

THE WHITE PROBLEM.

BY RICHARD T. GREENER.

If one wishes to observe eccentricity, vagary, platitude, and idiosyncrasy all combined, let him only read the literary effusions of the so-called "Caucasian" intellect from Thomas Jefferson's "Notes on Virginia," down to the recent contributions to the *Forum*, when discussing any phase of the "Negro Problem." Jefferson, fresh from Hume, uttered some platitudes about the two races living together in freedom, treading very cautiously, as is his custom, when not too sure of his premises. Imlay and Abbé Grégoire routed him at once, and, as if to complete the poetic irony, the negro almanac maker, Benjamin Banneker, who had, from 1792 until 1800, calculated alone the only almanacs printed for Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia, and Virginia, sent him a copy, with an autograph letter, couched in as choice English as Jefferson ever penned, and of equal chirography. Nevertheless, the special negro-hate went on. Nott & Glidden, DeLeon, DeBow, *alii*, *alii*, quoting, rehashing Jefferson, supplementing him with modern discoveries.

A phase of the white problem is seen in the determination, not only to treat the Negro as a member of a child-like race, but the grim determination to keep him a child or a ward. In every advance, since emancipation, it has, with true Caucasian gall, been assumed that everything must be done for him, and under no circumstances must he be allowed to do for himself. In religion, in politics, in civil and social life, he must be developed in a pen, staked off from the rest of mankind, and nursed, coddled, fed, and trained by aid of the longest spoons, forks, and rakes obtainable. All along there has been heard the solemn, low refrain of doubt, small hope, and feeble expectation as to

the probable survival of this black infant. Indeed, nothing has so weighed upon the average American Christian heart as the precarious health of this infant, whom no one had the heart exactly to kill, were it possible, but whose noiseless and peaceful departure to a better world, would have been hailed with smothered sighs of intense relief.

This feeling obtains North as well as South; scalawag, native, carpet-bagger or sand-hiller, democrat, republican, or independent, seemed to think that for some occult reason this infant must not be allowed to grow in any one of the social, religious, or political ways, in which other American citizens grow and develop healthfully for the good of their country. All the traditions seemed against the negro, all the arguments surely were. He was rarely given a real chance, as here, to talk freely for himself, and when such opportunity was afforded, he generally took his cue from his audience, and talked to the jury, and usually with 'bated breath. When he spoke humbly, apologetically, deprecatingly, he was an intelligent, sensible fellow, a milder form of "good nigger," before the war. Among the *novi homines* of the Republic it is so self-satisfying to have some one to look down upon and despise, just perhaps, as you have emerged from the mire yourself, and before, indeed, the evidence of "previous condition" has been thoroughly obliterated.

"Wut is there lef' I'd like to know,
Eft ain't the difference o' color,
To keep up self-respec' an' show
The human natur' of a fullah?
Wut good in bein' white, onless
It's fixed by law, nut lef' to guess,
That we are smarter, an' they dumber."

Another difficulty of this white problem is the universal belief that somehow the Negro race began its career with President Lincoln's proclamation. All such novices would do well to look up their old histories, newspapers, and pamphlets. Next to the Indian, he is probably of the purest racial stock in the country, and as has been stated, whatever accession has come to him, has been from the

“choicest” blood of the country. He has been thoroughly identified with it from the beginning. He was the agricultural laborer and the artisan at the South, the trusted servant and companion; at the North he took part in all mechanical pursuits, helped build the houses, worked on the first newspapers, made the first wood cuts, and was the best pressman at Charleston, Philadelphia, and Boston. In every industrial, social, and political movement, as well as in the different warlike struggles, he has borne an honorable part, which to profess ignorance of, is not creditable, or, if denied, shows wilful prejudice. He was on the heights of Abraham with Wolfe; in the French and Indian wars with Braddock; the first martyr of the Revolution; is seen in Trumbull’s picture retreating with the patriots from Bunker Hill, musket in hand; Washington did not disdain to share a blanket with him on the cold ground at Valley Forge; at the South with Marion and Green; at the North with Washington and Gates, with Wayne and Allen. On account of the injury to the United States through him, the war of 1812 was begun, and his fertile brain suggested the defence of New Orleans, and, after the battle, led Andrew Jackson to say in public proclamation:

“I expected much: I knew well how you loved your native country. * * * You have done more than I expected. * * * The President of the United States shall hear how praiseworthy was your conduct in the hour of danger. * * * The American people, I doubt not, will give you the praise your exploits entitle you to.” Do we not know how they fought with Lawrence in the Chesapeake, and formed more than half of the crew of Old Ironsides, were with Scott and Taylor in Mexico, as they were with Grant and Sherman, and Sheridan and Butler, with Farragut and Foote and Porter, at Port Hudson and Battery Wagner. He who doubts the record can read it from the pen of Negro historians, from Nell or Williams or Wilson, for “of those who perform the deeds, and those who write, many such are praised.”

