

## THE MULATTO FACTOR IN THE RACE PROBLEM.

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It is a matter of regret that in organizing the twelfth census it was determined to attempt no separate enumeration of the mulatto element of our population, — using the term in its popular sense, as denoting all persons having any admixture of white and negro blood. It will not do to say that the failure to do this will in any wise affect the solution of our race problem, for to do so would be to regard it as admitting of a sort of blackboard treatment, — the only essentials to success being an array of statistics and their proper handling. But any one who endeavors to go beyond the superficialities of the problem — to do something more than academically consider, from his particular standpoint, its external symptoms — must feel that such data would at least be of value, whatever ideas he may entertain as to its ultimate solution.

Any consideration which fails to reckon this mulatto element as an independent factor ignores what is possibly the most important feature of the problem, and is faulty in its premises, whatever the theoretical conclusion arrived at. Yet we see this constantly done, and of the hundreds of such discussions annually engaged in, it is safe to say that scarcely one is entirely free from this blunder. There appears in them but a single "problem," and every panacea proposed — education, voting, industrial training, or what not — is made to fit the same Procrustean bed. It is a primal postulate of these discussions that the negro is an undeveloped, not an inferior, race, and to this basic error may be attributed much of the confusion which surrounds the entire subject.

We have too long been guilty of the

folly of trying to legislate the negro into a white man, and a pyramid of failures has apparently not yet convinced us of the futility of the undertaking. We have ignored the scientific truth of the ethnic differences among the human family, and have blindly disregarded the fact that the negro, in common with all other races, possesses certain persistent, ineradicable distinguishing characteristics. Foolishly attempting to evade the stubborn fact that the negro in Africa is to-day just what we know him to have been since he first appeared on that continent, we have sought in slavery an excuse for the natural and inevitable resemblance between the native and transplanted branches of the family, and have proceeded toward the American negro as though heredity could be overridden by constitutions and laws. Probably nothing has contributed more toward the persistence of this effort at creating an artificial being than the absolute elimination of the mulatto equation from all our considerations of the subject. It is this that has enabled those who have so long ignored the laws and operations of heredity to point, in proof of the correctness of their theory of race-problem treatment, to the achievements of men loosely accredited to the negro race. Unless through discussion the American people be able to reach a common ground, a century of polemical strife will accomplish no tangible good; and I know of no surer means of reaching a working agreement than by the frank acknowledgment of the mulatto factor in the race problem. I would not be guilty of complicating a situation already sufficiently complex through the introduction of a new fac-



tor; I rather hold to the hopeful belief that the consideration of one which already exists, though commonly ignored, may at least serve to simplify discussion, even though it fail to at once point a way out of existing difficulties. When we recognize the very simple and very patent fact that the intermixture of white and black races has given us a hybrid that is neither the one nor the other; when we get far enough along to separate this type from the negro masses in our efforts at determining what may be best for the latter; when the South is willing to lay at the white man's door many of the failings of this mulatto type and much of the meanness which he too frequently exhibits, and Northern opinion is sufficiently candid and honest to persist no longer in ascribing all his virtues and accomplishments to the negro, — I think we shall have made a distinct gain in race-problem discussion.

One of the greatest needs in the equipment of those who discuss the negro from a distance is a better knowledge of the real negro, and nothing would so promote this knowledge as a recognition of the fact that in crediting his race with the achievements of its mulatto element they but becloud the question. How may we reasonably hope to know what is best to be done for the negro until we first truly grasp the facts of his moral and intellectual possibilities and limitations, as well as needs? And how may we hope to do this under our present method of treating the subject? In reviewing the work of the most distinguished writer accredited to the negro race — though he has but one sixteenth negro blood in his veins — the foremost living American author has used this language: "They [referring to the mulattoes] need not be ashamed of the race from which they have sprung, and whose exile they share; for in many of the arts it has already shown, during a single generation of freedom, gifts which slavery apparently only obscured." This criticism develops the

very foundation of the theory upon which all such discussions are based, and which we have referred to above, — that the negro is an undeveloped, not an inferior race, — that in all essential particulars the white man and the black are by nature equally endowed. Thus is placidly ignored the truth that the negro is one of the oldest races of which we have any knowledge, and that its very failure to develop itself in its own habitat, while the Caucasian, Mongolian, and others have gone forward, is in itself sufficient proof of inferiority. Conveniently disregarding the fact of the persistence of a racial status fixed several thousand years ago, they tell us that forty years of freedom are not enough to develop "gifts which slavery apparently only obscured." The years, both of slavery and of freedom, passed by the negro on this continent constitute but an insignificant span in the life of that people; yet if we blot out the achievements of the American negro, who has passed through slavery, what has the race left to boast of? And if we but go one step farther, and from the achievements of the "American negro" obliterate all that the American mulatto has accomplished, what ground indeed would be left to those whose sentiment and sympathy have apparently rendered them so forgetful of scientific truth?

