effected by violence, the negroes being driven or frightened from the polls or maltreated at the polls in one of the ways to which the name "bulldozing" has been applied. Latterly gentler methods have prevailed. Sometimes fraud is used in taking or counting the ballots. Sometimes ingenious and technically legitimate devices, like the Eight-Box Law of South Carolina, are resorted to. Sometimes the well-grounded belief of the colored voters that in some way or other their votes will not be allowed to take effect is enough to prevent them from coming to vote at all.

There are no doubt districts, in some even of the Gulf States many districts, where neither force nor fraud is employed. There are minor elections in which it is not thought needful to interfere with the natural course of things. But, speaking generally, the fact is too well known to need either proof or illustration that over large areas and in really important elections, such as those for Congressmen and for Presidential electors, the colored people are not suffered to use the rights which the amendments to the constitution were intended to secure. One of the ablest and most influential men in the South, now unhappily lost to it, said to me in 1881: "Do not mistake our position. We know the negro and we like him. We are treating him well, and

we mean to treat him well. But we vote him, and we must vote him." These words fairly describe the facts, and fairly express the mind of the Southern people. They are as true now as they were ten years ago.

The problems which this statement of the position suggests may be reduced to three :—

First—How is the negro to be elevated ? The English who settled North America have had two lower races to deal with. One they have extruded from his ancient seats. The other they brought from his native continent to serve them. The African has now so multiplied that their interests no less than their duty oblige them to labor for his well-being. If he remains ignorant, uncultured, swayed by passion rather than by reason, he cannot but be a source of danger, as well as a reproach to Christian civilization.

Secondly—How is the social antagonism between the races to be lessened ? That it is not prescribed by a law of nature appears from the fact that there are places where it is, if not wholly absent, yet far less strong and far less palpably obtrusive than in the United States. Of social equality I do not speak ; but the sharp and harsh social separation which now exists is fraught with trouble, and may become dangerous when the weaker race has grown in intelligence and courage.

Thirdly—How are the anomalies and contradictions of the political position to be overcome ? The negroes have got the suffrage, which in America is the source of all power. But the vast majority of them are confessedly unfit for the suffrage. It has been solemnly guaranteed to them by the constitution ; and they are not suffered to enjoy it. Such a situation has more than one element of evil in it. It is a standing breach of the constitution, a standing violation of that respect for law which is the very life-blood of democratic institutions. It is calculated to provoke resentment and disaffection on the part of more than seven millions of people. It suspends the natural growth and play of political parties at the South, forcing the negroes to stick to one national party, irrespective of the (often far more important) local issues which State politics present ; forcing the Southern whites also to hold together as one party upon one issue, instead of dividing and regrouping themselves according to the questions which the changing conditions of their country bring from time to time to the front. Thus it perpetuates sectional-

ism, a grave mischief in national politics, even though the danger of another secession may have wholly passed away. And last of all, perhaps worst of all, it accustoms the Southern politicians, among whom elections were at one time purer than in the Northern cities, to a course of fraudulent evasions or perversions of the law and of good faith which cannot but distort their own political conscience and undermine that citadel of free government, faith in the elective system and obedience to the decision of the majority. If voting ceases to be honestly managed, people will cease to respect the results of a vote, and the community is thrown back to the old régime of brute force.

To describe thus in these strong terms the shadow which the political side of the negro problem throws over the South is not, I think, to deepen that shadow unduly. Many dispassionate observers use words even stronger. "It may have been a blunder to confer the suffrage on the negroes," such an observer will answer when the history of the matter has been pressed on him. "Probably it was a mistake. But to deprive the negro of it by force or fraud when the constitution has given it to him is an offence which must, if it continues, permanently injure not only the political character of the South, but the constitution and government of the republic itself." That there is some truth in this view sensible Southerners admit. But, as they remark, it does not follow that the proper remedy is to proceed at once to secure for the negro the actual enjoyment of his chartered rights. There are features in the case which must be regarded before adopting so apparently simple a solution of the problem.

