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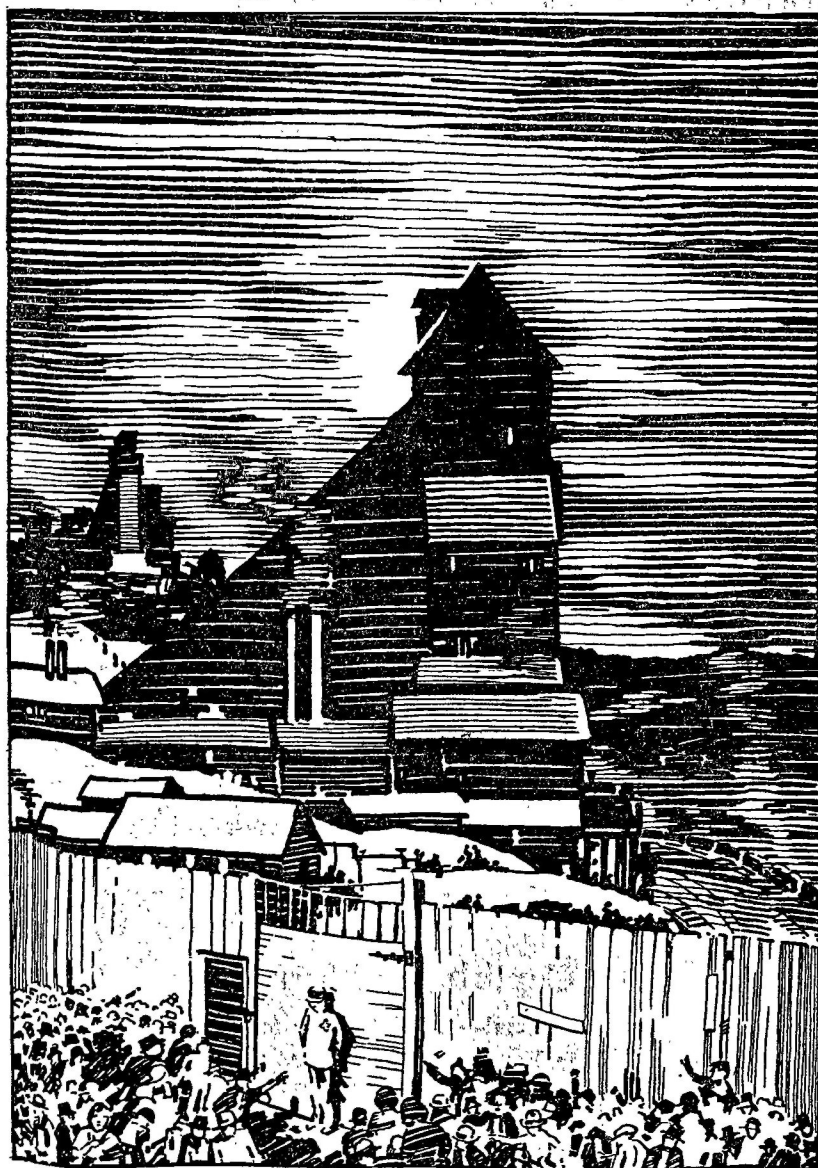
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Building Tomorrow's World

The New White Man

A HUSHED, rapt audience leans forward to watch in fascination the lips and gestures of an eloquent speaker. It is September 18, 1895.

He is a colored man. He raises his right hand with the fingers spread apart and utters a sentence which arouses his white hearers to intense enthusiasm. From that moment, seven months after the death of Frederick Douglass, this humble Negro becomes in the eyes of the American people the leader of his race.

That man was Booker T. Washington. And what he said was this: "In all things purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

This conception of race relations was never accepted by the leaders of the Negro race in the North, not even in Washington's lifetime. He has been dead twelve years. Those years have witnessed the greater part of the World War; our participation in it; the return of thousands of colored troops from overseas; the great post-war migration of Negroes to the North; the introduction and perpetual postponement of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill; the recent organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—a history-making accomplishment; and, in general, a literary and artistic renaissance among our cultured Negro citizens. The emergence, in short, of the vocal, the irresistible, the "new" Negro. The new Negro, whose soul, no less than his forerunner's, to use a phrase from Langston Hughes, "has grown deep like the rivers," but who more vigorously asserts as in Countee Cullen's line,

"We shall not always plant while others reap."

The new Negro, to be sure! The old Negro, emancipated though he was from chattel slavery, has lived in bondage none the less, and only now is he commencing to throw off his yoke.

But what of the white man? Despite the legend of the Civil War, he has allowed himself to be sold by his desire for dominance into a spiritual slavery. His back is bent beneath the burden of his own weighty superstitions, the load of his self-created fears. His dreams of the future are haunted by dire demons:

loss of supremacy, reduction of economic gain, racial intermarriage. And exactly as the ignorant slaves of the South found their way to some famed dream interpreter, these modern bondmen have besought their scientists, so-called, to conjure Nordic strains, and cast the spell of psychological tests in order to free their dreams from goblins. But voodooism and medicine men, whether old style or new, can lure for long none but the ignorant and dull. It is because thus far we whites have not yet had *our* spiritual renaissance that we pay any heed to oracles who but bolster up our prejudices. The white man in our time is still the *old* white man, holding his hand aloft with the fingers widely spread, and mouthing still the old taboos.

