EVOLUTION OF THE NEGRO PROBLEM

It has been the habit, in recent years, to contrast the statesmanship of the new South unfavorably with the statesmanship of the old. This depreciatory estimate is perhaps, on the whole, not unjust if we restrict our gaze to the Southern representation in Congress under the new order, although that representation has been marked by a high degree of integrity and patriotism. But the really constructive statesmen of the South since the war have not been found in Washington. They must be looked for in the seats of the State assemblies and city councils, on the benches of the higher courts, and in the chairs of the colleges. The ablest Southerners have been so much occupied with legislating in local matters that they have had little time or inclination to interest themselves in national matters. The rising towns and cities, the smoke of innumerable factories, the thick network of railways, the scientific and varied agriculture, the advanced colleges, and the expanding system of public schools,—these are the solid and permanent monuments of the post-bellum statesmanship of the South,—not international treaties, as of old, or vast additions to the public domain, or presidents in the White House, or brilliant orators in the Senate. And they are the monuments, not really because of what they are in themselves, but rather because they have been rendered possible by the wisdom and firmness of the local legislators of the Southern States in fixing the relations of the two races upon the precise footing which the well-being of that section in all its aspects, moral and social, economic and political, called for. Never in
the previous history of those States, whether in its local or national bearing, had a problem of so complex a nature and so momentous an import, been presented to the consideration of her public men; and if in the treatment of that problem they have not won the general reputation for constructive ability which their fathers won under the former system, it is because their efforts have been diffused over a wide and obscure local area, instead of being concentrated in the halls of Congress at Washington.

The most notable achievements of this constructive local statesmanship consist of five great enactments, namely, the practical disfranchisement of the negro, the prohibition of the intermarriage of the races, the interdiction of their co-education, their separation in all public conveyances, and their domiciliary segregation in the cities.

First in importance, because looked upon as absolutely necessary to the preservation of Southern society, was the law which deprived the mass of the negroes of the right to vote. This law belongs to a category of its own. It has no direct connection with the four other enactments I have mentioned, even to the extent of aiming to prevent the blacks from acquiring social equality with the whites, which would follow ultimately,—certainly in a measurable degree,—should the intermarriage of the races, their co-education, and indiscriminate commingling in public conveyances and in residential sections of cities, be permitted. Nor does it seek, like the four other enactments, to promote the peaceful relations of the two races by diminishing the number of points of contact which are likely to cause friction. It is true that the practical disfranchisement of the negro has fostered goodwill between the two, but it has done so by reducing the amount of injury which he could inflict on the interests of the white people.

In passing the act of disfranchisement, the South intended deliberately to repossess herself of a right which the North, in the hour of passion, had taken from her; namely, the right to fix the political status of the freedman. She quietly drew a sponge over all the alien legislation defining that status, leaving it precisely where it was before the Republican majority in
Congress had had time to interpose. In one sense, the act of disfranchisement was a step backward; but it was a step backward with the intention of taking such a step forward ultimately as circumstances should then show to be safe. It was not a constructive act, like the other acts which I have named, but a destructive act, both in spirit and in operation, because it was essentially an act of repeal.

In rushing in and arbitrarily and prematurely requiring the South to enfranchise the indigent and illiterate black man almost as soon as he had obtained his freedom, the North dislocated hopelessly for a time that judicious evolutionary process through which negro suffrage would have passed, had the Southern people been left to confer that right gradually and to regulate its exercise. As it is, the franchise is the one question relating to the blacks, which, forty-five years after their emancipation, continues in a state of uncertainty; and this is due directly to Northern interference. The North did not dictate that negroes should be permitted to marry with the whites; or that black children should be educated with white in the public schools; or that white people and black people should be required to ride in the same railway coaches, or to live together in the same city blocks. Had Congress attempted to interpose in the settlement of these questions, there would have been the same check in their orderly evolution as there was in the orderly evolution of the suffrage. Confusion would have at once resulted; and those branches of the negro problem would have remained unsolved, to the serious embroilment of the two races.

The four other measures which I have enumerated stand upon a footing different from that of the act of disfranchisement. They represent four consecutive stages in the evolution of the negro problem, and reflect the harmonious and consistent progress which that problem has made toward a permanent settlement. These enactments could not all have been adopted together in the beginning without inflicting a hardship, or at least without causing grave inconvenience, simply because the conditions then prevailing were not ripe for the passage of all four at once. For two alone were those conditions really ripe;
namely, the prohibition of intermarriage, and the interdiction of co-education.

