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SHALL WHITE MINORITIES RULE?

THE "Negro question" is unquestionably the most momentous problem of our civilization. Considered with regard either to its scope or character it is almost unprecedented in importance, difficulty, and the possible peril involved in its solution. It is not a new question. Slavery and the slave trade were only its earlier phases. Rebellion, reconstruction, and ku-kluxism were incidents attending its partial solution. For a hundred years it has almost constantly threatened the life of the republic. The steps already taken toward its solution have cost the nation a million lives and some half-dozen billions of dollars. It still confronts us unresolved and growing every hour more perilous. In its essential elements the Negro question has remained, from the very first, substantially unchanged. The slave trade was based solely upon the claim that the white man was inherently superior to the colored man, and therefore had a right to take, hold, subjugate, and utilize the labor of the Negro, without compensation and without his consent. This was accounted a conclusive argument at that time. Might and right were then very nearly convertible terms. The strong were always in the right, while the weak were peculiarly liable to error and, of course, required restraint. The sword and the stake were then approved theological arguments, and difference of faith was almost as perilous to individual liberty as a contrast in the color of the skin. Slavery held the same ground. Backed by scriptural exegesis and entrenched behind the Constitution, it held this position until the whole fabric of illusions based on the patriarchal anathema, "Cursed be Canaan," and the Apostolic injunction, "Servants, be obedient to your masters," was swept away by a whelming tide of freemen's blood. It is useless at this time to discuss the question of the inherent superiority of the white race, or whether the fact of superiority confers a right to subor-



dinate and control an inferior race. The conscience and intelligence of to-day will not tolerate any such absurdity.

The present phase of the question is a controversy touching the Negro's right to exercise freely, peacefully, and effectually the elective franchise, and to enjoy without hinderance its resulting incidents. It is not fairly presented by the inquiry, "Shall black majorities rule?" The rule of the majority is the fundamental principle of our government. It is one of the incidents of the right to exercise the elective franchise, of which no individual or class can lawfully be deprived while that right remains unrestricted. Some confusion has been produced in the discussion of this question by attempting to treat the elective franchise as a privilege instead of a right. Until duly conferred it is a privilege—a privilege which no individual or class has any legal right to demand. Once granted, however, the exercise and enjoyment of it and of all its natural incidents becomes a right which the sovereign must maintain and enforce, or submit to nullification of the law. The particular point in controversy is not whether the colored man shall be allowed a new privilege, but whether he shall be permitted to exercise a right already guaranteed by law. The proper form of inquiry, therefore, is, "Shall white minorities rule?"

The arguments advanced in support of this monstrous proposition thus far are identical with those adduced in favor of slavery and the slave trade, nullification, secession, rebellion, klu-kluxism—all varying phases, let us not forget, of the same idea. They are urged by the same class of our people, with the same unanimity, the same positiveness, and the same arrogant assumption of infallibility as of old. They not only boastfully admit that for a decade and a half they have nullified the law and defied the national power, but boldly proclaim their determination to continue to do so as long as they may see fit.

In order to appreciate the importance of this question, it is necessary to consider both its character and its scope. In character it is a question of relative rank between two classes of people in a republic whose laws guarantee equality of right and privilege to all. Both classes speak the same language, profess the same religion, owe allegiance to the same government, and are legally entitled to exercise, man for man, the same power in

its control. The one is black, more or less; the other is white. The one has been the bondman of the other for two centuries and a half; he has been a freeman for twenty-four years (since 1865), and a citizen for twenty-one years (since 1868). Socially, they are antipodes. Intermarriage between them is forbidden in most of the States, North as well as South; yet in none of them is the illicit relation of the white man with the colored female specifically prohibited. While professing the same religion, their church relations are entirely separate. They do not worship in the same edifice, white and colored ministrants do not serve at the same altar, and white and black communicants do not kneel together to partake of the same sacraments. No colored man is ever invited to a fashionable gathering. No white woman can recognize a colored woman as a friend and intimate without losing caste with her own people. One drop of colored blood constitutes its possessor a social pariah just as much as if he were of pure African descent.

