

## THE NEGRO'S PART.

### I.

The development of man is a progress from the abstract to the concrete ; his history, as we possess it, is the history of the development of individuality. Pre-historic man has left us only the idea of a Race, — the primitive Aryan, dwelling upon his own lands, and subsisting upon the fruits of his own labors. Further down the ages we encounter the gigantic but misty figures of semi-individualized heroes and heroines, with a human name, and a mythic history, then kings and princes, nobles and paladins become endowed with will and conscience, though the rank and file of humanity still serve only to fill up the chasm over which these favorites of the gods pass to immortality.

But the present age is strongly individualistic ; and just as our modern telescopes have resolved the rings of Saturn — once thought to be solid — into innumerable tiny planets, each pursuing its own orbit, which, though largely determined by the influence of every other planet, is still its own individual orbit, and distinct from all other orbits in the universe, — so we latter day saints are beginning to realize that every man of the so-called masses has a life of his own, which no other man can, by any possibility, live for him.

Every man, we say advisedly, for the individuality of women and children is quite another matter altogether. Women in America are not, it is true, mere chattels, actual legal tender, as Stanley found them in the realms of King Mtesa ; yet neither have they attained the position in which the year 2,000, according to Mr. Bellamy, is to find them ; while children are still trained largely according to fixed rules and set theories, their fluent natures pressed into a mold of custom, squared off with a ruler, and turned out upon the multiplication table to harden. Now how is the woman to work out her salvation, and that of her children which stands or falls with hers ? By rivalling man, and competing with him upon fields to which he, justly or unjustly, considers that he has a prior claim ? Under our present system she has scarcely another choice ; and she does rival him, often successfully, yet with some loss, and certainly at great cost, to herself. But the year 2,000 promises her “a world of her own,” wherein her powers may find free play and her nature its full perfection ; wherein she is to be, “not like, but diverse” ; as thoroughly womanly, as distinctively feminine as possible.

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But what has all this to do with the negro? Much every way; the negro being, in some respects, in a very feminine position. The man of the race has, it is true, the right to vote, but practically he votes as he is bribed, cheated, or intimidated into voting; in his choice of a trade or profession he is quite as heavily handicapped as the woman, and if he go beyond what is arbitrarily defined as his sphere,—an inferior sphere, be it remarked, to that of the arbiters,—he encounters a social prejudice equally insurmountable.

But perhaps the arbiters are right; perhaps the negro—for we are not now pleading the case of woman—perhaps the negro is inferior to the white man. Well, perhaps he is; perhaps all other races that ever have lived, now live, or ever can live, are inferior to the Indo-European race, Teutonic branch, Anglo-American variety. Yet we have been surpassed in various respects by several nations both ancient and modern. The Hebrews for example—once considered a very inferior people indeed,—are an easy first in mathematics, and in music a good second, against the world. But in music the negro far excels any race or people on the globe. He has, it is true, produced as yet no great names, unless we quote such a freak of nature as Blind Tom; but as a people they are the most musical in the world. Every one knows how the Jubilee singers set folk staring; yet we have heard music from ordinary untrained school-children that equalled the best efforts of the Jubilee singers. The richness, the peculiar *klangfarbe*, of the negro voice, is simply marvellous; and there seems to be scarcely one of the race who does not sing more or less well.

Is music then their only heritage? Far from it; the average negro has a feeling for form and color which, in special cases, has even already been cultivated into something very well worth while; he is a natural orator and a capital actor; these gifts, be it remembered, belonging not to one or two, here and there, but to nearly every member of the race.

Well; but we often hear it said that the negro has had twenty-five years of freedom and has done almost worse than nothing with it; that the large majority of the race are quite as ignorant, far more degraded, and generally less comfortable than in slave times. That this is true, especially of the far South, I shall not attempt to deny; nay, I believe that even the education which some of them have received, while it has unfitted them for their former position, has not

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been sufficiently deep and thorough going to do much more than scratch the surface of their former ignorance.