It was natural from a social point of view, and wise from a political, that the white people, from the inauguration of the new order, should have been solicitous that the intermarriage of whites and blacks should not be sanctioned by law. The instinct of race preservation even more than opposition to social equality, dictated this attitude. It is true that, during the existence of the institution of slavery, illicit cohabitation had taken place to such an extent that mulattoes made up an important section of the population of each Southern community. But these mulattoes took the status of the black parent, not of the white, even though the mother was of the latter blood. Had marriage between the two races been suffered after the war, the offspring of these unions would have, legally and morally, been entitled to the status of the white parent; and as the number of such unions increased, such offspring would, in time, have actually acquired that status. As education developed in them a greater ability to accumulate wealth, mongrelization would have steadily advanced in social respectability, until it is presumable that there would have arisen a large number of families of legitimate mulattoes who, through their white parents, had obtained an unquestionable social position. With intermarriage made valid, the tendency of every community in which negroes predominated numerically would have been towards Africanization; for, first, the existence of the right of intermarriage would have encouraged illicit as well as legitimate sexual commerce between the races by promoting social equality; and secondly, in that considerable section of the white population which would have declined to affiliate with the blacks it would have created a disposition to emigrate. As the intermixture progressed, the white persons who would have been revolted by the spectacle of the legal miscegenation which was going on, would have been gradually driven out by the force of their intense repugnance to the prevailing condition, until there would have been left a residuum of white families unopposed to the commingling of their own blood with the blood of the negro.

But the force of the law which prohibits the intermarriage of
whites and blacks is most fully seen in the effect which it has had in diminishing illicit sexual intercourse between them by discouraging their social equality. During the existence of slavery, the mulattoes formed a proportion of the negro population which, numerically, steadily maintained itself even if it did not actually increase. As long as the negress was a slave, there was no danger of her presuming upon an immoral intimacy,—a fact well known to her white paramour for his encouragement,—and her subservience necessarily made her more open to advances. Since the revolution in the relations of the two races which was brought about by emancipation, the number of mulattoes has, to the body of the population, relatively if not absolutely declined. It is only in the Southern cities that they are to-day really noticeable even in the African quarters; and not even there to the extent observable twenty or thirty years ago. One may visit the public schools for the negroes in the cities without seeing perhaps half a dozen children in each room whose complexions reveal a white parentage on one side. The proportion of those whose darkness of skin indicates a black parentage on both sides for at least one generation and a half, is, in comparison, overwhelming. The indiscriminate intermarriage of blacks and mulattoes since the war has been steadily reducing the number of mulattoes whose first infusion of white blood was obtained during the period of slavery, while the reserve of the white men of the new generation has prevented the replacement of the number thus lost. That there is still a considerable proportion of mulattoes in the cities is to be largely attributed to the facilities there for a casual and passing illicit sexual commerce unattended by any danger of exposure for the white participant, or risk of being held legally responsible for the offspring resulting. It is also, in some degree, attributable to the influx of foreigners in recent years, men not likely to be led by prejudice or fear of notoriety to shrink from even permanent illegitimate relations with negroes. In the rural districts of the South, the number of mulattoes is now so small as to attract no notice whatever. The explanation is obvious,—apart from the general influences which are steadily separating the races, the white man in the country is held back by the certainty that
an intrigue will sooner or later become known, or by apprehension lest he may, at any time, be compelled to assume some responsibility for the fruit of the illicit cohabitation. In either event, his standing in his own community would suffer lasting injury.

The immediate effect of the decline in the illicit sexual intercourse between the two races is to promote a steady reversion in the negroes to the original pure African type, a fact that, in the next few generations, will be perceptible in their general moral and intellectual character. The leading men of the race so far have been of mixed blood. It remains to be seen whether this pure African type can produce an equal number of persons of considerable intellectual capacity. With a complete reversion to the original type, the last ground for anticipating even partial amalgamation of the two races will pass away. The first great law touching the freedman adopted by the South has already fully accomplished its purpose; the integrity of the white race has been preserved not only from destruction but even from partial deterioration. Intermarriage is now an impossible factor as affecting that integrity, and illicit sexual commerce a negligible one.