In scope the Negro question embraces the political and economic relations which eight millions of our people must sustain to the remaining seven eighths of our population, as well as to the people and government of the States in which they are chiefly to be found. South of the Potomac and Ohio rivers, and westward to Kansas, the Negro constitutes one-third of the population. Three-fourths of the entire colored population are to be found in eight States—Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In these States there is one colored man for every white one. In three of them, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana, there are one-fifth more blacks than whites. In these States the population is very intimately intermixed. On every plantation and in almost every house both races are represented. Few white families are without colored kindred. In churches, schools, and social gatherings, however, they are distinct. Politically, the white race is exclusively dominant. All executive and judicial positions are filled by white men. In the eight States named there are less than half a score of colored members of the State legislatures. The colored race increases in numbers in these States much faster than the white race. Since 1790 they have increased 564 per

cent; in the same time the whites have increased only 343 per cent. The whites of these States show a much greater tendency to migrate than the blacks. In 1880 twenty-four per cent. of the native white population had removed from the State of birth; but only fifteen per cent. of the colored natives are to be found in other States. There are no existing conditions which are likely to change these proportions or tendencies. Alabama and Georgia will probably show more blacks than whites in 1890, and Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia in 1900. The colored race is not likely to emigrate in any great numbers, because there is no region in which the training which slavery gave is likely to win success in competition with that developed by free labor and the universal employment of machinery in agricultural processes. There will never be any white immigration to these States sufficient sensibly to affect the proportions between the races. In 1880 there were 30,000 fewer whites of northern birth in these States than in 1860, and 3,000 fewer of northern birth than in 1870. Of the latter—whites of northern birth, that is—there were in all these eight States only 52,000 in 1880, and 55,000 in 1870, or less than three-fifths of one per cent. of the population. This proportion is not likely to be greatly increased, because the northern white man cannot compete with the southern Negro as a manual laborer. The Negro will work more hours for less money, wait longer for his pay, live in cheaper houses, endure more hardships, claim fewer privileges, and increase more rapidly than the northern or foreign white laborer. The numerical relations of the races in these States are not likely to be greatly modified in favor of the white race, and the distribution of the colored race throughout the country is not likely to be sensibly disturbed during the next generation. While the ratio of blacks in the whole country is not likely to be greatly increased, in the eight States named every indication points to a greatly-enhanced numerical proportion. Its future scope, therefore, may be defined with almost the same accuracy as its present limits.

In its present phase, the Negro question is not one of sentiment, so far as the colored man is concerned. He asks nothing as a Negro. On the score of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude" he makes no demand, asks no favors. It is as a citizen

merely that we are called on to consider what rights and privileges he is entitled to exercise, and how far and in what manner it is just, politic, and safe to permit them to be restricted, abridged, or revoked. Like most political questions, it presents a mixed issue of policy and principle. What is best to be done must depend to a great extent upon what we have the right to do. These elements cannot be separated, and must both be allowed due weight in the final decision.

Even if the claim of inherent superiority of the white race be admitted, it does not follow that it constitutes a sufficient ground for the disfranchisement of the inferior race. The world has moved since it was recognized as a fundamental principle that a divine right to rule inhered in particular classes. The chief function of government at the present time is to protect the weak against the strong. The past has shown conclusively that the white man of the South is not a fair or just guardian of the interests of the colored man. In two hundred and fifty years, while the Negro lay prostrate and helpless, appealing simply to the kindness, gratitude, and charity of the white Christians of the South, not one single act designed to ameliorate his condition or brighten his hope was placed on the statute-books of any of these States. On the contrary, the last days of American slavery were infinitely worse than the first. Even the shreds of privilege the slave had at first enjoyed were stripped from him, and the faint gleams of hope that once had gladdened his eyes were excluded. It was made a felony to assist him to escape or to teach him to read, and the master was forbidden to liberate him by will. There is nothing in their past history to show that the southern people would so control the course of government as to promote the interests of the Negro if abandoned to their care, and nothing in their present attitude or declarations to show that they desire the elevation or development of the race they ask to be permitted unlawfully to subordinate.