No sneer of race, no assumption of superiority, no ingrained prejudice will ever obscure this record, much less obliterate it, and while it stands, it is the Negro's passport to every right and privilege of every other American.

Not alone a soldier and a sailor, the Negro was a citizen, under colonial and proprietary governments, under the Articles of Confederation, and in most of the original thirteen states, was an honorable part of "we people," who ordained and established this constitution for the United States of America. Long before Calhoun and Taney, he fought, lived, voted, and acted like any other citizen; and if many of his race were enslaved, he was not alone. There were "free willers," "indentured servants," and "apprentices," many of them to bear him company. Not a few of these, as records show, white men, Irishmen, Scotchmen, Englishmen, Moors, Palatines, were ruthlessly sold into slavery as the exactions of the traffic became more pressing. At the earliest period there was always a class of black freemen, and they were found at the South as well as at the North,—at New Orleans, Mobile, Charleston, and Virginia, as well as at Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, where in business, in social life, in church and in politics, they were active, enterprising, and respected. In rare instances, with acquired wealth, like some "free willers," and "indentured servants," they went West or North, as the case might be, and mingled and blended into the new surroundings and developed civilization, where, but for names and traditions, all traces of them would be lost. There come to mind of such men, three United States senators of distinction, at least ten representatives in Congress before the war, five eminent officers of the United States Army, two cabinet officers, three eminent Catholic prelates, four prominent divines of the Episcopal Church, while in the other churches, in medicine and in law, the list is too long for enumeration.

But of those who were content to remain chafing under the indignities and ostracism, which increased from 1820

it is time it should be clearly, emphatically and proudly stated that instead of being a pauper pariah class as is supposed, there was no movement looking to the amelioration of their condition, from 1808 until John Brown raid in 1859, —nothing which tended to unshackle the slave or remove the clogs from the free colored man, in which he was not the foremost, active, intelligent participant, never a suppliant, never a mere recipient. On the contrary he was first to organize for his own emancipation; among the first to speak, and write, and print in his own behalf. From Benezet and Grégoire, Condorcet, Brissot de Warville, from Franklin, Rush and Rittenhouse, and more than all, from that “glorious communion of the saints,” the Friends, he had early learned the value of his own manhood, was willing to fight for it, and acquired the art of putting his complaint into pretty choice English, at a time, too, when Abbé Raynal, 1779, thought it a matter of astonishment that America had not a good poet, an able mathematician, or a man of genius, in any single art or science, and “not one of them shows any decisive talent for one in particular.”

When Fisher Ames was saying, 1807, “Except the authors of two able books on our politics, we have no authors; shall we match Joel Barlow against Homer or Hesiod? Can Tom Paine contend against Plato?” When Sydney Smith, 1818, wrote, “There does not seem to be in America, at this moment, one man of any considerable talents,” a Negro astronomer was calculating logarithms, studying all alone, in the woods of Maryland, Ferguson’s Astronomy, and making valuable observations, viewing the stars, and computing his almanacs. During this period, 1780-1810, the Negro had his churches, literary societies, abolition societies, and, later on, newspapers, with educated editors, and active agents for the assertion of their rights and privileges, before Landy and Garrison.

Mr. Howells looks up the streets of “Nigger Hill,” and

sees only a few straggling negroes. They are of no interest, and of course have "no story, bless you, to tell." And yet there are many stories, many traditions, much history clustering about that hill, from Cambridge street to the Common, from Charles to Hancock. Big Dick, the boxer, the precursor of Jackson; the Blind Preacher, Raymond, Prince Hall, and Easton, Master Paul and his church and school, in which the first American Anti-slavery Society was organized, Jan. 6, 1832.

"On that dismal night, and in the face of public opinion, fiercer far than the tempest, or wind and hail that beat upon the windows of that 'nigger school-house,' were laid the foundations of an organized movement against American slavery that at last became too mighty to be resisted." Mr. Garrison might have told Mr. Howells, he certainly could have learned that among colored men of that dear old town, the first patrons of the *Liberator* were found, who supported it the first year, when it had not fifty white subscribers. Mr. Garrison, at Exeter Hall in London, sixty years ago said, "I am proud to say that the funds for my mission * * * were principally made up by the voluntary contributions of my free colored brethren at very short notice. * * * Many of their number are in the most affluent circumstances, and distinguished for their refinement, enterprise, and talents * * * they have flourishing churches, temperance and other societies. * * * Among them is taken a large number of daily and weekly papers, and of literary and scientific periodicals, from the popular monthlies up to the grave and erudite *North American* and *American Quarterly Reviews*. I have, at this moment, to my own paper, '*The Liberator*,' one thousand subscribers among this people; and from an occupancy of the editorial chair of more than seven years, I can testify that they are more punctual in their payments than any five hundred white subscribers whose names I ever placed indiscriminately in my subscription book."

