

This is the problem of the hour. It demands a solution now. We must address ourselves to the work, while the difficulties may be met. The situation is a peculiar and delicate one. No step should be taken without the most scrupulous care. For upon the one hand lies the future of an entire race. Upon the other, the efficiency and indeed the very permanence of our democratic institutions.

Let us then, with all soberness, ask ourselves the question, what are the real difficulties in the way of an equitable solution of this most knotty problem. Are they inherent in the character of the Negro, or are they to be sought in his social and political relations? In the answer to those questions will be found the key to the situation.

The character of the Negro may best be shown by a glance at his history. Three hundred years ago, he was a savage, steeped in ignorance and superstition. His desires were few. His ambitions fewer. His religion was the most savage heathenism. In the whole range of his history he had made no perceptible progress. Furthermore, the first two hundred and fifty years of his life in America gave little opportunity for advancement. Body, mind, and soul, all were kept in a most galling bondage. Everything tended to develop to the uttermost the baser instincts of his nature. And yet, in the face of all these obstacles, as a race he has made slow but sure progress from the moment he came into contact with our civilization. He was early filled with an insatiable desire to improve his condition. Would you know how he longed to learn to read, ask the Southern lads, who traced for him the letters in the sand, and taught him the words on the sign boards. Do you doubt that he prized personal liberty? Read the tales of a thousand runaway slaves, who toiled a lifetime to purchase the freedom of a child, of a wife, of a father, of a mother. His heroic struggle for advancement during the last twenty-five years has called forth the admiration of even his enemies. If you would know how great has been his progress, compare the Negro of to-day, in industry, in education, in political sagacity, in religion, with the Negro of 1620 or, indeed, of twenty-five years ago. And still the work of advancement continues. To-day, hundreds of the young men and women of the race are annually graduated from the colleges and seminaries of the South, who go forth as a leaven wherewith the whole loaf shall be leavened. Wherever they locate their influence on the community is incalculable. As teachers, as physicians, as ministers they are gradually elevating their race. In the Negro schools, being best acquainted with the desires, the needs, and the capabilities of the race, they make the most successful teachers. They secure a larger and more regular attendance in the schools, and exercise an influence upon the social and political tendencies of the community that is not to be over-estimated. As ministers they never fail to bring about a more simple and practical interpretation of Bible truths, and a more judicious application of its precepts. But especially is one favorably impressed with their influence upon industry; for, as a Southern enthusiast says, labor is the greatest moral force in civilization. They inculcate habits of industry and thrift; the results of which may be seen from the fact that in Louisiana, during a single year, the Negroes more than doubled their private holdings in land, which amounted, in that state, in 1889, to nearly twenty-three thousand. In agriculture, in stock raising, and in the mechanics, increased skill and thrift are everywhere remarked even by his enemies.

Finally, the Negro is peaceable by nature and takes kindly to civilization. He is in the infancy of his development, and easily conforms himself to established modes of thought and habits of living. And yet, even at his present rate of progress, it will require many years of patient toil to complete his emancipation. Will you lend a helping hand to this unhappy brother, as he toils slowly, but patiently, upward toward the heights of civilization? Or, will you, impatient at his slowness, with a ruthless hand, hurl him again to the bottom?

In the light of the Negro's development, do you believe that his character renders a solution of the problem impossible? If not, where lies the difficulty? I answer, in what is known as "the peculiar situation."

Two potent factors go to make up this situation. First, public sentiment against the Negro as a race, or his social relations. Second, his position with respect to the two great political parties, or his political relations.

Now, this adverse public sentiment, aroused as it is by social pride and race prejudice, has been the greatest obstacle in the way of the Negro's progress. Public sentiment is the strongest factor in the life of a nation. Without its favor, laws, nay, even constitutions fail to operate. The creators of it hold in their hands the destiny of nations. It has been the more baneful in its influences against the Negro, because it has been controlled and directed by such inhuman passions. But public sentiment is gradually changing to the side of the Negro. The passions that once controlled it are fast dying out.

