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## THE RACE PROBLEM AT THE SOUTH.

By Col. HILARY A. HERBERT,

Ex-Secretary of the Navy.

This is a land of free speech. Americans may now discuss anywhere, North or South, even their Negro question in all its bearings. This it has not always been easy to do even in this historic city, which claims the proud distinction of being the birthplace of American liberties. In 1859 George William Curtis became temporarily a hero by an anti-slavery speech in Philadelphia. A mob had gathered to prevent him, but the mayor of the city, backed by the police, succeeded in protecting the speaker, who delivered his address in spite of the missiles that were hurled into the room where he spoke. The next year, however, so violent were the passions of the day that the friends of that great orator could not hire a hall in this city for Mr. Curtis to lecture in, even on a subject totally disconnected with the Negro, or with politics.

In those days the Negro question was full of dynamite, because we then had in this country two systems, I might almost say two civilizations, one founded on free and the other intimately interwoven with and largely dependent upon slave labor. They were in sharp conflict with each other, and therefore it was that free discussion of the slavery question, or Negro problem, was then sometimes difficult at the North, while it was everywhere impossible in the South. Abolition sentiment was proclaiming in the North that slavery must go, no matter at what cost. In the South, therefore, the stern law of self-preservation demanded the rigid suppression of free speech on this question, lest discussion should incite insurrection, and light the midnight torch of the incendiary. In the North the motive of the mobs which, like those who gathered around Mr. Curtis here in

1859, and who called themselves Union men, was to prevent abolition speeches because they saw in them disunion or civil war, or it might be both civil war and disunion. The civil war came; it was terrible; more terrible than dreamer ever dreamed of. But it is over, and there will never be disunion; no one fears it now, because now no one desires it. Slavery is dead, and can never be resurrected. So, therefore, there is now nothing to hinder free speech, here or elsewhere in our country, about the race problem in the South. We are all here to aid, as far as we may, in its correct solution. The city in which this meeting is convened, the auspices under which we are met, the startling contrasts in the antecedents of those who are to take part in the discussion, all are propitious. This Academy is seeking knowledge.

But let us not lose sight of the fact that many years had rolled away after our Civil War, before a meeting comprising so many divergent elements as this became possible, even in the city of Philadelphia. If in 1861 there was dynamite in the Negro question, so when that dynamite had exploded, and when states had been wrecked and social and economic systems shattered, the problems that grew out of the Negro question were quite as exciting when up for discussion as had been slavery itself.

The most acute form in which this many-sided question then presented itself was suffrage, and every student now knows that political science played no part in its solution, that the reconstruction acts were passed and the Fifteenth Amendment was adopted when party spirit was more intolerant than it had ever been before, and the passions of war were still blazing fiercely. The Constitution of the fathers was framed in this city after mature deliberation behind closed doors. The Fifteenth Amendment, changing that instrument fundamentally, was formulated after heated debate in Congress, on the rostrum, and in the newspapers throughout the land. In debating the question of granting

suffrage by law to millions of ex-slaves, and then of clinching the right by a constitutional provision intended to secure it forever, whether it worked for good or evil, the fundamental proposition for consideration should have been the fitness of the Negro. Was he intellectually, by training and antecedents, competent to take part—often a controlling part—in the great business of government? But the case did not turn on that point, the discussion was always wide of that mark. The nearest approach to the question of the fitness of the ex-slave for the ballot was this argument: Did not the government free the Negro? Was he not the ward of the nation? Did not the government owe him protection? And how could he protect himself without the ballot?

This, though fitness was assumed without argument to support it, is the most defensible of all the grounds on which the Fifteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution. If the Negro had only possessed the qualifications which political science tells us are essential in those on whose shoulders rest the burdens of republican government, with the ballot in hand he would not only have protected himself, but he would have given to the Southern States, and he would have helped to give to the nation, the blessings of good government. But the fitness for the ballot that had been taken for granted did not exist. The political structures based on Negro ballots, like the house of the unwise man in the Scriptures, fell because they were builded upon sand.

Out of reconstruction and the Fifteenth Amendment have come many of the peculiar phases, and nearly all the aggravations which now beset the "race problem at the South," the subject before you for discussion this afternoon. In the days of reconstruction the teachings of political science as such, and of ethnology, its handmaid, had made but little impression in America. Political science had been taught, it is true in William and Mary College, to Jefferson and other Virginia states-

men prior to the Revolution, and there were, prior to 1860, in a few scattered American colleges, solitary professors lecturing occasionally on the subject, but great schools of political science and great academies like this are of recent growth.