Not alone Wm. Lloyd Garrison. Long before Frederick

Douglass began "to pray with his legs" and look toward the "north star," the leading colored men of Washington, Cary, and Fleet, and Cook; of Philadelphia, Forten, Allen, Burr, and Purvis; of Baltimore, Grice, Greener, and Watkins; of Boston, Paul, Easton, Barbadoes, and Walker, corresponded with, aided, lodged and fed the apostle Lundy, in his mysterious journeyings through the southern states, and circulated his *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

My account is from Isaac Cary, who knew "the little, pale, thin man," and he says Lundy never departed empty handed.

It was in Master Paul's Church, Belknap street, that the abolitionists, driven from Tremont Temple, in 1860, found refuge, and preserved there free speech for Boston and America. Master Paul himself was a college graduate, accompanied Mr. Garrison to England, and won praise from Daniel O'Connell for his scholarship and eloquence.

Before emancipation in New York state, *Freedom's Journal*, edited by Cornish and Russwurm, a graduate of Bowdoin, I am told, afterwards President of Liberia, demonstrated the public spirit, intelligence, and literary character of the American Negro. If David Walker's *Appeal*, issued in 1828, had been printed in 1765 or '70, and had been about the rights of the colonies, it would long since have attracted attention. But it was written by one of the "old clo' merchants" of Brattle street—an extinct guild—and is the voice of a black John the Baptist, crying in the wilderness. It attained the honor of legislative attention, and a reward set for the author's head; but it is an American classic, and forever answers all hints at Negro contentment under oppression. By law of heredity, thanks to Governor Butler, Walker's son became a lawyer and a municipal judge in Boston.

These facts taken at random would tend to show that the American Negro has traditions—far more, and more honorable than many of his traducers. They are of services, ancestry, interests in public affairs in his own future. Now

traditions of blood and training and achievement can never be permanently repressed. Pile Etna upon them, they will break forth, no matter how long or persistently kept down. As a help to the solution of the White Problem, this article is to show that they exist, and if they have not hitherto asserted themselves, it is because they could afford to wait, not because they are not cherished and kept for inspiration. Some complacent critics of the Negro, who analyze, weigh, measure him with their little poles, discuss his removal to Africa, debate his admission to trades unions, into the ranks of business, into the literary circle, into social life, would save themselves much unrest if they knew his motto, *J'y suis renté*.

He is a reader of the Census. He calmly contemplates either horn of the politico economic problem—absorption, all he asks to be is an actual American citizen ; repression and fifty years of race isolation,—one of the ruling forces of this Republic, the arbiter of the South. For, in fifty years, he will be nearly 100,000,000 strong, and, judging solely by the advance since 1863, in thrift, in education, in race development, in equipoise, in aspiration, all that tend to consolidate and strengthen, he will have no fear of the few white chips which will here and there attempt to stem the rush of this black Niagara. Truly he can afford to wait. One of the worst phases of the White Problem is the fatuous clinging to certain ideas, especially the good done to the Negro by bringing him to America. As well tell the descendants of Virginia convicts, the progeny of the kidnapped Irish, 1645-52 ; the proud descendants of Dutch, Scotch and English poor-houses, shambles and heaths, of the benefits which have accrued to them.

For the presence of all these, the negro included, America is the gainer, humanity the debtor. The value of his contribution far outweighs any benefit he may be supposed to have received. He has reaped down the fields, developed new ideas, preserved the ark of the Nation's inheritance, and if Fletcher of Saltoun, and Dr. Dvorak have any weight, he

is to become greater than the lawgiver, he is to found the American music of the future.

“The future music of this country must be founded upon what are called negro melodies. * * They are American. They are the folk songs of America, and your composers must turn to them. * * In the negro melodies of America, I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot find a thematic source here.”—*Dvorak*.

The Nero has no tears to shed over that, “wonderful school of slavery, under Providence,” so often quoted. He is no such hypocrite as to go through the pretence of believing that slavery is ever a good, a necessary, or beneficial school. Much less does he grant that any phase of that school, at any stage, affected him morally, socially, or physically, except adversely, while he does know from bitter experience, how utterly pharasaical, how absurdly hypocritical, and how thoroughly unchristian the entire system was in practice, example, and influence.

