

The Commoner.

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THE RACE PROBLEM AGAIN

Editor "Evening Post," New York City.—Dear Sir: The pressure of other work has delayed an answer to your inquiry. The questions which you ask are predicated upon the assertions of the appellant in the case referred to, and it is hardly necessary to discuss the subject until the case is decided. You say, "Granting the authority of these statements and falling intervention by the supreme court, has congress any duty in the premises?" The first thing to do is to ascertain the truth of the statements, and the second is to learn whether the court will intervene. It will then be time for congress to act, and in acting it will have before it the facts as ascertained and the reasons as given by the court.

The second question also begins with an "if" and is based upon an assumption.

The third question begins with an "if" and the answering of it would require a prophecy, and as Speaker Reed once said, "It is never safe to prophesy unless you know."

The suffrage question is one of the most important ones that can come up for consideration, and if by your inquiries you mean to raise that question, I take pleasure in submitting the following:

Conditions are imposed upon suffrage everywhere. Age is always made a condition. It is also required that the voter shall be present at the polls, and this excludes any one who may be necessarily away from home, or who may be unable on account of ill health to leave the house. This provision has sometimes been suspended in the case of soldiers, but it is generally made one of the prerequisites to suffrage. In cities registration is often required, and sometimes it is necessary for the voter to be at a certain place on a day previous to the election as well as at the polls on election day.

Communities differ also on another phase of the suffrage question. Most of the states limit suffrage to men, while in other states men and women vote on exactly the same terms. Some of the states give to women a limited suffrage, that is, a suffrage on certain questions. Often the payment of a poll tax is made a condition to manhood suffrage and a criminal conviction is usually a bar to suffrage. Many of the states have at one time or another had educational qualifications, and some of them have had property qualifications. In view of the experience through which we have passed in this country, it is difficult to lay down a rule upon this subject that can be applied everywhere. We ought to start with the proposition that universal suffrage is the thing to be desired, and where a limitation is placed upon it there must be a satisfactory reason to justify it. That is to say, the presumption is in favor of suffrage and the burden of proof is upon those who would limit it.

An educational qualification is less objectionable than a property qualification, because knowledge is more needed than the possession of property for the proper performance of one's civic duty. An educational qualification is easier to surmount than a property qualification, and then, too, those who prescribe an educational qualification are not so apt to be influenced by purely selfish reasons as those who prescribe a property

qualification. Sometimes the property qualification is made to relieve the educational qualification rather than to aggravate it, that is, one possessing a certain amount of property can vote even without complying with the educational provisions and vice versa.

As the race question in the south has given rise to the present controversy, it is sufficient for the present to consider it alone, and the arguments made upon the race question as it now appears could not be used in discussing the suffrage question unless the same principles were involved and the same conditions had to be met.

Whether or not a given state should adopt a qualification aimed at the black race is a question which must be decided upon the facts in the case, and no person would judge it worth considering would announce a decision without knowing the facts. The race question does not present itself to the people of the north as it does to the people of the south. The colored population of the north is small compared to the white population, and therefore white supremacy is never menaced. Very few colored men hold elective offices in the north, although the colored votes help to elect a great many republicans. Negroes do not hold offices even in the north in proportion to their voting strength, and much less in proportion to their voting strength in the party with which they usually cast their votes. Even where a colored man holds office in the north, it is a colored man who has commended himself to the white people of the community, because in no instance is there a colored majority in any considerable territory in the north.

It is different in the south. In many sections the black population outnumbers the white and, if every male adult voted, the colored population could fill all the offices with negroes selected by the colored population regardless of the opinions of the whites. It is hardly fair for a man who lives where white supremacy is not menaced, and who has never lived or visited the black sections to state dogmatically what ought to be done by the white population who have lived under the reign of the carpet bag legislatures. The administration of government during the reconstruction period just after the war took on a somber hue that the people of the south still remember, and they have reason to dread a return to it. The question which the white people of the south have to meet is whether the white race, with its more advanced civilization and its higher ideals, shall permit its progress to be turned backward by the dominance of the black race. This is the question which the citizen of the north has never had to contemplate.

The republican officeholder who is drawing a salary given to him by colored voters is hardly in a position to set himself up as an impartial judge as to what should be done by the people of the south who live under the shadow of the race problem. It is no reflection upon the black man to say that he is behind the white man in progress. It would be a miracle, indeed, if in a period of forty years the slave could become the intellectual equal of his former master. For centuries the white race has been toiling up the

bill and it has not by any means reached the top. However rapidly the black man may have advanced, who is so blind as to say that the Caucasian is not in front? This question cannot be settled by comparing a few individual cases; it must be judged by the mass. If the black man was inhabiting this country and a few white men without invitation and without necessity entered his domain, attempted to bring him into subjection and then to exploit him, the case would be different. That condition we have now to meet in the Philippine islands, but not here. Here the white man and the black man are living together, and while they live together one race must be dominant. Lincoln expressed what every white man must feel when he said that as the two races could not live together on terms of perfect equality, he was in favor of the race to which he belonged "having the superior position."

Unless all arguments in favor of civilization are without foundation, the superior race, if dominant, would be more considerate toward the inferior race than the inferior race would, if dominant, be toward the superior race. A superior race, when dealing with an inferior one (where it is necessary that one shall be dominant), is restrained, first, by its conscience, and, second, by its view of its own interests; and it is only fair to assume that the superior race will be more responsive to the dictates of conscience and will take a broader view of its own interests, than an inferior race will. To make the application, the white people of the south, if in control, will be more apt to deal justly with the blacks than the blacks would be, if in control, to deal justly with the whites. And the whites, if in control, will be more amenable to public opinion and will take a more comprehensive view of their own interests than the blacks would if in the same position. People differ not so much in the possession of a selfish spirit as they do in their breadth of view when they consider their own interests. The man who steals is selfish, and yet the man who refrains from stealing takes better care of his own interests than the man does who steals. If the white people of the south make laws that are unjust to the blacks, the more intelligent blacks will leave the south, and the whites of the south will suffer because of the absence of a refining and elevating element among the blacks. The provision which the white people of the south have, at heavy expense, made for the education of the negro, shows that they realize that it is to their interest to raise the standard and elevate the condition of the black man. The excesses of the black legislatures after the war show, on the other hand, the indifference of the blacks to their own interests as well as to the interests of the white people.

I am sure that you will pardon me, my dear sir, for putting aside the hypothetical and one-sided questions which you submitted, and taking up the principles which are involved in this subject. If I lived in the south and had to act upon the question, I would act upon it in accordance with the principles which I have suggested, favoring such qualifications as seemed to me necessary to protect the interests of all, making those quali-