One of these features is the unfitness of nine-tenths of the colored people for the privilege which has been thrust upon them. The fifteenth amendment was a hasty and desperate remedy for evils which, crying as they were, might probably have been gradually removed in a less rude and drastic way. The favorite democratic dogma that the gift of a right carries with it the capacity to exercise that right has enough truth to tempt enthusiasts to apply it rashly. No application was ever so extreme as the enfranchisement of the five-years' freedmen of the South, a mass of people not merely ignorant, but destitute of the very rudiments of political aptitude. Children of ten would have been fitter for such an experiment. What wonder that they remain unfit now? The peoples of western Europe, peoples nat-

urally far more gifted, as their primitive literatures prove, have been played upon for some two thousand years by various civilizing influences, and have had many centuries of experience in the arts of government. As we all know, large sections of their populations are to-day scarcely fit for electoral rights. But it is little more than a century (if we strike an average between the earlier and later importations) since the negro of west Africa came in contact with civilized man ; only a quarter of a century since he was made a legal person capable of holding even private civil rights.

But the matter is more serious, in the eyes of Southern whites, than this general statement of unfitness conveys. The unfitness of the negro was demonstrated on a colossal scale and with ruinous results in the reconstruction period, when his vote, manipulated by the so-called white carpet-baggers, ruled the States that had seceded, placed unscrupulous adventurers in the highest posts, wasted the public revenues, piled up stupendous fabrics of State debt. The whites cannot forget that dismal period ; and their recollection of it makes them vehemently resolute that power shall never again pass into the hands which so misused it. It is not revenge, it is not hatred, it is the instinct of self-preservation, which governs them ; an instinct which soon affects Northern men who settle in the South, and which (I strongly suspect) is not without its influence even upon men living in the North who invest their capital in Southern undertakings. This anxiety to prevent the negro from making the force of his vote felt in elections may seem overstrained, and even morbid, to an outside observer who notes the vast superiority of the whites in wealth, intelligence, and the power of organization. But he is forced to admit that both it, and the social separation which keeps the races more widely apart now than they were in the days of slavery, are natural results of the days of carpet-bag rule.

A third feature of the situation is the fact that the great bulk of the negroes have not hitherto valued the suffrage, and do not greatly resent being virtually deprived of it. It must be remembered that there are among the colored people not only different classes, but different races, some of which are greatly below others in intelligence and capacity for progress. The majority to whom I refer, most of them from the Guinea coast, are not only ignorant, but at the same time sluggish and volatile. They

know too little and care too little about politics to have the same sense of injustice and loss which any mass of white men, even the poorest and most ignorant, would feel in the United States. They were not individually better off when they did enjoy the right of voting and ruled their respective States by means of it. Though ready to support the Republican ticket when roused, especially by their preachers, they have no settled, abiding purpose of asserting themselves. The comparatively small minority of educated and property-owning colored people suffer less in their own persons, because they are less frequently interrupted in going to the polls. There are no doubt those who do complain warmly of the wrong practised on their brethren, and sometimes talk of taking action about it. Yet among them one finds not a few who recognize the hard facts of the case, who see that their race needs moral progress rather than political power, who perceive that they and their brethren might suffer more from any increase of irritation on the part of the whites than they would gain by a forcible assertion of their rights even under the protection of the federal government. There are also many whose aspirations lie entirely in the direction of material progress. They wish to improve their own position, and know that political agitation will do nothing for them. There is, I think, more active indignation among the colored people in the Middle and Northern States at the injustice suffered by their race in the Gulf States than exists in those States themselves; and there is also more resentment at the very scanty share in federal offices which the colored people receive.