This Academy and its co-laborers did not come too soon; they did not enter the field before the harvest was ripe. As our country expands it has need for wider knowledge. It is dealing now not only with its Negroes in the South, but with Cuban and Porto Rican and Philippine populations, and it needs not only accurate knowledge of all these peoples, but, facing as we do a future that will bring to us questions as momentous as they will be novel, the time has come when we must search carefully for and familiarize our people with the lessons of our own history, that our experience may be a lamp to guide our feet. You gentlemen of this Academy have set yourselves to that work, and I am very sure you will do it fearlessly. The task you have set yourself requires high thinking and bold speaking. Where our fathers acted wisely you will hold up their example to imitation. Where they made mistakes, you will not hesitate to point them out.

Professor Cope, the great naturalist of your University, was a pioneer in the field you are exploring. A few years ago he made a notable contribution to the discussion of the race problem you are to consider this evening. It was a series of articles published in the *Open Court*, a Chicago periodical, discussing, from the standpoint of a naturalist, the differences between the white man and the Negro. He showed the inferiority of the Negro, and contended that the Mulatto was in many respects, which he carefully pointed out, inferior to both his parents. Then he left the firm ground of science on which he was at home, and surmised that intermarriage would hereafter become common in the South. If this surmise should be correct, then there would follow, as he had proven, the destruction of a large portion

of the finest race upon earth, the whites of the South. To prevent this result he argued that the government could well afford, whatever might be the cost, to deport all the Negroes from the South. This admixture of the races let us hope will not take place, and deportation is impossible.

If these articles had been written and published in 1860 who can estimate the opprobrium that would have been heaped upon Professor Cope and the University of Pennsylvania. But in the nineties the publication excited no comment. It was simply a scientific contribution to the discussion of the Negro question. The day of free thought and free speech even on our race problem had come.

So I am free here and now to say to you, and you will consider it for what it is worth, that in my opinion the granting of universal suffrage to the Negro was the mistake of the nineteenth century. I say that, believing myself to be a friend to the Negro, willing and anxious that he shall have fair play and the fullest opportunity under the law to develop himself to his utmost capacity. Suffrage wronged the Negro, because he could only develop by practicing industry and economy, while learning frugality. It was a mistake to tempt him away from the field of labor into the field of politics, where, as a rule, he could understand nothing that was taught him except the color line. Negro suffrage was a wrong to the white man of the South, for it brought him face to face with a situation in which he concluded, after some years of trial, that in order to preserve his civilization he must resort to fraud in elections, and fraud in elections, wherever it may be practiced, is like the deadly upas tree ; it scatters its poisons in every direction. Universal suffrage in the South has demoralized our politics there. It has created a bitterness between the present generations of whites and blacks that had never existed between the ex-slave and his former master. These are among the complications of the problem you are studying. Another crying evil that has resulted to the people of the

South and of the whole Union is that we now have an absolutely solid South, where the necessity for white supremacy is so dominant that no political question can be discussed on its merits, and whites do not divide themselves between the two national parties. What we need in the Southern States to-day, above all things, is two political parties, strong enough and able to deal with each other at arms'-length.

The Negro's prospects for improvement, his development since emancipation, his industrial conditions, his relation to crime, the scanty results of the system of education that has been pursued, how that system can be bettered—all these questions as they exist to-day are before you for debate. Here and there, among Southern people, are some who in despair are advocating that no more money be spent by the whites for the education of the blacks. This, I am glad to say, is not the prevailing sentiment. The Southern people, as a rule, believe that we should continue to strive for the development of the Negro and the lifting of him up to a higher plane, where he may be more useful to himself and to the state. Most of us are looking hopefully to that system which is now being so successfully practiced in different Southern schools, and notably at Tuskegee, Alabama. Booker T. Washington, the president of that institution, is one of the remarkable men of to-day. A paper from his pen was to have been read before you.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately it has not reached you yet, but it will come. Every opinion he may express, and every fact he may state, is entitled to most careful consideration. Two eminent speakers are here to discuss the questions which I have only attempted to indicate, and I will detain you no longer.

This meeting is open for business.

Our next speaker is Dr. George T. Winston, president of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. President Winston is a Southerner, a native of North

<sup>1</sup> This paper was not received in time for publication in this volume, but will appear in a later issue of the ANNALS.—EDITOR.

Carolina, his father was a slave owner ; he himself is a graduate of Cornell, and there were two Negroes in his class. He has enjoyed exceptional opportunities for study and for understanding the subject of which he will speak to you, which is "The Relation of the Whites to the Negroes." I introduce Dr. Winston.