

THE NEW NEGRO.

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The American negro of thirty years ago was the product of African paganism and American slavery that called itself Christian. Two widely different pictures of the negro of that period are to be found in the descriptions and allusions of writers both of that time and of the present day. In apologies for slavery, whether direct or indirect, the negro appears as docile and happy, loyal to his master and to his master's family, kind in disposition, of a warm religious nature, and so trustworthy that his very vices leaned to virtue's side. Such idyllic pictures of the negroes as the best laboring population in the world are to be found abundantly in the literature of the past and present generation, and in wayside conversations of to-day.

On the other hand, in criticisms of the legislatures of the reconstruction period, and in excuses made for separate railway coaches, separate schools and churches, and the exclusion of negroes from all offices and from the ballot-box, the negro appears as ignorant, depraved, given over to all the vices, and incapable of cultivation in mind or in morals.

A judicial estimate of what the millions of the freedmen were when just emancipated, must no doubt retain enough features from the last characterization, to show that if slavery was in any sense a missionary instrumentality it was not efficient for producing the highest Christian civilization. It did not develop in the slave thrift, foresight and self-reliance to make him more and more fit for successful freedom. It did not graft firmly upon the religiosity of his nature the virtues of honesty, truthfulness and chastity.

When we add the fact of universal illiteracy on the part of the freedmen at the close of the war, it is evident that their condition called for something slavery had not given them. There was crying need of some new form of missionary work other than the "peculiar institution." It was necessary not only for their own sake, but for the welfare of the whole South and the entire nation. The situation demanded not the development of a better slave nor the production of a serf, but the transformation of a vast population trained as slaves into a population with the character, habits and virtues of freemen. The nation could not prosper with these millions continuing as they were. The problem for statesman, philanthropist, Christian, was no less than to make a new negro.

The American Missionary Association was one of the most important agencies that grappled with this problem. It rightly regarded the school-house as the starting point for the great transformation. The change must come in response to intelligent appeal. In developing individual intelligence and character, the school-house can build into society all the elements of Christian civilization. For the school-house has to do with health and skill and thrift and morals and religion.

Thirty years have brought many changes to the South. The greatest of them all is to be found in the results already attained by Christian education in making a new negro. In putting forward this claim and some of the evidence in its support, I shall deal but slightly with statistics, and confine myself largely to testimony from personal observation.

In the matter of physical stamina and health, Christian education cannot claim that it has up to the present time improved on the old negro, when the whole mass is taken into

view. The death-rate among the colored population in such Southern cities as publish a record, is nearly double that of the white population. It is undoubtedly much larger than it was among the slaves. This high death-rate is not surprising in view of their poverty and ignorance and, moreover, is partly to be explained by the high birth rate among the same population. For in all cities nearly half the deaths are of little children. The higher rate than in slave times shows that we have not yet carried education far enough with the negro population to secure as good care of themselves and their children as the old masters took of them when each had a high market value. Every missionary school gives instruction in hygiene and sanitation. The new negro in this sphere of the physical life is to be seen in the trained colored teachers and the growing company of thoroughly educated colored physicians. The number of both these classes must be increased, and they will lift the millions to a new physical level.

In the intellectual sphere, the new negro is unmistakably prominent. We marvel at the literature which has sprung up in the white South since the war. This brilliant constellation of writers now glowing in the Southern sky, is not so indicative of a new era for the South and the nation as are the gatherings of the state associations of colored teachers. I have attended that of Alabama where were some four hundred present, of whom the president said the larger part owed their education at first or second hand to the American Missionary Association. They were principals and teachers of city and village schools, shaping the colored youth of their respective communities. They were presidents and professors in colleges and normal schools, training the teachers of the majority of the children of that state which has a larger colored than white population. Whether old enough to have been born in slavery or only the children of slaves, these earnest, capable, and many of them highly educated, teachers were the new negro in sharp contrast with the absolutely illiterate slave population of less than a generation before.

New negroes worthy of all honor are the multitudes of our pupils and pupils of our pupils who are pushing out into the remoter public school districts of the Black Belt. They are at once examples and apostles of a new era, for they are missionaries of a better life to the rural millions of the South. I have seen them at their work and found them not only good teachers in the school-house, but also a spiritual power in the churches and practical examples of thrift and nobly ambitions in their communities.