This is a fact that makes for peace and good feeling. It may be thought to reduce materially the element of political danger in the situation. But it must be remembered, on the other hand, that education is making way everywhere among the negroes, even among the half-barbarous masses that inhabit the lowlands along the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. Before long the influence of newspapers may be far greater than it now is. The number of well-educated men of color, men who have had a college course and who will feel more acutely than the ignorant the social ban that rests upon them, increases fast. Education at a certain stage brings risks with it. Says Bishop Atticus G. Haygood, than whom the colored people have no better friend:

"In his educational development the negro is just now at the danger-line,

—of which he, most of all, is unconscious. So far his education has developed wants faster than his ability to satisfy them. In the most of them the result is discontent; with many, unhappiness; in some, a sort of desperation; in not a few, dishonesty. . . . This state of things grows out of a natural and universal law of humanity; and is peculiar to the American negro because he is now, and by no fault or choice of his, in this crisis of development. The poorest people are not those who have little, but those who want more than they can readily earn. That many half-taught and unwisely-taught negroes go to the bad is not surprising. In these matters the negro's weakness illustrates his brotherhood to his white neighbors. The prisons show enough half-educated white people to prove that merely learning the rudiments does not secure virtue. In all races it is true that with new knowledge new temptations come: strength to resist comes after, if at all. In all this a man of sense finds no argument against the education of the negro, but a demonstration of the need, for him and for the white race, of more and better education."

This class of half-educated colored people, who can read, but have not yet learned to think, and are beginning to be averse to manual labor, increases daily, while the generation which had the deference, and often the affection, of the slave to his master, will soon have passed away. It is, therefore, possible that the problem may within the next twenty or thirty years enter into a phase more threatening than the present.

Even as it stands, however, there is much to disquiet the men of the South who are most directly affected; much to make the men of the North desire the removal of a state of things which interferes prejudicially with the natural course of national politics. Many are the solutions that have been proposed; some too bold and sweeping to come within the range of practical statesmanship; some too obviously slight and partial to deserve discussion. Space permits me to advert to two or three only.

One, less frequently advocated now than formerly, is the mixture of the two races by intermarriage. Of this it is enough to say that, while the negroes do not desire it, the whites detest it, and that not less in the Northern than in the Southern States. Even in commonwealths where mixed marriages are lawful they are extremely rare, and are visited with the severest social reprobation. Nor is this feeling unreasonable. So far as one can conjecture, the white race would lose more by what is called "miscegenation" than the negro would gain. Civilization would be thrown back. Parts of the country in which the white race had become thoroughly mingled with the black would be out of accord with those where the whites had remained distinct.

Scarcely less impracticable is the plan which seeks to get rid of the negro question by getting rid of the negro—that is to say, by transporting him from America back to his own continent. A large undertaking, indeed, to take seven millions of people, who might have grown to eight or nine before the operation had been completed, uproot them from their homes, and “dump them down,” like so much slag from a furnace, in an already populated country, where the appliances of civilization exist in the scantiest measure. The negroes, even those among them who complain of their treatment in the United States, have never shown any wish to leave the territory of the republic. Some of them go West, like the whites, from the older South to Texas or Kansas or southern California. Few or none emigrate either to Africa or to South America, which has been suggested as an alternative place of expatriation. If they were all expelled from the United States, it would be necessary to prevent their return by laws even stricter than those directed against the Chinese, coupled with a severe transport system.

Moreover, the Southern whites, uneasy as they are in States like South Carolina and Mississippi, would not wish to lose this vast body of workers, who cultivate the soil of regions where white labor cannot contend with heat and malaria. There are no doubt many districts formerly tilled by slaves in which white farmers have now begun to establish themselves; and wherever white labor can fairly compete with black, the former is found to be more productive. But there are also extensive hot lowlands into which it would be necessary to bring coolies from India to raise cotton, rice, and sugar, were the negro population withdrawn. Although, therefore, this solution has been recently advocated by some able writers, it seems to be decisively condemned by considerations of humanity and of economics, as well as by the immense practical difficulties which would surround its execution.