Do we therefore conclude that the negro is unfit for freedom; or, rather, that he has never possessed it? Is a man free who is built around with a wall of iron prejudices, whose presence is considered to contaminate, not merely the bed he sleeps in and the car or steamboat in which he travels, but even the neighborhood in which he lives? My brethren, those things ought not so to be; but so they certainly are. Proof is needless; else could we find it in abundance. There is a certain house, in a respectable, though not fashionable, street, a quarter of a mile from the writer's own home, which was, a year or so ago, rented for a colored orphan asylum, in charge of colored sisters. Quieter, more regular, more inoffensive tenants no house could have had; yet the neighbors complained, some of them moved away, property depreciated, rents came down, and that locality is now given over almost exclusively to colored people.

Now how many men are there of pure Caucasian lineage, who could work their way against such a headwind of prejudice as this? Some, of course; but not more in proportion to numerical strength than the negro race can boast of. An article appeared not long ago, in one of their own periodicals which, quoting a white writer's statement that colored children are equally as quick as white up to a certain age, after which they fall behind, accounted for it by the theory that at that age they begin to feel the degrading influence of their inferior social position. As we have already concluded, there is doubtless some ground for this opinion; but there is also the observed fact that colored children, as a rule, are very poorly taught. For negroes, as a rule, must be reached through the imagination and, though eager after knowledge and proud to be considered learned, it must be confessed that they lack the Anglo-Saxon capacity for dull, uninteresting plodding. Trained teachers of their own race, who understood this characteristic, and how to use it, might do much with them; but under present conditions they easily can, and often do, pass through their school-days without even the smell of fire upon their garments.

## II.

Now it must be evident to the least careful observer that, under the present unfortunate social conditions, while a few exceptional natures may rise to a point considerably below that which they would have

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reached, had not so much energy been expended in overcoming friction, yet the great mass of the negro race must infallibly deteriorate. This, indeed, is just what is taking place under our very eyes. The negro is losing the virtues which were called forth by the old system and is gaining no others in their place; he has ceased to be a slave without becoming a freeman, and a man can have no worse master than his own passions.

The question now arises, therefore, what are we going to do about it? Well, first of all, we can let it alone. And the end thereof is destruction. For we must remember that race prejudice is not confined to one side of the color line; and the present signs of the times point with horrible certainty to a period when this feeling shall awfully materialize. And though a war of races might result in the extermination of the numerically weaker, yet this method of settling the negro question would be about the most expensive we could well select, and would also be attended by such wholesale carnage and horrible atrocities as would luridly eclipse the French Revolution and the Sepoy Mutiny.

Next, we may make the best of things as they are; we may admit the negro to perfect political and social equality; we may throw open to him every trade and profession, and receive him as an honored guest in every drawing-room. But before we eliminate our social prejudice in this wholesale and, of course, possible and perfectly practicable manner, let us consider whether, after all, it may not, by some tenuous fibre, be connected with the eternal verities of right and justice. For it must be remembered that prejudice is only prejudgment, and that in the case of a whole race,—nay, of two whole races,—instinctive prejudgment is rather apt to be correct, though it may manifest itself in ways that are not admirable.

Religious or political equality is quite a different matter from social equality. We may vote with the negro, we may even vote *for* him; we may kneel beside him at the altar, as the present writer has done many a time; but we don't ask him to dine with us. Why? Because we do not wish him to marry our daughter. For intermarriage is, after all, the foundation of social intercourse, and its permissible limit forms the boundary of what is called "Society," or one's "own set."

Now ought we to wish the negro to marry our daughter, or his daughter to marry our son? On ethnological grounds alone, we answer emphatically, No! For wholesale intermarriage would in the

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first place soon banish the black man from America, and a race of octoroos would be but a poor exchange. Since, as even the old negro traders could have told us, and as was a recognized fact on every Southern plantation, the octoroon is mentally and physically inferior to both of the races from which he springs; he lacks energy and muscular strength, is predisposed to consumption and, as a race, would be doomed to speedy extinction.

Moreover, the instinct which is the defense against this fusion of races is quite as strong in the negro as in the white man. We know of one family — who, by the by, took their origin from a mixed marriage “in the old colony days.” The story is a romantic one, and the marriage, though of course irregular, was solemnized, under protest, by an ordained clergyman of the Church of England. This family — to begin our sentence again — had, even before the war, won such a position in the Southern city in which they had lived, free, educated and well-to-do for several generations, that they were offered a pew in the oldest and most aristocratic Church in the place; an unheard-of concession for the times, which they declined, on the ground that they “preferred to worship with their own people.”