A year ago a movement was inaugurated in Congress looking to the investigation of the suffrage laws of the various states. No attempt was made to conceal the real purpose of the movement, and even though we go so far as to credit the proponent of the measure with honesty of opinion as to its necessity, what must be thought of his wisdom, and of the point of view from which he would have the so-called "investigation" made, when he himself, in the face of the facts of history and the experiences of recent years, calmly affirms that "there is no doubt that the negro is capable of unlimited development," and declares his belief in the



virtue of "participation in politics" as a means of "uplifting the race"? Yet such is our looseness of expression in discussing this question, that to challenge either the wisdom or correctness of such views is to hear, as their sole support, a recital of the achievements of "famous men of the negro race," — while, as a matter of fact, the names brought forward are merely those of well-known mulattoes, — from Murillo's favorite pupil, down to Crispus Attucks, Benjamin Banneker, Douglass, Bruce, Lynch, the late Sir Conrad Reeves, Du Bois, Washington, Chesnut, and others. I am well acquainted with the exceptions that may be urged here, but this is a plea for greater scientific precision in laying the foundations of race-problem study and treatment, and the student of negro ethnology knows that these exceptions are more apparent than real. The traffic which furnished slaves to the Americas and the West Indies was no respecter of ethnic distinctions, and, while the great majority of those brought over were pure negroes, through it a few of the higher types of Bantu and Fulah stock found their way into foreign servitude, and with their blood have occasionally transmitted some measure of their ability. Otman dan Fodio, the poet chief of the Fulahs, was no more a negro than was Othello, — nor was Abdul Rahaman, the Moorish chief, who was a Mississippi slave in the early part of the last century. Thus it will not answer to cite such sporadic examples as the revolutionary leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the political cunning of Elliott, or the ballads of Dunbar.

Just as the crossing of the Spaniard upon the Indian has given us the mestizo of Central America and Mexico, so the blending of white and negro blood has given us a type which combines some of the racial characteristics — good and bad — of both its progenitors. But in a sane treatment of the race question this hybrid can no more be regarded as typical of the potentiality of the negro

than can Porfirio Diaz be considered an index to the "undeveloped ability" of the native Mexican Indian whose blood he has in part inherited. It would certainly seem to be the part of wisdom to frankly recognize the negro's own racial characteristics, and honestly study them, but this cannot be done so long as is our consideration of the problem of what is best to be done for him we continue to confuse the great mass of American negroes with the exceptional mulatto types, and point to the accomplishments of the latter as evidence in support of crass and preconceived notions as to the capacity of the former.

When free from white or mulatto influence the negro is of a contented, happy disposition. He is docile, tractable, and unambitious, — with but few wants, and those easily satisfied. He inclines to idleness, and though having a tendency to the commission of petty crimes is not malicious, and rarely cherishes hatred. He cares nothing for "the sacred right of suffrage," and, when left to his own inclinations, will disfranchise himself by the thousand rather than pay an annual poll-tax. He infinitely prefers the freedom and privileges of a car of his own to the restraint of one in which he would be compelled to mingle with white people. Surrounded by larger possibilities for material betterment than have ever been possessed by any land-tilling people in the world, in the peaceful enjoyment of his church and lodge, he frets not himself because of evil-doers, nor troubles about "participation in politics," nor suffers dreams of social equality to mar the peaceful tenor of his care-free mind. No truer utterance was ever made, nor one which contains more of wise and helpful suggestiveness, if but taken to heart, than the declaration of Major-General N. P. Banks, made to a Boston audience in 1864, that "*the people of the North are much more disturbed and distressed at the condition of the negro than he is himself.*" This is the real negro,



the negro of the masses, — not the artificial product of vicious advice or ill-considered philanthropy. As such, he presents few, if any, serious problems, and none which he may not himself work out, if let alone and given time. But it will be an individual rather than a race solution: the industrious will, as children, acquire a common school education, and as adults will own property; those capable of higher things will find for themselves a field for the exercise of their talents, just as they are doing to-day; the vicious and shiftless will be as are the vicious and shiftless of other races.

If we will but study the true sources of the agitation over "negro disfranchisement," "negro cars," the deprivation of "the negro's rights," etc., it will be found that in it all the negro takes but an insignificant if any part. The cry that goes up over "the lack of opportunities under which the negro labors," and the "injustice of race distinctions," does not proceed from the negro. It is the voice of the mulatto, or that of the white politician, that is heard. If the statutes of those states which have been charged with discriminating against the negro were not in any wise enforceable against the mulatto, I strongly suspect that America's race problem would speedily resolve itself into exceedingly small and simple proportions.

Through the medium of race papers, and magazines, the pulpit, industrial and political gatherings and associations, the mulatto wields a tremendous influence over the negro. It is here that his importance as a factor in whatever problems may arise from the negro's presence in this country becomes manifest, — and the working out of such problems may be advanced or retarded, just as he wisely or unwisely plays the part which fate — or Providence — has assigned him. The negro, like the white man, responds more readily to bad influences than to good, and the example and precepts of an hundred men like

Washington and Du Bois may be easily counteracted by the advice and influence of men of whom the mulatto type unfortunately furnishes too many examples. Booker Washington may in all sincerity preach the gospel of labor; he may teach his people, as a fundamental lesson, the cultivation of the friendship and esteem of the white man; he may point out the truth that for the negro the privilege of earning a dollar is of much greater importance than that of spending it at the white man's theatre or hotel; yet all these lessons must fail of their fullest and best results so long as the negro's mind is being constantly poisoned with the radical teachings and destructive doctrines of the mulatto of the other school.

The most prominent mulatto editor of the country is credited by the Washington Post with having declared that he was "tired of hearing about good niggers, — that what he wanted was to see bad niggers, with guns in their hands." One of the leading race papers in the country, published at the national capital, in enumerating certain things which it would like to see occur, as being beneficial to the negro, included "the death of a few more men like Charles Dudley Warner," and this merely because that good man and true friend of the negro had, shortly before his death, reached and expressed conclusions concerning negro higher education at variance with opinions he had formerly entertained. With Booker Washington crying from the housetops, "Peace! peace!" and the most widely read and influential of race magazines silently furnishing to the private precincts of the home and chimney corner stories revolving around themes of race prejudice, and appealing to passion and hate, together with articles which would inculcate lessons dangerous to even a stronger people, — which voice is in the end likely to prove most potent in its influence upon this childish race? The occurrence is too recent for the country