The proposal that the whole nation, which gave the suffrage to the colored race by the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the constitution, should undertake to protect them in its exercise by the intervention of the national government, deserves a somewhat fuller discussion. It was lately embodied in a bill laid before Congress by an able and rising statesman, one of the foremost men in his party. As everybody knows, the other party

alleged that the measure was prompted, not by sympathy for the negro, but by a desire to reap the full benefit of his vote at congressional and presidential elections. Those, it was said, who enfranchised the negro in the reconstruction period, having now found that the only result of that enfranchisement has been to make the representation of the South larger as against themselves,—since the negro vote, though in fact suppressed, increases that representation,—are now resolved at all hazards to recapture some of those States and districts which it was their aim in 1870 to keep forever attached to themselves. A European observer need not inquire what basis there may be for this charge. It is enough for him to remark that, even were it well founded, it would not affect the merits of the proposal to protect the negro voter by conducting national elections under the authority of the national government. There is a very strong presumption in favor of enforcing a law which actually exists. Under the constitution the negro has the suffrage. He is—this nobody denies—in many districts practically excluded from the enjoyment of it. Two courses are open. If the law cannot be enforced, it ought to be repealed. If it cannot be repealed, it ought to be enforced. No one supposes it can be repealed. Those, therefore, who advocate its enforcement by that very authority which made it have a weighty *prima-facie* case. Whatever may be their secret motives, they come forward as the protectors and vindicators of law, of orderly government, of democratic principles.

The first argument used against this proposal was that it would be unconstitutional—a point which cannot profitably be discussed here, though one may observe in passing that, while the federal control of elections would depart pretty widely from previous usage and from what may be (somewhat vaguely) called the general conventions and tendency of the constitution, most lawyers would be inclined to think that the letter of the constitution covers it. But there are practical objections of undeniable weight. One of these is that such a remedy would be but partial, since it could not extend to protect the negro in State elections. Another is that it might lead to breaches of the peace and even to conflicts between federal troops and an angry population—conflicts whose results in accentuating sectional feeling must be disastrous. Whether or no things would go so far as this, no one who travels through the South can doubt that the interference

of the federal power would exasperate men's minds. It would be resented both as interference with State rights and as the act of a hostile majority acting in its own party interests. It might stop, or at least greatly retard, the progress of the colored people by inflaming white feeling and by disposing the whites to withhold those large sums which they now vote for negro education. It would certainly intensify race antagonism and social divergence, so that one is not surprised to hear that many thoughtful negroes believe their own people would lose in the social sphere more than they could gain in the political, and declare that the irritation of Southern sentiment against them would outweigh any benefit to be expected from the strict enforcement of their legal rights.

A stranger who seeks to examine the proposed measure by the light of American history and European experience will be apt to think that it is an attempt to overcome nature by force of law. The negroes have been unable to protect themselves in the exercise of the suffrage because they are naturally inferior to the whites—inferior in intelligence, in tenacity, in courage, in the power of organization and cohesion. This inferiority was forgotten or disregarded by those who gave them the suffrage. But it made itself painfully felt, first in the badness of the State governments which the negro vote supported, next in the collapse of those governments, and in the ease with which the whites have been able to dominate ever since. Power naturally falls in a community to the strongest, and law undertakes a tremendous task when it attempts not merely to protect the ordinary civil rights of a backward race, but actually to force the rod of authority into their feeble grasp. It is true that all that federal legislation and federal troops could secure would be the full delivery of the colored vote at federal elections; not also at State elections. Further they could not go. This, however, is regarded by the South as virtually tantamount to an attempt to reëstablish negro ascendancy, would be resented accordingly, and would more than ever stimulate the naturally stronger race to crush, in whatever way remained open to it, the naturally weaker.