Another instance: A very pretty girl, with fair hair and blue eyes, was offered, by her father’s sister, a fashionable milliner, a place in her shop, on condition that she would conceal the African blood that came to her from her mother. The girl made the reply that “she would not deny her own people.” This happened only a few years ago, and neither the girl, nor, we believe, her mother, had ever been a slave.

These are not isolated instances: they are types and parables. Indeed, it is thoroughly comprehensible that centuries of slavery, and of dwelling together as strangers and despised, in a strange land, should have welded together these descendants of many African races into one race, the Afro-American; and should have mingled in the blood, and fused into the heart of that race, such a passion of Nationality, as Nationalism, above all other isms, can least afford to disregard. Yet as Howard Payne had no home, so the Afro-American has no country.

### III.

We are now, for dealing with the problem we undertook to solve, “The Negro’s part in Nationalism,” prepared with the value of two

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important factors, his race individuality and race prejudice. For, as the full development of woman is to be attained by her being as distinctively feminine as possible, so the ideal of the negro race — God's ideal — is to be reached, not by amalgamating with the whites, but by being negroes to the ends of their fingers, and with all the strength that is in them.

During the stormy times of abolition excitement before the war, the project of colonizing the negroes in Liberia was extensively agitated. Doubtless it was the best and most statesman-like plan possible at the time; yet it had its dark side. For, though the climate of Africa may be more endurable by the negro than by the white man, in other respects the banishment would be as bitter to him as to us. Africa is no more his country than Great Britain, France or Germany is ours; he has trodden the shores of America nearly as long as the white man; and indeed in any case selected at random for comparison between the two races, the chances are that the African ancestor will prove to have been the first arrival.

Also: — suppose we nationalize our land and our industries tomorrow, next week or next year, or at any time in the near future. Do we want, *can we have*, in addition to the difficulties which will start up on all sides in our tramps, paupers and criminal classes, the further complications introduced by race-prejudice? Let us by all means inscribe on our banners "No distinction of color;" but organize your Army of Industry on this basis, and then, — wait — till the first negro shall be promoted over the heads of his white co-workers!

Now of course, if this difficulty, this wrong, if you like, could be obviated in no possible way, it would have to be met and wrestled with; but there is neither socialism, nationalism, nor rationalism in trying to butt down a stone wall that has a gate in it. But into what promised land does this gate lead? Where can the negro find a fair field, and no favor; room to develop along the lines of his own nature, and the stimulus of generous and friendly emulation?

Our answer is, under present political conditions, — nowhere; but once establish *THE NATION*, and it would be easy to set apart a sufficient territory — presumably in the far South — as the Afro-American's peculiar heritage, within which he should, as far as possible, be left to govern himself. Not that he should be in any sense abandoned, or cast adrift; on the contrary the negro contingent should form an integral part of the industrial force, officered, however,

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from its own ranks, and with its fair and proportionate voice in all questions of general importance. Certain kinds of production, such as the cultivation of cotton, rice and sugar, would, by the conditions, fall naturally to his share ; but he would participate in all the material and educational resources of the Nation, and would have ample facilities for the development of every faculty. Nay, though a certain amount of gentle coercion might be necessary to the establishment of this as well as other divisions of our true Grand Army, yet, once established, its own cohesive force would keep it together. And individuals might therefore be allowed free liberty of action and of residence ; there would be no more objection or race-prejudice than the negro in Europe now encounters, or we ourselves feel for an occasional Japanese. But, mark you, a wholesale emigration of the negro to England, or a settlement of the Japanese nation bodily in our midst, would be a matter altogether different. The position of the negro is now a difficult, because an anomalous, one ; but acknowledge his independence, recognize his individuality, give him a sphere of his own, and social questions will settle themselves.

Are we like children, marking off the boundaries, and settling the laws of a fairyland, a country in the moon ? Truly, we have awaited the coming of the Bridegroom for nearly nineteen centuries. But the Wise take oil with their lamps : the oil of preparation. For, in an hour when we think not, the Bridegroom shall come indeed.

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