Social pride or caste, the last remnant of feudalism is quickly disappearing before the advance of democratic ideas. So too, on account of its potency in the past, the influence of race prejudice upon the future of the Negro has been greatly over-estimated. For as we pass down through the history of the nations, we find arising upon every hand new forces that tend to mitigate its evils, and that, in the near future, will wipe out every vestige of its baneful influences. Christianity is the greatest leveler known to modern civilization. Who will assay to measure its influence in this direction? Commercial activity has opened to us the iron-bound gates of far-off Japan, has explored the most distant islands of the sea, and, aided by the steamship and telegraph, has brought us into almost daily contact with their peoples. Such forces tend to broaden the mind of men, and are fast pulling down the mighty barriers that formerly separated the races. Surely, we of America will not allow these prejudices to separate us from our duty.

The political situation is none the less complicated. The home of the Negro is, and for many years must be, the South. His political affiliations are with the North. The causes that have brought about this anomaly need not be commented upon; they are well known to every American. The Negro is allied to the Republican party by the almost indissoluble ties of child to parent. His faithful heart has enshrined in his memory, for all time, the great leaders of that party, and that army of heroes, martyrs to the cause of his freedom.

Naturally his interests lie with the South. But the North, ever eager to secure his vote, has, in the past, overstepped all boundaries of propriety and public policy. The South, equally anxious to present a solid front to her opponents, has struggled to keep the Negro in ignorance, and to deprive him of the right of franchise. He has thus been a bone of contention, in that fiercest of struggles, the contest for political supremacy. Two forces, however, are fast solving the political situation. First, the attitude of the North and the South towards the race. These two sections are no longer arrayed against each other on the questions that first divided them. New generations, unacquainted with those sectional jealousies, are taking their places in the councils of the nation. New issues are arising that know no North, no South, no East, no West. The North is no longer an over-sympathetic champion of the Negro's rights. She is taking a broader view of the situation. She is beginning to sympathize with the South, and to consider her welfare, as well as that of the Negro. The South is conservative and has been long in discovering the mighty possibilities of her undeveloped resources. But she is now entering upon a new era of prosperity and development. In the near future, by a union of the labor of the Negro, the capital of the North, and the resources of the South, she will lead the world in the multiplicity and importance of her industries. She is beginning to realize her dependence upon the Negro. She sees that he is peculiarly adapted to her climate and to the labor she needs. In short, that he is an inseparable part of her future greatness. Again, the increasing intelligence of the Negro will, in the future, enable him to ally himself with principles, not parties; with measures, not men. Holding in grateful remembrance his benefactors, conviction, not sentiment, will henceforth actuate him in his political alliances.

Time, commercial intercourse, and new blood, together with the education of the Negro, will afford the remedies for all his social and political ills.

The view that the Negro is taking of the situation is, indeed, encouraging. He is beginning to see that there is no high road to civilization; that he must ascend the ladder of material, moral, and intellectual progress, as other races have done; that he must begin at the bottom, and make the slow and painful ascent, round by round; that no war measure, no stroke of political power, no amount of legislation, will enable him to reach the top at a single bound. In his own words: "We believe that our future depends infinitely more upon ourselves than upon any other agency. It is high time for us to cease following the *ignis fatuus* of politics, and to begin the work of development along those lines only, on which real progress is possible. The politician has long since exhausted his store-house for us." The thoughts of the Negro are no longer upon revenge. His face is turned toward the future—a future full of realization for his noble aspirations. He, full of hope, peering out through this darkest night of oppression, believes that even now, he sees, though dimly, the first rays of the sunlight of freedom—harbingers of his glad day of liberty. He is girding himself for the struggle already at hand. He realizes that the contest will be long and bitter. He knows that his greatest foes are ignorance and superstition. He sees arrayed against him an unalterable color line, the prejudice of his white brethren, and that fiercest of human passions, race antipathy. But, on the other hand, he musters for the conflict, patience,