The new white man will soon become articulate. Even now he is trying to find his voice. The new Negro could come first, because his burdens, though insufferable, had been laid on his back by other hands. The old white man, however, has lived these many years in thralldom to his own obsessions, and it will take much time to snap the thongs that bind him to his prejudices. Yet one by one they burst. And there will come in time the white man's renaissance, expressing itself perhaps in a new dedication to the art of living, and ushering in the new white man to lead his race from bondage.

The new white man will have to burst the bonds of *ignorance*. Last month following an address I had made at a forum, a man who had taken exception to my remarks on social equality approached me and declared that whatever came, he could never approve of social equality "because of the principle of the thing." "What principle?" I inquired. Whereupon he evaded every query I propounded, admitting that he knew nothing about Negroes personally or as a racial group, had studied the question not at all, but nevertheless was sure that social equality went counter to his "principles." The experience is so typical as to be almost banal. The new white man will not allow himself to be deterred by lazy generalities from widening the horizons of human fellowship. He will be aware of

Negro achievement and cultural contributions. He will know so many Negroes personally, if he has the good fortune to deserve their friendship, that the experience of association alone will render him immune to the foolish phrases of traditionalism which often do, alas, get by as "principles."

The new white man will burst the bonds of *superstition*. "Negroes," often say uncultured whites, "are superstitious." And that, of course, is true of some, but as a fact, the superstitious Negro is excusable, since he is usually uneducated. But what can be said in defense of the comparatively well educated whites who carry around in their heads superstitions about other races which are as unrelated to scientific fact as the "science" of phrenology? What of the tales to bulwark white esteem which are passed about behind hands raised to hide the lips,—the ugly jests, the myths, insinuations which are to Negroes only the vilest of lies, but to the whites who hear them, and the young whites in particular, the most insidious of poisons? The new white man will never hesitate to meet these whispers, no matter how distasteful it may be to drag them into the open. He will scotch them and the basic one on which they rest, the general faith in white supremacy.

The new white man will burst the bonds of *economic dependency*. When our country was new and cheap labor could not be had because land was free to all, slavery was the easy road for those who had to lean on the exploitation of others for their profit. Indentured labor was another contemporary escape from justice on a smaller scale. Freedom from chattel slavery brought by no means to all colored people freedom from economic exploitation. Negro labor today is "cheap" labor, and many a white-owned industry exhibits the profits that it does simply because it lives in a state of dependency on colored labor. The new white man will not fail to attack this extremely practical aspect of the race question; for without freedom to compete for his bread and butter (since we live as yet in a competitive society) what can mere physical freedom amount to? In the ranks of white labor, which for the most part refuses to admit the colored worker, will some day yet be heard the voice of the new white man, crying out the sound principle of all-inclusive labor solidarity.

The new white man will burst the bonds of *fear*. For underneath all else that stands between the races is the white man's age-long jealousy for his dominant position. The Ku Klux Klan, the post-war wave of Nordicism, were built up largely on the fear among the white "superiors" that some day if the "rising tide of color" were not checked, the pale-skinned despot would be jeopardized. It is the same fear, reflected from a different facet, which underlies the intermar-

riage bugaboo. You can't even mention social equality, as a rule, without being forced to discuss intermarriage in the self-same breath. It is frequently useless to point out the vast extent to which miscegenation goes on outside of wedlock, and the patent fact that social equality, by safeguarding the status of the colored woman, will tend to decrease racial mixture while slightly increasing intermarriage. The cautious may console themselves with this: that custom being what it is in the life of man, by the time when there is any wholesale intermarriage, there will be on the part of society a wholesale sanction of it. The mores can be changed; but you cannot change them fast.

It cannot be denied, of course, that economic class divisions have grown up, to some extent, within the colored race itself in the United States, and that within this minority caste group, though subject to all the psychological influences of discrimination against it, even color lines have been drawn at times between those of darker and lighter skins.

Is there any way of settling this question short of *complete justice, complete equality, complete freedom* for friendship? I know of none. It is because of this increasingly apparent fact that I am compelled to realize every now and then afresh the audacious radicalism of Jesus' conception of human relations. Into a world regimented along racial, national, and religious divisions, he thrust the drastic concept of the Father-God and the Man-Brotherhood, all, every person, "of one blood" with all the others. It is he—not to disparage Lincoln—who was the Great Emancipator, for in his method there was nothing self-defeating, yet there were no limitations to his goal of fellowship. Equality to him was no mere sweeping away of barriers; it was a highly positive, creative, completely normal atmosphere in which could develop after the normal fashion the insatiate reach of human personalities for others.

And that is why today, anything short of his thorough-going principles is insufficient. For nothing affects the situation very much unless the new Negro and the new white man can begin to live, right now, the new life that will some day be the rule between the races. When hands are clasped as a symbol of victory over ignorance, superstition, greed, and fear, the widespread fingers,—symbols, instead, of perpetual separatism—fall very naturally together. Why not clasp hands so firmly that they stay together always?

Genevieve Allen