

## SUFFRAGE RESTRICTION IN THE SOUTH; ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES.

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THE political history of the Southern States since the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment to our national Constitution has been completely dominated by one overshadowing problem, negro suffrage. And with regard to that problem, this period of the South's history may be roughly divided into three epochs:

1. The era of unrestricted negro suffrage, ending about 1875;
2. The era of restriction or control by methods not recognized in the law. This lasted, broadly speaking, from 1875 to 1895;
3. The era of disfranchisement by State laws, prescribing, as tests of fitness for the suffrage, qualifications possessed by a much smaller proportion of blacks than of whites. Of this period we have hardly yet reached the end of the beginning.

At this time of changing conditions, therefore, it may not be inappropriate or unprofitable to glance at the more salient features of the two periods that seem to have passed into history, and to examine, with more fulness, the present trend of Southern political affairs.

### I.

We shall rapidly pass over the Reconstruction Period, but not so rapidly as to leave unnoticed the fact that some of its legacies linger with us, and that to recollections of this period are due the few traces of sectional animosity that yet exist in the South. Of the great war, when brave men met brave men in open battle, it can be truthfully said that its memories arouse no bitterness; but this is not true of that later period when the victors—thousands of them in a spirit of mistaken philanthropy, many of them carelessly and thoughtlessly, some with malice aforethought—

allowed a race only a few generations removed from African barbarism to take the reins of government into its own hands, and humiliate the men and women who had built up the splendid civilization of the Old South. If, as a well-known magazine editor said some time ago, "there is no period of American history at once so poetic and so full of the atmosphere of chivalric romance as that which the South saw for a score of years prior to 1860," there is, on the other hand, no decade of our history so dark with foolish blunders and foul wrongs as that which this South saw from 1865 to 1875.

Difficult enough for the Southern whites would have been the simpler task of dealing, without outside interference, with the ignorance and recklessness of the newly-enfranchised blacks. A hundredfold more difficult did the task become, when designing plunderers came and found in negro suffrage a cat's-paw admirably adapted to their schemes. Ignorance and Greed having joined hands, corrupt men might make laws, propertyless men might levy taxes, illiterate men might conduct public school work, characterless men might serve as judges. The plunderers cared not; the blacks did not understand; the native whites could not resist the military force that threatened them. The South of Reconstruction days, like the fabled Prometheus, lay chained and helpless while the vultures preyed on her vitals.

Finally, however, time brought the inevitable readjustment. Failure came to the unnatural and irrational scheme of the extremists, from its inception doomed to defeat, and the white man took again the heritage of his fathers.

## II.

But if the story of Reconstruction makes unpleasant reading for the Northern man, it is no less true that the Southerner finds much to humiliate him in the story of the succeeding epoch. Irregular election methods were adopted, demagoguery encouraged, bullyism condoned, politics corrupted.

The negroes formed an unchanging political factor. Whatever the policies of the Republican Party or the character of its candidates, the undivided slave-like support of the blacks was assured, and their numbers gave them the power of the majority in that party. Division of the whites, therefore, the Democratic leaders lost no time in pointing out, meant negro rule. Inde-

pendent voting was denounced; black solidarity was opposed by white solidarity; bigoted partisanship dominated both races. Even when there was no real danger of negro supremacy, the race question, as the "Baltimore Manufacturers' Record" says, "was often made a pretext to keep the white vote solid, and almost to ostracize those who dared to speak their convictions on economic questions, if against the Democratic organization." It was but natural that, out of such conditions, rings and cliques should spring forth; and so it came about that States sorely in need of progressive leadership found themselves in the grasp of oligarchies that stifled freedom and hindered progress. The South lost prestige in national affairs with both political parties, because she no longer considered questions on their merits, but judged them solely by their relation to the incubus with which she struggled. Such a condition was fatal to statesmanship. In all this period, the South produced no Washington or Jefferson or Marshall or Calhoun or Clay. Such men could not grow in an atmosphere poisoned by such influences, or among a people whose judgment and intellect were kept in subjection by the presence of a negro problem.

Not less demoralizing were the election frauds which bad men practised and good men often thought it necessary to wink at. Mr. Dixon does not mention it, but I have heard the story of that prominent North Carolina minister known in "The Leopard's Spots" as the Rev. John Durham, saying to the men who were telling him how they proposed to overcome the negro majority in his county: "I am a preacher; don't tell me how you are going to win; but, remember, you must do it."

I would not extenuate the evils of election frauds; there is probably nothing in our political life more debasing, nothing that strikes more directly at the corner-stone of our liberties. Without fair elections, as ex-Secretary of the Navy Herbert told his Alabama people recently, "the natural outcome of republican government is discontent, unrest, instability, and finally revolution." But, that the reader may get the proper historical perspective, it should be said in passing that the people of the North, as well as those of the South, have at times excused lawlessness as the means to a righteous or popular end. Subsequently, many election frauds were perpetrated in the South for indefensible purposes; but the spirit which caused the people to forget law in

their struggle with the carpet-bag leaders, was much akin to that which caused the Massachusetts Abolitionists of the fifties to nullify fugitive slave laws and justify illegal means of helping runaways. Transferred to the South of the seventies and given a genuine insight into the condition of affairs, these brave New Englanders, moved by their old-time temper, would have joined the Southern white man in the desperate measures adopted by him, answering their critics as before with Lowell's words:

"We owe allegiance to the State, but deeper, truer, more,  
To the sympathies that God hath set within our spirits' core;  
Our country claims our fealty; we grant it so; but then,  
Before Man made us citizens, great Nature made us men."