If the nation refuses to take active steps to protect the negro in the exercise of his political rights, might it not fall back upon the other alternative and withdraw those rights themselves, altering the constitution so as to permit States to discriminate against citizens on the ground of color? It might; but no one supposes

for a moment that it ever will; not only because the feeling against such a change in the constitution would be highly unpopular, but because even those who might desire it for political reasons would think it unadvisable on social grounds, as tending to degrade the colored man, purely and simply as a colored man, below the rest of the community. The same objection would not, however, apply to a scheme which should exclude from the suffrage the ignorant mass of negro population, not on the ground of color, but by the action of an educational qualification. There is nothing in the federal constitution to forbid the enactment of such a provision, which actually exists in a few of the Northern States already (though it does not seem to be rigidly enforced). Each State is perfectly free to restrict the electoral franchise in any way it pleases, so long as the restriction is not based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

The advantages of dealing with the problem by this method are obvious. It admits of variations in different States, and would, even if enacted in the same form by different States, operate differently according to the degree in which education had advanced in each particular State. In Maryland, for instance, or Kentucky, it would exclude a smaller proportion of the colored population than in South Carolina, where illiteracy is more general. It would stimulate the desire of the negroes to acquire knowledge. It would cast no slur upon them as a race, and would not wear the aspect of a retrogression from the generous—perhaps too generous—policy of the period which followed the Civil War. It would spring from, and would conform to, the real character of the difficulty in which the Southern States find themselves. That difficulty arises from the fact, not that colored men can vote, but that the majority of the colored voters are not capable voters, competent for the active functions of citizenship. To deprive the educated and intelligent minority of colored men of these functions would be not only an injustice to them, but a source of evil to the community, for it would increase their discontent, and destroy their attachment to American institutions. But the exclusion of the incompetent on the ground of personal incompetency need excite no resentment, and would probably be followed by the discontinuance of the present artifices practised against colored voters. An outside observer may even think that the precedent of a discriminative suffrage law, withholding a

share in government from those still unfit to use it, would be a valuable one for the whole country. The desirability of universal suffrage, for whites, has been exalted in America to the rank of an axiomatic truth, and applied with hasty confidence. Nothing can be plainer than the mischief it is working in those parts of the Union which receive swarms of ignorant immigrants from the most backward populations of Europe. If the introduction of qualifications for the suffrage in the South should lead some of the Northern and Middle States to reconsider the above-mentioned dogma, and to withhold the means of injuring the commonwealth from new comers unfit to vote intelligently, whether through their general political incompetence or owing to their ignorance of the English language and of American institutions, a service of no small consequence would have been rendered.

There are, however, two considerations which have deterred the States of the South from what might otherwise seem the obviously right course. One is the fact that in lessening the total number of their voters they would lessen their representation in Congress, and therewith their weight in presidential elections. This is just the kind of motive which, though philosophers may condemn it, tells powerfully with practical politicians. The other is the case of the poor whites of the South. There is still much illiteracy among them; far less, to be sure, than among the negroes, but enough in nearly all the States to swell to many thousands the number whom a really effective educational qualification would exclude. It is an unpopular thing to propose to these illiterate voters, some of them, though illiterate, not politically incompetent, that they should disfranchise themselves. Many of them would rather continue to exclude the negro by illegitimate devices than purchase his exclusion by the surrender of their own privileges. However, the State of Mississippi has in its new constitution, adopted in 1890, moved in this direction. It is a State in which there is a huge negro population (747,720, against 539,703 whites), and where, therefore, some action was called for. Here are the provisions bearing on the subject:

Section 241 enacts that every male inhabitant who has resided for two years in the State and one year (or, if he be a minister of the gospel, six months) in the election district, and has paid all his taxes for the two preceding years, shall have the right of vot-

ing. A previous section imposes a poll-tax of \$2 (to be applied to the support of the common schools) upon all male inhabitants. Section 244 enacts as follows :

"Every elector shall, in addition, be able to read any section of the constitution of this State, or he shall be able to understand the same when read to him, or give a reasonable interpretation thereof."