Whatever of intelligence, Christianity, or civilization the Negro possesses today, let it be remembered he retains in spite of slavery, and its relic, caste. Whatever of honesty or morality or thrift has survived the charnel-house, comes from that excellent stock—better than the Indian—which Galton says is now farther behind the best English brain of today than it is behind the brain of Athens! It is due to brain that slavery could not disintegrate, to a happy heart, an abiding faith.

I am at loss to observe how close the race maintains its hold on orthodox Christianity, when it is remembered how even the maxims of the common law were set aside, at its behests—*partus sequitur patrem*—how Virginia (Henning Vol. II., pp. 356-7) declared that those imported thither “except Turks and Moors in amity,” shall be accounted slaves * * notwithstanding a conversion to Christianity after their importation.” How far from solution seems the

white problem, when the Negro reflects how powerless is Christianity to repress race prejudice; how often indifferent to real brotherhood, while affecting deep denominational interest. Indeed, while an emasculated religion has been preached to the Negro, each denomination has seemed to shirk the question of, Who is my Neighbor? A premium has been offered every self-respecting Negro to repudiate Christianity as it is taught. Why speak of the Christian? Take the cultured editor, the moulder of public opinion. How despairing the "White Problem," when this is the high water-mark of culture:—"Consider him at his best. I cite the case of a manly and accomplished gentleman of the race. His life has no background. What we mean by ancestry is lacking to him; and not only is it lacking but its lack is proclaimed by his color, and he is always reminded of it. Be who he may and do what he may, when the personal test comes he finds himself a man set apart, a marked man.

There is a difference between the discrimination against him in one part of the country (the South) and in another part (the North), but it is a difference in degree only. He is not any where in a fellowship in complete equipoise with men of the other race. Nor does this end it. The boundless sweep of opportunity which is the inheritance of every white citizen of the Republic, falls to him curtailed, hemmed in, a mere pathway to a few permissible endeavors. A sublime reliance on the ultimate coming of justice may give him the philosophic temper. But his life will bring chiefly opportunities to cultivate it. And for his children what better? To those that solve great social problems with professional ease, I commend this remark that Mr. Lowell is said to have made, "I am glad I was not born a Jew; but if I had been a Jew, I should be prouder of that fact than any other." You can find men who are glad that they were not born Negroes; but can you find a man, who, if he had been born a Negro, would be prouder of that fact, than of any other? When you have found many men of this mind,

then this race problem will, owing to some change in human nature, have become less tough, but till then, patience and tolerance."

Here is a paragraph which most people would acquiesce in; which bears the air of hard sense, stern reality, deep philosophic insight, keen analysis and delicate humor. It is already winging its way, and will be quoted as a solid fact. If it were true then Schopenhauer reigns in America; religion and culture have failed to soften the manner but have hardened and intensified the small prejudices of two centuries ago. If the statements were true, acquiescence in such condition, would show the utmost callousness, a more than heathen indifference, a heartlessness, and inhumanity, unworthy of the century. If character, reputation, manly accomplishments, the heights reached, the palm won, still find any black hero a "marked man," because of no fault of his own, and church and society, home and club, united in thus ostracising him and his children, then is it not demonstrated that it is not the Black but the White Problem, which needs most serious attention in this country?

Mr. Lowell, as always, was wisely terse. No trace of the snob was in him; he was no panderer to caste. Of course he was not anxious to be born a Jew, for he knew unreasoning and unreasonable pride of race still pecked often at its superior; but Lowell, knowing the history of the race, and what its sons had accomplished in spite of persecution felt he "would be prouder of that fact if he were a Jew than any other." Nor is it true that every social avenue is closed to the aspiring and manly Negro of today. Professor Washington, of Tuskegee, the leader in perhaps the greatest work of the race, is received among the best people of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. The late Professor Price of North Carolina, was the recipient of exceptional attention at home and abroad, on account of his talents and rare eloquence. Professor Scarborough, the best Greek scholar of the race, meets the members of the American Philological Association, on terms of equality, and

Mr. Dubois, who won a travelling scholarship at Harvard, read a paper before the American Historical Society, and has been offered a professorship in a white college. It is surely no unusual thing in New York city to see educated colored men, at various social functions, collegiate, theological, political, literary, professional. These are sporadic cases, of course; but so are the cases of the bright farmer boys from Vermont, North Carolina, Michigan, Connecticut, and New York State, who have, by virtue of study or talent, gained entree to the same salons. The fact springs from the new ozone of equality, or better liberality, which is in the air, and is prompted and encouraged by those who have a clear notion of the fitness of things. Here at least, it is not a race, nor color, nor creed line.