At the Charleston Exposition a few months ago, an old man—a man of character and intelligence, a Democrat whose breadth of view was shown by his high praise of President Roosevelt—told me of the South Carolina campaign of 1876 that ended the saturnalia of negro rule in that State. "In my precinct," he said, "there was 800 negro or Republican majority, but when the votes were counted it was Wade Hampton who was 800 votes ahead." The old man added, "It had to be done"; and it was clear that he and his co-laborers thought of their work as Cicero thought of his official career, when, asked to take oath that he had done nothing contrary to the laws, "I swear," said Cicero, "I swear—that I have saved the Republic!"

### III.

But there is nothing more uncontrollable than lawlessness. To no certain spheres of activity can you confine it; to no certain periods of time can you limit it. It is subject to no law save that of growth: sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. Wink at your election officer's thievery in times of stress and peril, and next you may have election thievery to aid plundering schemes, or to save the rings and cliques to which the election officer belongs. Give rein to mob violence at a time when you think such action justifiable, and you will find your reward in a popular contempt for the restraint of law, a permanent injury to public morals.

So thoughtful Southern people soon came to perceive, if they did not understand from the first, the dangerous nature of these methods of dealing with the negro problem. The South had escaped the Black Peril, to be sure; but the baleful spirit of

trickery and disorder with which she had leagued herself, and whose aid she had invoked, clave to her with the tenacity of an Old Man of the Sea, haunted and threatened her like another Mr. Hyde grown too powerful to be controlled by Dr. Jekyll. On the one hand, negro rule endangered peace and safety; on the other hand, the demagogue and trickster were a constant menace.

This was the situation when the Southern whites, taking courage from the waning of Northern bitterness, resolved to steer boldly away from the Scylla and Charybdis between which they had been so long held. While baser motives actuated some, it was in this spirit that the South, as a whole, began the work of remoulding its suffrage laws. Very rapid has been the progress of this movement; and now, of the Coast States between Maryland and Texas, only two (Georgia and Florida) have not yet adopted so-called "disfranchising amendments." This, however, is a matter of such recent history, and has been so often explained in the press, that it is unnecessary for me to outline the provisions of these laws or relate the story of their adoption.

What the reader is most interested in is the situation at present and the probable consequences of the new policy.

#### IV.

The ship so recently launched has hardly yet found herself; the machinery is not yet in good running order. In several States no elections have been held under the new régime, and the dread of national interference has retarded in some degree the coming of the promised good results. Moreover, in some of the States (in South Carolina, for example), the limited legal restriction of the suffrage affords only partial relief, and the old-time Tillmanesque methods remain in force.

Taking a general view, however, the thoughtful observer finds many signs of promise—signs not of a startling or miraculous transformation, but indications of a gradual recovery from our nearly four decades of bondage to the race issue.

First, there are evidences of a healthier public sentiment with regard to dishonest election methods. In this, as in other kindred matters, we cannot expect in a year, nor in five years, complete reform. Fairer election laws have been adopted; but it is not in the letter of the statutes, but in a proper popular reverence for the essence of law, that safety is to be found. That the long-

standing abuses will be sloughed off with reasonable rapidity, the awakening of the public conscience, or rather the breaking of the fetters that have bound it, clearly indicates.

Not less surely are the people beginning to exercise greater freedom and tolerance in matters political. The men here and there who say to you, "The negro question is out of the way and I shall vote as I please hereafter," are the pioneers. The newspapers are growing more independent, and many that used to accept with well-feigned grace all men and measures bearing the image and superscription of the party authorities now manifest a spirit of stubbornness very disheartening to the bosses. Manufacturers assert their belief in certain political policies and their readiness to break party ties, if necessary, to further those policies. Efforts to resuscitate the race issue (evidently for the purpose of staying the growing spirit of independence) call forth the most emphatic disapproval. In North Carolina, for example, such an effort recently made by the acknowledged head of the Democratic Party in the State, has been coldly received by the Democratic partisan press, and has been plainly condemned by nearly all the independent and the religious papers. This typical comment is from the "*Raleigh Christian Advocate*," organ of the North Carolina Methodist Conference:

"No, there are thousands of white men throughout the State who are determined to vote hereafter for men and principles rather than by the color line, and the fact might as well be known. They will not have the negro question thrust on them again."