This curious provision might, no doubt, be so administered by a perfectly upright and impartial authority as to admit substantially competent and exclude substantially incompetent persons, irrespective of color. But it has a suspicious air. One may conjecture that a white official will be more readily satisfied with the "reasonable interpretation" which a brother white gives of some section, say this section, of the constitution, than with the explanation tendered by a negro applicant. Such discrimination will be all the easier because illiterate whites will as a rule understand the matter better than illiterate negroes. However, even if the section is so worked as to disfranchise most of the negroes and hardly any of the whites, it is perhaps better that the disfranchisement should take place in this form than by bulldozing or fraudulent counts.

Of the solutions of the political side of the negro question which I have rapidly reviewed, the last will probably be deemed by unprejudiced minds the most simple, natural, and pacific. If an educational or a property qualification, or a combination of both kinds of qualification, were honestly and fairly put in force at the South, both the sense of wrong among the negroes and the sense of danger among the whites would be removed, while the bad habit of tampering with the ballot-box would disappear. Many of the wisest men in the South desire such a solution, and think it not unattainable. They recognize, however, the great obstacles which the illiteracy of a part of the poor white population interposes.

Supposing that these obstacles should prove insuperable, and assuming, as one may safely assume, that neither the commixture of the two races nor the elimination of the negro by removal to Africa can be carried out, the question remains whether the federal power must intervene, or whether it will be better to let things take their natural course. It is from no blindness to the evils of the situation as it stands, nor from any want of sympathy with the negro, that I conceive the latter policy to be the safer

one. The maxim that the physician who doubts whether to administer a drug or not had better refrain, is applicable to legislative interference. Where the reasons for and against such interference are nearly balanced, where success, though possible, is quite uncertain, non-interference is to be preferred, because in politics as in the human body, there is a tendency similar to that which used to be called the *vis medicatrix naturæ*. Things find their level and readjust themselves according to their natural affinities and the balance of actual forces, not, perhaps, in the best way, but in a way which has elements of stability. The reconstructors after the war disregarded the balance of the local forces they found in the South, too readily believing that federal law would prevail against the purposes or passions of the whites. Events have proved that they erred; and another error of the same kind might turn out as ill.

To one who travels through the South, that which seems most needed is the allaying of alarms, the appeasement of irritation, the supersession by other political questions of that constant recurrence to the negro difficulty which harasses men's minds. Could these alarms be removed, and were the negro left to acquiesce in his present exclusion as a temporary evil, which would vanish in a quieter time, things would steadily improve. When he ceased to attempt assertions of his power, the whites would desist from the acts by which his vote is now nullified. Such negroes (chiefly the intelligent townfolk) as did vote would no longer vote in a compact body, but would divide according to their proclivities on the particular issue of the moment. Their votes would come to be courted by the white parties; and those parties would in time form and shape themselves without a constant and dominating reference to the negro question. If a stranger may venture to express his view on a point of domestic politics, I would say that the solidity of the South, so displeasing to many at the North, is more likely to be broken up by letting the negro alone than by agitating for his protection.

Patience and inaction are distasteful to men who feel, as many friends of the negro do feel keenly, the hardships of his position. But the situation has elements of hope in it. The South is changing in many ways. I do not refer to the latest political developments there, and particularly to the Farmers' Alliance party, for a party which represents the less cultivated sections

of Southern society may prove to have as kindly feelings towards the negro as the older aristocracy of the South has shown. The lynching and other acts of violence which take place now are the work of the poor whites far more frequently than of the descendants of slave-owners. I speak rather of the economic changes that are in progress, of the enormous development of mining and manufacturing industries in large areas in the western parts of Virginia and North Carolina, in eastern Kentucky and eastern Tennessee, in northern Georgia and northern Alabama. New cities are rising, new industries are springing up, workpeople as well as employers are flowing in from the Northern and Middle States; many of the old Southern families are recovering from the losses of the war time; there is a general air of stir and movement and prosperity through tracts where twenty years ago land was not worth the clearing. This prosperity has not merely created new commercial ties between the South and the North, stimulated the growth of the white population in several States, and brought a new civilizing influence to bear upon the negroes. It has also given a new turn to the thoughts of Southern men, made them more eager and more energetic, opened up a new vista of material and social development. People are usually good-natured when they are prosperous, and are more apt to take a sanguine view of their position. Even the negro difficulty will, after another twenty years of such prosperity as these parts of the South seem likely to enjoy, look far less formidable. It will not fill everybody's thoughts as it does now. The negro will be regarded more as a useful reservoir of labor, less as a possible source of danger.