"Ignorance may struggle up to enlightenment," says Mr. Henry W. Grady, in a recent self-reported speech; "out of corruption may come the incorruptible; but the supremacy of the white race at the South must be maintained forever, simply because it is the white race and is the superior race!" There is no

doubt that in this he expresses the conviction of the majority of the white race of the South; and a people who within thirty years punished as a felon the man who uttered the name of liberty in the slave's hearing or taught him to spell it out himself, would not hesitate to destroy the Negro's opportunity for development in order to keep him weak, dependent, and manageable. Not because the Negro is ignorant or incapable do they object to his exercise of the right of suffrage, but because he is a Negro, and as such they will spare no pains to keep him weak.

But even if the inherent superiority of the white race is admitted, and a consequent right to rule not denied, the means by which alone the rule of white minorities can be secured must make the proposition a most serious one. There are but three methods by which it may be accomplished. Two of them would require an appeal at least to the forms of law; the other presupposes a steady and persistent defiance of law. The most direct method would be to restore the term "white" as an essential qualification for citizenship in the State constitutions. Such an amendment could no doubt be easily adopted in all the States of the South by the same means by which the will of the majority is now nullified. This method would have one great advantage over any other—it would save the need of a frequent display of deterrent force, or the habitual recourse to fraud to defeat the will of the duly-constituted majority. This habitual appeal to unlawful force, or the habitual perjury of some thousands of election officials, cannot but exert a deleterious effect on public morals in an American commonwealth. An insuperable objection arises in the southern mind, however, to this method of eliminating the power of the Negro as a political factor. The representation of those States in the House of Representatives and the Electoral Colleges would be reduced in exact proportion to the number thus excluded from political power. Now, however much the southern man may object to the Negro as a political force, the southern politician is desperately fond of him as a political counter. It is as essential to his peace of mind that the Negro should be counted as a constituent, as that he should be disfranchised as a citizen. The simple fact is, that he desires the Negro's constituent power in the government to be added to his

own, in order to give him the same advantage over his peer, the white man of the North, which he enjoyed during the slave epoch. This method of securing power for the white minorities of the South, therefore, is hardly thought worthy of consideration by southern political leaders. It would reduce the electoral strength of the South by about fifty votes, thereby doubling the number of electoral votes which must be obtained at the North in order to enable the "solid South" to elect a President or control national legislation. Another method in which the derived result might be temporarily attained by apparently legal means, is by imposing an educational qualification upon the voter. Such a course would probably command the approval of a majority of the people of the North. They would no doubt be willing to punish the Negro still further for the crime of having been kept in compulsory ignorance by his white Christian brethren for two centuries and a half, in order to conciliate the white people of the South, and get rid, for a time at least, of the unpleasant and annoying Negro question. There is one difficulty in the way of adopting this plan, to wit: forty-five per cent. of the voters of the eight States in which the matter is most pressing are unable to read their ballots. In three of them more than fifty per cent. are illiterate. Of course, these men will never knowingly vote to disfranchise themselves, and no amount of iron-clad assertion would convince either them or the world that such an amendment of the existing constitutions was fairly adopted. There is another difficulty, too. One-fifth of the white voters of these States cannot read the ballots they cast. It would be a very unpleasant thing to disfranchise so large a proportion of the white voters, especially as fully one-fifth of the colored vote would still remain duly qualified. With the amazing increase of intelligence among the Negroes during the past twenty-four years, it is evident that this expedient would be but temporary. While the proportion of colored illiterates is rapidly decreasing, illiteracy among the whites shows hardly any diminution, if indeed it is decreasing at all. Already in one of the counties of South Carolina the census reveals a greater number of colored people who can read and write than of whites. In Kentucky there are more white men who cannot read and write than there are blacks. For these

reasons an educational qualification, which is the most popular remedy among northern theorists, the southern politician perceives to be utterly impracticable.