Quite as important as lists of taxable property is the new spirit of self-reliance and independence beginning to show itself among many of the negroes who are still poor. It would be an impressive sign of the new industrial South if we could gather in one assembly the white iron masters of Alabama whose skill and energy have in twenty years brought that state from zero in the production of pig iron to a position next to Pennsylvania and Ohio. I affirm in all truth and soberness that far more significant to one that looks deep into the sources of civilization, was the gathering I saw of some hundreds of hard-handed negro cotton planters in the black belt met to discuss their condition, prospects, and means of improvement. Some of this company had not much book learning, and others were teachers for a part of the year. All had felt the influence of the missionary movement of Christian education. They lived, most of them, in cabins without glass windows, and many of them in the one-roomed cabin. Few of them owned land. Year by year their cotton crops were mortgaged for food while they tilled the fields. But there was in them the spirit of freemen. They raised no clamor for government aid. They indulged in no chimerical visions of reaching the millennium by wholesale emigration. All day long they exhorted one another to more intelligent farming, more unremitting industry, greater economy, and the purchase of land. They urged that the pulpits be purged of immoral preachers. They applauded loudly the exhortation to talk religion less and live it more. Such spirit and purpose among the laborers is the best of all auguries of industrial improvement.

The graduates and former pupils of our missionary schools are to be found everywhere in the South among the foremost leaders of every upward movement. The steady and rapid development of industrial training in our schools makes them important factors in diversifying and developing the industries of the South. The amount and character of Biblical study in our schools of all grades is a powerful instrumentality for changing the old time religion of emotion into a religion that concerns the intelligence and the conduct as well as the feelings. We are making a new negro.

When criticisms of our work call attention to millions of negroes who are still ignorant and degraded, we are only incited to press our work the more vigorously, till the lowest are lifted. When we are told that many partially and some highly educated negroes are it

Southern penitentiaries, we remember that our Northern prisons hold some white graduates of colleges, and are moved not to educate less but to increase the moral and religious element in education.

A Georgia critic complains in the *Forum* for October that education is leading the negro away from "his feeling of dependence and causing him to cease showing "proper respect to the white people," and says "a little education is all the negro needs," and that he "will have to be disfranchised" and have "a separate code enacted that will fit him." This leads one to wonder whether the Anglo-Saxon race in the South has lost its capacity of adjustment to new conditions. Many even of the educated men of that race seem to have learned nothing on this subject in thirty years. They still have no suggestion to make for the negro but to suppress him. They still write in the spirit of Chancellor Harper's ante-bellum memoir on slavery, in which he maintained that the aspirations of a freeman unfit a laborer for his situation, and asked triumphantly, "Would you do a benefit to the horse or the ox by giving him a cultivated understanding or fine feelings?"

The almost universal prevalence of such a sentiment among the old masters thirty years ago, unfitted them for the new training of the negro. The persistence of the sentiment keeps most Southern whites of to-day unfit to deal with negro education. The tradition that the negro must be kept in his place by white authority, is so fixed in the average white mind in the South, that it is impossible for him to work along the line of letting the negro, as well as every other human being, find his place by natural selection, as Providence gives him capacity and opportunity. Even Judge Gundy says a social law forbids white people to teach negroes. Bill Arp in the *Forum* would not give one of the seven million negroes the higher education, nor let one of them enter a profession.

In Judge Gundy's very liberal address on negro education at the Southern Teachers' Association in Atlanta a year ago, he urged better schools for the negroes and giving them all the education for which they have desire and capacity, but said that they should be taught in school that they are inferior to the white race. It is worthy of notice, however, that while this sentence appeared in the *Atlanta Journal's* report of the address at the time, it was left out when the address was given to the nation a few weeks later in the *Journal of Politics*. The original utterance in the most liberal address recently heard from any Southern man, shows the persistence of the influence of slavery on the master race.

I have heard the superintendent of education of a great Southern state address the colored teachers assembled in their state association and put the chief emphasis of his address of an hour's length on assuring these teachers that the Southern whites are much better friends of the negro than the Northerners are, and on warning these teachers against "social equality," whatever that may mean. As if the work of the chief school official of a state were to prevent somebody from getting somewhere or trying to get somewhere, instead of doing everything possible to increase the capacity of every child in the commonwealth to achieve good results for the commonwealth and honorable rewards for himself.

Too much of the white South that expresses itself is still in the attitude of repressing the old negro instead of recognizing the new negro and helping him upward. If half the pains were taken to find out what the best negroes are doing and saying and thinking, that is taken to hunt down a negro suspected of crime, the mind of the white South would be rapidly changed on the whole subject of the treatment and the prospect of the negro. Such change in the Southern white mind would be of incalculable service in accelerating the change in the negro. There are open-eyed southerners who recognize the enormous progress made by the negro in a generation. We who are in the work know the appalling needs still unmet, but we are not appalled, for we see the improvement to be so great that we regard the time as not remote historically when the negro shall be so completely made new as to become wholly an element of strength and hope in the nation's life and the world's evangelization.