In proving that the colored population grows more slowly than the white, the census just taken has removed another cause of anxiety. It is now clear that the negro, regarded as a factor in the whole community, is becoming relatively far weaker; nor is the process likely to be arrested, because any diminution of the death-rate—now terribly high—would almost certainly be accompanied by a decline in the birth-rate. Taking all these phenomena together, there is good reason to hope that the anxiety with which the whites have regarded the political part of the negro problem may decline; and that as they have less fear of the results of his vote, they will less and less care to interfere with it.

Behind the political problem, however, there stands the further question of the moral and intellectual elevation of the negro, and of his social relations with the whites. Here there is evidently still less room to hope much from legislative interference. Of social equality between the races there is no prospect. The absence of intermarriage and of any wish to intermarry is a serious obstacle to any social intercourse of a familiar and domestic kind. It is, however, possible that easier and more natural relations should spring up; that offences against negroes should be more frequently punished; that the separation enforced in schools and in places of public resort should be less rigid. These improvements, being matters within the sphere of State law, cannot be looked for until public sentiment has begun to change. It is likely to be favorably influenced, not only by the cessation of political alarms, but by the progress of the negro race itself; by its growth in industry and self-control; by the diminution of crime among its ranks.

I am aware that there are those who doubt this progress. To the traveller, however, who compares the South of 1890 with the South of 1883, the evidence seems conclusive that, although in some districts where they live isolated in large masses the negroes, if not relapsing into barbarism, may be standing still, yet over the country at large they are steadily advancing, and advancing by their own exertions as well as by the help of the whites. Thus the signs for the future are on the whole encouraging—encouraging not only as regards the negro himself, but as regards those great commonwealths in which his home lies. The future stages of the problem will be watched with the keenest interest by those who perceive how much its solution may affect the general welfare of the United States and the working-out of the largest scheme of democratic self-government which the world has seen. But although there will be anxiety mingled with this interest, there will be hope also—hope more confident than could have been entertained by any one who saw the South before the war or in the days that immediately followed reconstruction.

JAMES BRYCE.

THE THREE PHILANTHROPISTS.

BY COLONEL ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

I.

“ Well, while I am a beggar, I will rail,
And say there is no sin but to be rich.”

MR. A. lived in the kingdom of ———. He was a sincere professional philanthropist. He was absolutely certain that he loved his fellow men, and that his views were humane and scientific. He concluded to turn his attention to taking care of people less fortunate than himself.

With this object in view he investigated the common people that lived about him, and he found that they were extremely ignorant, that many of them seemed to take no particular interest in life or in business, that few of them had any theories of their own, and that, while many had muscle, there was only now and then one who had any mind worth speaking of. Nearly all of them were destitute of ambition. They were satisfied if they got something to eat, a place to sleep, and could now and then indulge in some form of dissipation. They seemed to have great confidence in to-morrow—trusted to luck, and took no thought for the future. Many of them were extravagant, most of them dissipated, and a good many dishonest.

Mr. A. found that many of the husbands not only failed to support their families, but that some of them lived on the labor of their wives; that many of the wives were careless of their obligations, knew nothing about the art of cooking, nothing of keeping house; and that parents, as a general thing, neglected their children or treated them with cruelty. He also found that many of the people were so shiftless that they died of want and exposure.