The second constructive law adopted by the South in the regular evolution of the negro problem forbade the co-education of the two races in the public schools. As with the evils of miscegenation, so with the evils of co-education — they were foreseen by the Southern people so soon as legislation began to be enacted to define the status of the freedman. A feeling of repulsion was reflected in both measures, — a repulsion aroused primarily by the instinct of race preservation; only in the case of intermarriage, it was chiefly physical; in the case of co-education mainly ethical. The principal reason for the repugnance which the Southern whites exhibited from the start to the promiscuous commingling of white and black children in the same schoolroom was not only that it would quickly break down the social barriers that kept the two races apart, but would certainly expose the white children, especially the girls, to polluting and debasing influences. The free and easy associations of a public school would be very different in their impression on character.
from the guarded associations of the plantation in the time of
slavery. Kind as was the feeling of most masters and mist-
tresses for their bondsmen, they nevertheless had an ineradicable
and unalterable conviction as to certain characteristics of
the race as a whole,—the indifference to chastity in the females,
the lewdness in the males, the physical uncleanliness, the un-
refined manners, and the generally careless habits of life distin-
guishing so many of both sexes alike. The class of whites
who had never owned a slave were as resolutely hostile to co-
education as the class above them who had owned many slaves;
but they were more influenced by fear of social equality than by
apprehension of moral contamination, though this too, in their
case, was also present, but perhaps not to the same degree.
Naturally, this opposition to co-education was particularly strong
in all classes of white citizens immediately after the negro
acquired his freedom, for then they had been in the habit of
looking on him only as a slave who possessed no social position
whatever in the community to which he belonged. So fully
was this opposition known even to the "carpetbag" govern-
ments, that only in South Carolina and Texas was provision
made for mixed schools,—a provision soon repealed in Texas,
while in South Carolina it remained entirely unenforceable. Had
such a law been adopted throughout the Southern States, it
would have simply meant that the whites would, as a body, have
deprecated to send their children to the public school.

The third great constructive law in the practical evolution of
the negro problem was not passed by the Southern people to
preserve their blood integrity, like the law prohibiting inter-
marrige; nor to conserve their purity of morals and manners,
like the law forbidding co-education; nor like both these
laws, to discourage social equality. The primary object of the
statute requiring the separation of the races in public vehicles of
conveyance was simply to promote the personal comfort and
safety of the whites. It was offensive to them to be brought
in such close physical contact with the new negro; and in addi-
tion, they were anxious to diminish the chances of personal
conflict so likely to arise at any moment when whites and blacks
who are strangers to each other, assemble under the same roof.
Had any question of the preservation of the whites' integrity of blood or morality been involved in the association of the races in public conveyances, their separation there would have been required as soon after emancipation as the prohibition of their intermarriage or co-education, although at that time, owing to the poverty of the Southern railways, an almost intolerable burden would have been imposed upon the resources of these lines of transportation. As the white and black populations expanded, and at the same time became more alienated from each other with the passing of the older generation, and as the regular volume of travel increased, the physical repulsiveness of indiscriminate race mixture in public conveyances grew more acute, and the danger of personal conflicts also augmented. The railways, in the meanwhile, had been steadily advancing in prosperity, and were now in a position to supply the double accommodations that would be called for by the separation of the races. The white people, perceiving this fact, demanded the change, and the railways offered no serious opposition. A more useful law was never inserted in the Southern statute book. No one who remembers the former promiscuous commingling of whites and blacks in the Southern trains can fail to recall the scenes of violence witnessed there in consequence of the aggressive attitude of negroes inflamed by drink. Such scenes between the races are no longer possible; and that fact alone has done much to promote a more friendly relation between them in all the walks of life in which they still meet.

The fourth great constructive enactment came, not in the form of a state statute, but of a municipal ordinance, which has already been adopted by the governing bodies of nearly all the large cities of the South; and, in a few more years, is quite certain to be adopted by the remainder. This additional enactment requires the domiciliary segregation of the races. Like the three great constructive laws which preceded it, it is a measure that looks to the preservation of something that the whites regard as essential to their welfare. First, as we have seen, they passed an act to preserve their race integrity; secondly, an act to preserve their integrity of morals and manners; thirdly, an act to preserve their comfort, convenience, and
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safety in travelling. Now a fourth act is passed, to preserve the value of property which has been seriously threatened with deterioration by the encroachment of the urban black population on districts hitherto entirely occupied by whites. This new measure is an indication, not so much of the accumulation of holdings by the negroes (although it does mean this too to a certain extent), as of their numerical increase in the towns; largely by immigration from the country. It is the black tenant rather than the black purchaser, whose intrusion, in most cases involuntary, has alarmed so many white owners of property. The bulk of these black tenants are unable to pay the rents which the previous white tenants had been paying; and this fact, coupled with the mere presence of negroes on the ground, has led to the decline in the value of all tenements from which they have practically ousted the white occupants.

