

"WOULD RATHER BE"

Perhaps the happiest people on earth are those who are satisfied with the lot into which providence has cast them. No more discontented, dissatisfied, and unhappy individual lives than the peasant, who forever envies the lot of kings; than the poor spendthrift, who thinks himself the world's most despised creature, and believes that the smiles and the blessings of this world are predetermined for the rich man alone; or than the Negro who believes the white skin of more worth than wisdom or character.

Yet, it would not be well to condemn this spirit of dissatisfaction in the people of the world which so frequently manifests itself in hatred and jealousy and prejudice. This spirit, which is the cause of unhappiness is also the germ of all progress. The peasant who wishes for himself kingly powers, rises up against his lord and a democracy comes to take the place of a monarchy. The envious spendthrift mends his ways, becomes frugal, and eventually a rich miser. And the Negro is becoming to regard his color as a badge of distinction and not one of humiliation. A white correspondent of the daily press remarked recently that her colored neighbors seemed to think themselves better than she was.

This spirit of dissatisfaction has not always been regarded as the mother of progress. Only recently has this idea been able to gain ground against the medieval and early precepts of action, which admonished the downtrodden to be content, the humble to be humbler still, and the despised to be gentle and not wrathful.

Something of this medieval spirit clings to the following words of Roscoe Conklin Simmons, nephew of the late Booker T. Washington, delivered before a body of high school graduates in Little Rock, Arkansas last week. Mr. Simmons said:

"I should rather be an American Negro with my face toward the future, standing on the memory of Lincoln, holding in my hand the flag of Grant and Carney, than to sit upon any ancient throne my ancestors may have known in the bloom of a day past and forever gone."

Contentment and pride with the lot into which providence has thrown him is the key thought of Mr. Simmons' words before these high school boys and girls. Placing the emphasis here is certainly correct according to medieval ideas. Mr. Simmons wishes to inculcate pride in the modern Negro and that is good. But was it necessary to do this at the expense of belittling what our ancestors accomplished? We do not think this was necessary.

The American Negro would rather be himself than anybody else under the sun, but if he had to be someone else, he would most rather be one of those blood African relations, who have not known 350 years of physical slavery and fifty years more of political, economic and social slavery. These Negroes, whose country is their own, whose lives are in their own hands, and whose God is their own, these people are and must be the happiest Negroes on earth.