

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Vol. 3. No. 31.

Lincoln, Nebraska, August 21, 1903.

Whole No. 135.

THE RACE PROBLEM

On another page will be found a letter recently written by President Roosevelt to Governor Durbin on the subject of lynching. Forgetting for the present the failure of the president to enforce the law against the trust magnates and Governor Durbin's refusal to deliver to Kentucky authorities a republican ex-governor charged with murder, let us consider the subject of mob law as it is related to the race question. The president is right in protesting against mob law—it cannot be defended. It is a reflection on the people if legal means of punishment are adequate and effective, and it is a reflection on the government if the people have reason to distrust its ability to enforce the law. All will agree with the president that punishment should not only be sure, but should be as swift as a due regard to the rights of the accused will permit. Whatever punishments are sanctioned by public opinion should be embodied in the law and in the case of crimes against women the laws should be such—even though a constitutional amendment were necessary to secure it—that the victim of the outrage will be protected from the humiliation of having to give testimony before a crowd of curious, but disinterested, persons.

The president is also to be commended for having coupled a denunciation of rape with a condemnation of lynching. Too many cry out against the lawless punishment without saying anything against the horrible crime which arouses the anger of the people. If some of the enthusiasm that is spent in passing resolutions denouncing mob law was employed in condemning the unspeakable beastiality that provokes summary punishment there would be fewer instances of mob law.

The fact that the president did not specifically mention southern lynchings shows that the lynchings and burnings in northern states have convinced him that race prejudice is as strong in Illinois, Indiana, Delaware, and Kansas as in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, or Texas.

It may be well in this connection to consider race prejudice for a moment in connection with mob law. That there is such a thing must be admitted. It is written on every page of history and is not likely to disappear soon. It must be remembered, too, that the negro has as much prejudice against the white man as the white man has against the negro, and if the negro was in a position to rule the white man there is no reason to doubt that the white man would have reason to complain. This was apparent in the carpet-bag days and is apparent today wherever it can find expression.

A sense of justice, however, restrains this prejudice and it is not often that either the white man or the negro says anything in the presence of the other that is calculated to offend. Color is not a matter of choice, neither can it be changed by will or by law. It is, therefore, as unkind to taunt a man with being black as it is unreasonable for a black man to be angered by such a taunt.

A man is to be praised or blamed according to the use he makes of his talents or opportunities, not by his inherited advantages. The fact that a negro is lynched by a mob because of an

outrage upon a woman ought not to increase the race prejudice that exists. White men are lynched for the same crime. Neither must the white man's feelings toward the negro be judged by his conduct when under great excitement. Man mad is an entirely different creature from man deliberate. Men in anger have killed fathers, wives, brothers, sons and friends—they have broken every tie of love and kinship.

Suffrage qualifications cannot be attributed entirely to race prejudice for suffrage qualifications are to be found in nearly all countries and have been employed in many of our own states. They have been employed by white men against members of the white race and by people of every color against people of their own color. Woman suffragists complain that women are disfranchised and such disfranchisement cannot be explained on the ground of race prejudice either, for husband and wife, mother and son, are not only of the same race, but are linked together by the strongest bonds known.

The suffrage amendments in the south, so much complained of by republican politicians, are not nearly so severe as the republican colonial policy in the Philippines.

First—In every southern state some of the negroes can vote now, and all others can qualify themselves for suffrage; in the Philippines the inhabitants are permanently disqualified.

Second—The negroes in the south, even when they cannot vote, have the protection of federal and state constitutions; the Filipino has no constitutional protection whatever.

Third—The negroes in the south live under the laws that the white man makes for himself; the Filipino lives under laws that we make for him and would not live under ourselves.

While the brown man of the Orient is faring worse than the black man in the south, the republican leaders are stirring up race antagonism in this country in order to keep the colored vote solid for the republican party. Even the president has contributed more than his share to the agitation. When he has appointed a colored man to office he has done it with a flourish of trumpets and a brass band accompaniment that the world might know that the "door" was wide open. When a colored postmistress was objected to he refused to allow her to resign and closed the office—and did it allay race prejudice? No; it did more to excite race prejudice than any ten colored appointments that President McKinley made.

The Booker T. Washington dinner at the White house did even more than the indianola postoffice incident to excite race prejudice.

The president surely did not intend to inject the question of social equality into politics, for on that issue he could not carry a state in the Union; then why arouse the colored people to expect social equality or agitate the whites with the fear of it? It is a grievous mistake to turn the negro's thoughts from the substantial advantages of industrial, intellectual and moral progress to the unsubstantial promises of social recognition. The amalgamation of the races is not the solu-

tion of the race question, and that would be the logical result of social equality. In their natural right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness the white man and the black man are equal and these rights should be protected with jealous care. Educational advantages should be open to both races and both should be encouraged to secure all the mental discipline possible.

Whether the more advanced race should fix suffrage qualifications for the less advanced is a question to be determined by the facts in the case, but it is safe to say that on this subject the people of the north would be much like the people of the south if they were compelled to meet the same conditions.

As to social equality there should be a frank and candid understanding. There is no difference on this subject between the white people of the north and the white people of the south. The color line is drawn by republican families as distinctly as it is by democratic families, as distinctly by northern families as by southern families. There is more friendliness and helpfulness where this is recognized than where it is left in doubt and uncertainty.

The white race ought to recognize the rights of the black race and lend it every possible assistance. The whites of the south are taxing themselves to educate the children of darker skin, while republican politicians in the north are riding into office on black votes and, while they exclude the colored people from their social functions, are constantly trying to array the southern negro against the southern white man.

There is another aspect of the question. The promise of social equality—false as it is—encourages the educated negro to hope to get away from his race and thus the race loses the benefit that the more progressive negroes might bring to it. Instead of trying to bleach the face or to take the kink out of the hair let the colored man recognize that he is black by nature and set to work to show what one of his race can accomplish. No upright, intelligent and law-abiding colored man ever gets into trouble himself or involves his people in a race war. After the colored man has established a reputation for virtue, sobriety and good sense, let him devote himself to the building up of a society that will satisfy his needs. If he has daughters let him make them worthy of the best young men of his race; if he has sons, let him make them examples of industry and good habits. To deserve respect and not enjoy it is better than to enjoy respect without deserving it, but to deserve respect is the best and surest way to secure it.

A good character is more valuable and more permanent than a postoffice, and nothing will do more to kill race prejudice than the building up of character.

The white man needs to be reminded, as the president suggests, that lawlessness is dangerous and torture demoralizing to those who practice it, but the black man must also be cautioned not to judge the white man's life purpose by the passions of an hour and he should be warned not to allow the vices and lusts of the most abandoned