The law of domiciliary segregation, which is equally pertinent to both races, operates in reality only on one section of the white people. It does not resemble the other great constructive enactments, upon which I have dwelt, in operating practically as well as theoretically on the whole population of blacks and whites combined. Moreover, it is the only one of the four which cannot always be enforced with ease even in the restricted sphere to which it applies. So steady is the increase in the number of negroes in the Southern cities that, unless they are permitted to encroach upon the residential sections of the whites, they are sure, sooner or later, to create a congestion detrimental to the sanitary condition of white and black populations alike. To avoid this, some of the Southern municipalities are making provision for the spread of negro homes over ground not yet occupied by white people; but this is not possible in all the cities without intruding upon suburban lands which the whites have been holding for the increment that comes with the expansion of the white population. The new law, while it will preserve the values of white property in the main parts of the cities, will damage it in some of the outlying districts. There are few Southern towns which are not belted beyond the corporate boundaries by what are practically white suburbs, though the houses may be scattered. Through these environs, the
negroes, in order to escape from their "pent up Utica," must burst here and there, carrying the same injury to suburban values which they have done to so much intra-urban property. The Southern municipalities, even if they wished, cannot cast aside responsibility for the proper location of their black population. Every requirement of the public health as well as of humanity, will demand that ample room for spreading out shall be afforded that population; and under the pressure of necessity, if not of a sense of public duty, it may be that the Southern cities will be compelled to reserve vast sections of sururban land as sites for future negro homes, just as those cities now reserve considerable areas of ground for negro cemeteries.

The enforcement of the new law will be attended by so many perplexities and difficulties, as the negroes in the cities increase in number, that the wisdom of its adoption may in time become seriously debatable; and these perplexities and difficulties will perhaps appear all the greater to the white people at large when they recall that only a small section of white property-owners are really injured by the intrusion of negro lease-holders and purchasers into the white urban districts. Would it not be better, they will argue, that a few white property-holders should suffer in some measure,—for the depreciation of their property from negro encroachment after all is not radical,—than that each municipality should have to face continually the problem of having to provide room for its black population in justice to that population and for the protection of the public health?

How far the law of domiciliary segregation differs in practice from the laws relating to marriage, education, and transportation, upon which I have touched, is revealed by the fact that it is purely local in its application. It is clearly recognized that, with the present size of the Southern rural population, this ordinance cannot be extended, by a general act, to the country districts. It follows that there is no universal sentiment in the Southern States supporting the domiciliary segregation law, inasmuch as the evil sought to be remedied comes home only to the urban section of the white population, and in reality to a limited section of that section. The acts relating to inter-marriage, co-education, and co-transportation, on the other hand,
touch every white person, rural or urban, residing in the South. They rest upon the rock of an absolute unanimity in public sentiment in country and city alike. But an indefinite time must elapse before a like unanimity will be observed in the public opinion supporting domiciliary segregation, simply because the congestion of the black population in the rural districts is not likely to be so great within a calculable period as to produce there the conditions detrimental to the property of the whites, which already have arisen in all the Southern towns. Not until similar conditions are created in the country will domiciliary segregation be used there as a means of checking and restricting the evils that will grow out of those conditions.

Practically, the South has reached the limit of State legislation looking to the settlement of the negro problem. Hereafter,—certainly for a considerable length of time in the future,—the measures designed for the further settlement of that problem will be exclusively municipal and local. The first of the municipal measures, the domiciliary segregation of the races, is a shade less practicable than the preceding measures, which, as we have seen, owed their existence to State legislation and not to municipal. An increasing degree of impracticability is likely to characterize municipal provisions for the separation of the races. There are two other measures, however, which may be adopted hereafter. First, it is possible that, at the end of a few decades, all the public schools for the education of the blacks in each of the Southern cities will be placed under the general control of a negro superintendent, who will be responsible for the proper administration of their affairs to a central white Board. The particular field in which this superintendent would labor would be entirely distinct from that of the general superintendent of the white schools; and the two would be independent of each other, except that both would be subordinate, along with the central Board itself, to the head of the municipality, whether that head should be a single person or a commission.

A possible second measure is the erection of a separate administrative black district in every Southern city containing a large negro population which has been compelled, by the law
of domiciliary segregation, to concentrate itself within prescribed limits. This district might be permitted to establish its own police court, to choose its own police magistrate and justices of the peace, to appoint its own police officers, and to set up its own fire, building, and street cleaning departments, under the direction and control of its negro citizens. In other words, there might be conferred on it the various powers of a self-governing municipality, except that all nominations to office must obtain the approval of the mayor to be valid; and the mayor, too, would possess the right to remove for cause. In addition, the administration of the district's affairs would be supervised in a general way by the central authority which overlooks the affairs of the rest of the corporation. This principle of home-rule for negroes segregated by the new domiciliary law, might be so far extended as to grant to a very populous district the right to be represented by a member of their own race in the State legislature and also in the halls of Congress. As such assemblyman or congressman would possess a constituency wholly black, the present objections urged by white persons to representatives of that color would be completely removed. Negro self-government in an urban district of this character would stand a fair chance of being more successful than it has been in independent countries like Haiti, San Domingo, and Liberia, which are remote from the pressure of civilized influences and withdrawn from the guidance of a white hand at the ultimate helm. Such urban districts would become schools for the education of the Southern negro in the art of self-government; and there is reason to think that the best intellect and the best morality of the race would be stimulated to prove that its members were capable of acquiring that art under these fostering circumstances.