Against that flippancy which draws too hasty conclusions, which cannot conquer its early prejudices, or ignore its limitations, there looms up a quiet, unobtrusive but persistent force, which is determined not to give way to caste distinctions; but to see to it that there is a career open to all, despite sex, or creed, or race, in order that no atom of intellectual force shall be lost to our common country, and it is this which tends to the solution of our problem. Once in a while the great utterance of some broad-souled, warm-hearted American, determined to give his testimony comes to us. Bishop Potter, broader than his entire church, says tersely, "What the Negro needs more than anything else is, opportunity." Or, it is Cable: "I must repeat my conviction, that if the unconscious habit of oppression were not already a scheme so gross, irrational, unjust and inefficient as our present caste distinctions it could not find a place among a people so generally intelligent and high-minded. We hear much about race instinct. The most of it is pure twaddle. It may be there is such a thing. We do not know. It is not proved. And even if it were established, it could not necessarily be a proper moral guide."

Then, it is Bishop Dudley, bravely fighting his way through traditions: "The time may come and will, when

the prejudices now apparently invincible, shall have been conquered. Society then as now organized upon the basis of community of interests, congeniality of tastes, and equality of position, will exclude the multitude, who cannot speak its shibboleth, but there will be no color line of separation.

* * Such a social revolution as will open wide the drawing-rooms of Washington to the black men who have been honored guests in the palaces of England and France.

* * Capacity is not lacking, but help is needed, the help I repeat, which the intelligence of the superior race must give by careful selection and personal contact with the selected. Does not our mother Nature teach us that this is the only process, such being her method of procedure, working under the Creator's law."

Not on the Protestant side alone. Hear this clearer blast from the leader of the Catholic cause in the Northwest, Archbishop Ireland of Minnesota: "The right way. There is a work for us. Slavery has been abolished in America; the trail of the serpent, however, yet marks the ground. We do not accord to our black brother all the rights and privileges of freedom and of a common humanity. They are the victims of an unreasonable and unjustifiable ostracism. * * It looks as if we had grudgingly granted to them emancipation, as if we fain still would be masters, and hold them in servitude.

"What do I claim for the black men? That which I claim for the white men, neither more nor less. I would blot out the color line. White men have their estrangements. They separate on lines of wealth, of intelligence, of culture, of ancestry. Those differences and estrangements I do not now discuss, and will not complain if the barriers they erect are placed on the pathway of the black man. But let there be no barrier against mere color. Treat Negroes who are intellectually inferior to us as we treat inferior whites, and I shall not complain. The Negro problem is upon us, and there is no other solution to it, peaceful and permanent, than to grant to our colored citizens practical and effective equal-

ity with white citizens." Here are men, whose words shed some rays of light upon the solution of this terrible White Problem, which I may lay some slight claim to the distinction of having discovered, though it would be presumptuous for me to say the solution is clear to me. If it could properly be stated, perhaps, Edmund Burke's "*timid prudence with which a tame circumspection so frequently enervates the work of beneficence,*" and of all things being "*afraid of being too much in the right,*" might be found its salient point on the positive side, while, as I have hinted, the absolute ignorance about the Negro, presents the negative side.

"Slaves of Gold! whose sordid dealings
Tarnish all your boasted powers,
Prove that you have human feelings
Ere you proudly question ours."

We learn from the *Forum* editor that there are members of this race who are, "accomplished" and "manly." He is mistaken in supposing they have "no back-ground;" some of them have several, three generations of education, sufficient, according to Emerson, to make a scholar. Some have proved their capacity, not in contests with Negroes alone, but with representatives of all races; some have, it is true, from training and heredity, the philosophic temperament. Like Hebrews, who look not back to Jerusalem, or await a Messiah; like Irishmen, who do not dream alone of a resuscitated Irish monarchy, or see visions of an Irish Parliament at Dublin, they are painfully aware what disadvantages still hedge the members of any proscribed race, in ordinary pursuits, and in daily life; but they see no reason because of this, why they should feel ashamed of the fact, seek to deny it, or attempt to ignore it. They feel that they are first of all American citizens, and secondarily Negroes. From their reading, observation, and reflection, they are not sure but that the very fact of their origin may have been the means, under God's guidance of the Universe, of saving them from illiberal prejudices, from over-weening race-pride, from utter disregard of other races' rights, feelings and privileges, and from intellectual narrowness and bigotry.

LEND A HAND.

A RECORD OF PROGRESS.

BY
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