There remains only the alternative of deterrent violence or neutralizing fraud, which is frankly admitted to have been in operation for a dozen years or more, and which, it is unmistakably intimated by such men as Mr. Watterson, Senator Eustis, Senator Morgan, and Mr. Grady, is to be indefinitely continued as a means of perpetuating the rule of white minorities. This answers all the required conditions. It saves the Negro as a constituent and neutralizes him as a factor in government. This is what southern writers mean when they insist that white minorities at the South shall be left to deal with the Negro question in their own way. This was the demand which Slavery always made, and the apprehension that it might not be allowed was the sole excuse for secession and rebellion. There are two obstacles in the way of the successful operation of this plan in the future. The first is the inequality it establishes between the power of the white voter living at the North and one dwelling in a southern State. New Jersey and South Carolina have each seven congressmen under the present apportionment; but six-tenths of the enumerated constituents in South Carolina are colored. These being neutralized in accordance with this plan in order that the white minority may rule, the vote of a white man in South Carolina is made just two and a half times as potential in national affairs as that of a white man in New Jersey. Now, while the people of the North might perhaps consent to sacrifice all the rights and a good many of the lives of the colored people of the South in order to conciliate the southern whites, they will never willingly surrender one iota of their own individual power to secure this desirable result. This was in fact the straw that broke the camel's back in the case of slavery, and the resulting impurity under this plan is much greater than it was in the slave epoch.

Another difficulty in the way of this indefinite continuance of unlawful usurpation, is the uncertainty that exists as to the course the Negro himself will pursue in regard to the matter. Thus far the Negro has been counted only a silent factor in the problem to which he has given a name. Slavery no more

thought of asking him how he enjoyed his condition than the owner does of inquiring whether his horse prefers to go on the road or disport himself in the pasture.

The discussion of the present phase of the problem was started by the grave inquiry of an eminent ecclesiastic, "What shall we do with the Negro?" Is it not about time that we asked ourselves, What will the Negro permit us to do with him? To this inquiry the advocate of the inherent right of white minorities to rule responds with his usual confidence in his own infallibility: "Just let us alone; we will take care of him; we understand the Negro; leave us to manage him." This confidence is very largely based on the docility and submissiveness of the colored race in the past. The man who advocates continued unlawful repression, seems not to realize that a race which has been a perfect type of humility for centuries when in a position of abject servitude, invariably shows altogether different qualities when once it has set its foot upon the lower rung of the ladder of opportunity. As a slave, the colored man had no reasonable chance, even if so disposed, to offer collective organized resistance to the will of his oppressors. He was not allowed to learn to read, lest he should find how to resist; nor to write, lest he should be able to communicate seditious plans to others. He could not go upon the highway without a written pass, nor meet three of his fellows, even for prayer, except in the presence of a white man. He had neither friends nor allies. There was no potential sentiment in the outside world to which he might appeal, and no arm that would be stretched out to save him from extinction in case of conflict. The laws of the several States in which he was enslaved gave his master power to take his life at pleasure. Numbers only added to his weakness. Now the circumstances are very different, and it is possible that conclusions based on the Negro's patient endurance of wrong as a slave may be altogether fallacious as an indication of his future course.

In view of this, it is well to consider briefly who and what the American Negro is. In the first place, he is an American. Since 1802, when the slave trade was abolished, very few African Negroes have entered the United States. In the second place, he is not a heathen. A larger proportion of the colored

people of the United States than of any equal body of whites in the country are actual members of a Christian church. It may be well to remember, too, that very few of them are pure Negroes. Hardly ten in a thousand of the colored people of the United States, if their pedigrees were traced, would be unable to show some strains of white blood. Indeed, it may be doubted if, taken drop for drop, there is not pretty nearly as much white as colored blood in the veins of those ranked as Negroes in this country. And this white infusion, it must be remembered, represents the very best stocks of the South. Hardly a noted family can be named that is not as fully represented on the colored side as on the white. The statesmen, politicians, soldiers of the South—almost all who have added to her fame or ministered to her pride—have given something of their vigor to swell the ranks of the subject race. This is one of the chief causes of its remarkable numerical increase. This fact alone makes it dangerous to count on the indefinite submission of this strangely-composed race under gross and flagrant wrong.