It will be many years before the population in the black urban districts will be so great as even to suggest the adoption of the two measures which I have mentioned as possible rather than as probable subjects for future municipal consideration. This recent ordinance of domiciliary segregation is not likely soon to be followed up by an additional law to compel the separation of the races. The attention of the Southern people for some dec-
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ades to come will rather be chiefly directed to enforcing the existing acts with a thoroughness that will ensure the blacks the exactest justice under their operation. The negro public schools will be extended and improved to a point that will raise them to an equal footing of efficiency with the public schools for the whites. The accomodations for negro travellers will be made as comfortable, clean, wholesome, and spacious as those provided for white travellers. The parts of the city in which the black population is concentrated will be inspected as carefully and advanced as liberally at the public expense as the parts in which the whites reside. As the negroes progress in wealth and education, the franchise will be enlarged until all property holders among them will be permitted to cast a vote.

This more generous attitude on the white people's part will be the direct result of that general policy of requiring the separation of the two races which is incorporated in the four great enactments upon which I have touched. Already, the life of each race is running in a channel of its own; and though these channels lie side by side, the possibility of their intersecting in the future grows smaller each year. The negroes never intermarry with the white people, and illicit sexual commerce between them is, relatively to their increasing numbers, steadily declining. They never meet under the same roof in schools and colleges. They never unite in the same religious worship. They never occupy the same coaches on the railroads, or the same seats in the tramways. They reside in different sections of the cities. They have separate theatres, separate Christian Association buildings, separate public halls. It is now the universal custom for the urban negroes of the South to employ only doctors, lawyers, dentists, professional nurses, builders, and mechanics of their own color. The same is equally true of the white people. Italians have displaced the black barbers in the shops for the whites; white porters and chambermaids are to be found in hotels which formerly gave work only to black; white waiters have superseded black in the restaurants. Already, but not yet to the same degree, white domestics are taking the place of the black in wealthy white households. It is only for the rude jobs of the streets that the negroes are in steady request;
and even in these jobs some municipalities employ only white men. In all the cities, competition with the whites is beginning to narrow the chances of the black man for a livelihood. One important section of the race, however, is gradually improving its pecuniary condition; namely, that section which is composed of the editors, lawyers, doctors, druggists, restaurant keepers, grocers, undertakers, bankers, real estate agents, insurance agents, agents for benevolent associations, small shopkeepers, builders, milliners, and the like. It will be to this section of the population that the less fortunate families of the same color who are unwilling to earn a subsistence by street work, will have to turn for employment when the field among the white people is practically closed by successful white rivalry.

The influences controlling the fate of the urban blacks are not yet, to the same degree, in operation in the rural districts. There is no probability that within a calculable time the country negroes will be pushed within restricted local limits. The subdivision of land now going on in most parts of the South may tend to drive the large number of persons of that race who are not sharing in it to the cities, where they would be drawn into the condition of isolation now occupied by the black population already residing there. A heavy immigration of whites from the North or from Europe would increase this expulsive force by further promoting the drift towards sub-division. But many generations must pass before the rural congregations of negroes which we now see can be broken up by the operation of these or similar economic influences, and dispersed among the cities. The tendency will rather be towards the formation in the country of distinct black settlements comparable to those in the towns, which will maintain themselves in the midst of the far larger white population pressing upon them from all sides.

On the other hand, it is conceivable that, by the middle of the next century, the negro population will be so scattered over the entire face of the United States that the South will possess no larger proportion of that population than New England, or the Middle West, or New York and Pennsylvania, will possess. When this condition of uniform dispersion has been reached, which will make of the blacks a factor of small numerical impor-
tance everywhere, the separatist laws that now stand upon the Southern statute books, would be relaxed and finally repealed. In place of progression in the evolution of the negro problem as now, there would then be retrogression. As the aim of the South in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to erect barriers between the two races, so its aim in the twenty-first may be to pull those barriers down, simply because there would then be no more need for their retention in the Southern States than in the Northern and Western. The menace created by the concentration of the black population in one section of the country would be removed by the wide diffusion of that population. The racial legislation originated in this menace. It would be repealed when that menace had passed entirely away.

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