There are other qualities which the colored man has displayed that should incline the enthusiastic advocates of the supremacy of white minorities to pause and think very seriously before they decide upon an indefinite perpetuation of this policy of unlawful and defiant despoliation of political rights. Twenty-four years ago the five millions of newly-enfranchised freemen were not worth all together five million cents. They were naked, helpless, inept. They had hands, and a sort of dull, incomprehensible power to endure; that was all. Within a decade they had \$12,000,000 in the savings banks alone. They lived on wages and flourished on conditions that would have exterminated the northern white laborer in a generation. To-day they claim a valuation in the southern States alone of \$100,000,000. In Georgia they own nearly a million acres of land. The six millions of Negroes who confront six millions of whites in the eight coastward States between Maryland and Texas, perform by far the larger part of the productive labor in them. Probably not a fifth as many of the Negroes live without labor as of the whites. Two-thirds, at least, of the cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice of the South never feels the touch of a white hand till it

reaches the market. Fully half the ordinary mechanical laborers of those States are black, yet they furnish but a third of the paupers and only half the defective recipients of public charity. In 1865 hardly one in a thousand knew the letters of the alphabet; in 1880 more than twenty in a hundred above the age of ten years could read and write. These are miracles of which it is worth our while to take note.

One instance of what they have achieved may give a better idea of the qualities of the race than many columns of statistics. A single Christian sect—the African Methodist Church—which has not a white man among its members or any organic relations with any white church organization, reports a membership of 460,000; it has 12,000 places of worship, numbers 10,000 ministers, has 15,000 Sabbath schools, supports its own denominational papers, has missions in the West Indies, Mexico, and Africa, and its reported contributions foot up more than \$2,000,000 annually for the support of church work. Men who accomplish such results will not always submit to wrong, even for the dear Lord's sake. Christianity is not drawing the white and black races nearer together, but separating them farther than ever in habits of thought, and developing and solidifying the manhood of the Negro with wonderful rapidity.

We often hear the idea advanced that what is termed the "race question" will disappear from politics just as soon as a proper issue is presented. No race can separate into parties or factions while its rights and liberties are assailed by another on the ground of race alone. Their rights must be freely admitted before they will dare to surrender whatever power there may be in cohesion. To do otherwise would be an act of stupendous and incredible folly. One might as well expect a herd of sheep to separate in the presence of wolves. Their only hope is in union. So, too, we hear it said that when the present generation dies off slavery will be only a dream to the colored man. Such is not the lesson of history. The farther a people recede from bondage, the keener is their appreciation of the wrong and the more intense their hate of the oppressor. The horror which the American Negro feels for the institution of slavery will become greater rather than less for several generations at least. When did the

Jewish prophets cease to anathematize the Egyptian oppressor? Such antipathies were curable only by continued and undeniable recognition of the right.

"But what can they do?" is the triumphant inquiry which greets the objector who calls attention to these things. "We have the arms, the skill, the experience, the wealth; what can they do?" Truly, the question is not an idle one, yet history clearly teaches that whenever an inferior class, intimately intermingled with a dominant and oppressive caste, becomes both intelligent enough to organize and desperate enough to resist, it is sure to overwhelm the arrogant and better-equipped minority. No man can say when the limit of endurance will be reached if this policy is continued, but that it will be reached in the near future is just as certain as that a boiler will explode if the safety valve is fastened down and the fire kept up. When that day shall come, the advocates of a policy of forcible repression and unlawful subjection will find that the battle is not always to the strong.

Should a conflict arise to-morrow, the odds would by no means be entirely with the white race. Their very wealth might constitute a source of weakness. Black eyes and black ears would take note of every white man's movements. In every camp there would be spies; in every household informers. While the Negro has not so heroic a record as the southern white man, it should not be forgotten that there are 50,000 still living who wore the federal blue and fought for the freedom of their race. Besides that, in a strife such as must result if the occasion for it is not carefully and wisely avoided, it is not valor alone that counts, nor excellence of equipment that assures victory. In such a conflict a box of matches is equal to a hundred Winchester rifles!

In the meantime, neither the nation nor the world would sit still and witness the *auto da fê* of a race. Eight millions of people cannot very long be kept in a subordinate position and despoiled of their guaranteed rights by a minority, however superior and arrogant, through the instrumentality of the shot-gun, the cow-hide, the falsified return, or perjured election officials. It is quite probable that the North might not awake to its duty in the prevention of evil until blood had been shed. Thus far it

has entirely failed to realize its responsibility. It has left the Negro to his fate, in seeming unconsciousness that the wrongs of the past must be atoned for either by justice or by disaster. The solution of the Negro question is of all the problems of civilization the simplest and yet the most difficult. The trouble is not with the Negro, who has always been content with half a chance in the world's scramble, but with the southern white man, who is not willing that any one should differ with him in opinion or dissent from him in practice; who is the traditional if not inveterate enemy of free thought and free speech, and is so confident of his own infallibility that he would rather appeal to arms or become a cowardly and disguised murderer, than submit to the control of a lawfully-ascertained majority of legal voters. There cannot be any security for our institutions or any guarantee of our domestic peace, so long as the question of depriving a majority of the qualified electors of any State of the rights which they are solemnly guaranteed by law through any unlawful means is coolly discussed as a living issue in the great organs through which popular thought finds expression. The remedy is a simple one—justice and knowledge. These are all the Negro asks. The superior white race should be ashamed to grant him less. It is not a question of sentiment, nor entirely one of right. As a matter of policy, it resolves itself into an inquiry as to what the American people can afford to do or leave undone—whether we can afford even negatively to admit that white minorities have the right not only to rule, but to nullify and subvert the law of the land, boldly, defiantly, and persistently, in order to bar a lawful majority from the exercises of political power, merely because the minority demand it.

ALBION W. TOURGÉE.

REMEDIES FOR SOCIAL ILLS.

IN preceding articles I have endeavored to exhibit the relative conditions of an average community of 6,000 persons, and to apply to such community the various reforms which have been suggested by different parties in order to bring about an improvement in the general social state. I will not myself attempt to present or to invent any specific method by which the whole condition of society in this country may be changed. Each man may perhaps do a little to remedy existing faults, but he who undertakes to solve all these social questions may perhaps find that communities grow and are not made to order.

A rather prosaic suggestion can perhaps properly be submitted. It is a well-ascertained fact that, with respect to about ninety per cent. of the community, the price paid for food comes to one-half the income or more. After this food is bought, how much of it is wasted in bad cooking? How much human force is wasted in consequence of bad cooking? How much does dyspepsia or indigestion, caused by bad cooking, impair the working capacity of the people of the United States and diminish their product? Perhaps the reader can observe and measure, or at least guess, what is the waste of food and fuel in the 1,200 families of five persons each, more or less, constituting the community of 6,000 persons who live near him. How many cooks are there who know what food to buy and how to cook it? In any 1,200 average families, more than 1,000 spend one-half their income or more for food and fuel; the less the income the greater the proportion spent for food.

Next, let the reader think for himself whether five cents a day per head could be saved in his own family, or in his neighbors' families, or on the average whether the waste of the 1,200 families nearest him amounts to five cents a day per capita. If all the women were good cooks and knew what to buy and how to prepare food in a judicious and appetizing way, would the