The next noteworthy fact is that men of higher character are to lead our political parties and fill our offices. I might devote much space to this, but the following editorial from the "Chapel Hill News," a Democratic county organ, tells the whole story and tells it with clearness and force:

"There is no use of winking and blinking and trying to hide facts; it is sure that scores of voters have voted a straight party ticket for years for fear of negro rule. Now that this is out of the way, there is going to be some voting straight from the shoulder, and the man who is unfitted for the position he seeks is going to be left when the votes are counted. It therefore behooves the Democratic party to nominate its most capable men for every position—men who have no ax to grind, men of well-known probity and honesty. Remember these things and watch the vote in November."

Furthermore, and quite naturally, the removal of the negro question from politics has resulted in better feeling between the races. To illustrate this, let us take the original of the hero, Charlie Gaston, in Mr. Dixon's "Leopard's Spots." Charlie Gaston is supposed to represent, in the main, the present Governor of North Carolina, the Hon. Charles B. Aycock. The bitterness toward the negro that seems to actuate Mr. Dixon and his imaginary hero is not shared by this living, flesh-and-blood Charlie Gaston, who, as he accepted the Democratic nomination for Governor two years ago, with a masterly defence of the Suffrage Amendment then being considered, gave utterance to this worthy sentiment:

"May the era of good feeling among us be the outcome of this contest. Then we shall learn, if we do not already know, that while universal suffrage is a failure, universal justice is the perpetual decree of Almighty God, and that we are entrusted with power not for our good alone, but for the negro as well. If we fail to administer equal and exact justice to the negro whom we deprive of suffrage, we shall in the fulness of time lose power ourselves, for we must know that the God who is love trusts no people with authority for the purpose of enabling them to do injustice to the weak. We do well to rejoice in our strength and to take delight in our power, but we will do better still when we come fully to know that our right to rule has been transmitted to us by our fathers through centuries of toil and sacrifice, suffering and death, and their work through all these centuries has been a striving to execute judgment in righteousness. That must likewise be our aim, that our labor."

Again, in his inaugural address last year, he declared:

"The white people owe a high duty to the negro. It was necessary to the safety of the State to base suffrage on the capacity to exercise it wisely. This results in excluding a great number of negroes from the ballot, but their right to life, liberty, property and justice must be even more carefully safeguarded than ever. It is true that a superior race cannot submit to the rule of a weaker race without injury; it is also true in the long years of God that the strong cannot oppress the weak without destruction."

And this man—perhaps the fittest spokesman of the new era in the South—has shown his faith by his works. It was his eloquent appeal for the education of both races, the blacks as well as the whites, that thrilled the recent Conference for Education in the South. Throughout North Carolina, regardless of opposi-

tion, he has preached the same doctrine. Against all mob violence, too, he has squarely set his face, and perhaps the largest reward ever offered by a Governor of a Southern State was that for a band of Salisbury lynchers which he issued a few weeks ago.

The Southern white man knows that "the negro race," to use Dr. Felix Adler's phrase, "is a child race"; he has always had, will always have, that consciousness of Caucasian superiority called by some "race prejudice." But he does not hate the negro, and passion has been manifested only when the blind partisanship of the blacks has been so manipulated by unworthy leaders as to bring about conditions intolerable to the whites, and no less damaging to the negroes themselves. With the removal of the negro question from politics goes the most fruitful source of bitterness between the races, and there are now brighter prospects for the general acceptance of the generous policy advocated by Governor Aycock.

Another encouraging fact is, that the educational test for voters furnishes an incentive to worthy effort on the part of this child-race—an incentive to labor that will in itself fit the negro to use more wisely that high privilege which, as Mr. James Bryce points out, no other people in all history has ever won save after proving and developing strength and fitness by centuries of struggle for the coveted honor. In North Carolina, since the adoption of our Suffrage Amendment, the increase in negro school-attendance has been very marked; not many miles from where I now write, an illiterate negro, sixty years old, is going to school to qualify himself for voting. Not unreasonable, it seems to me, is the hope that this effort now necessary to obtain the ballot will cause the black man to value it more highly, and that the education secured will enable him to act more judiciously in all civic matters. I know at least one Southern leader, a man who has served his State as Governor and United States Senator, in whom this faith is strong. Talking with the writer a few weeks ago, he said: "The new class of negro voters will act more sensibly than the old. Education and experience will teach them something. I do not think that they will go Republican *en masse*, as their fathers have done. On the contrary, I believe that they will rapidly assume a non-partisan position, and that this policy will keep the negro question from again becoming prominent in politics."

## V.

But what will be the attitude of the North and of the Republican "powers that be" at Washington towards this question?

On this much depends, but I risk the prediction that (excepting, possibly, unfavorable action by the Supreme Court on some non-essential features of these disfranchising amendments) the South will be left alone to work out its own problem; that, as the advocates of the Force Bill failed in the second of the three periods of which this paper treats, so now will the advocates of Congressional attack on this new Southern policy fail—and fail even more completely than did the friends of the Force Bill; for the country has learned much in the last decade, both from the South and from "our new-caught sullen peoples" in the Philippines.

But I must say that there is a considerable element in the South—and in the Democratic Party, moreover—that would gladly welcome Northern interference. These are the agitators, whose political fortunes flourish only when prejudice and passion usurp more or less completely the place of reason and judgment. An attack on Southern suffrage regulations would revive the conditions in which these men delight; it would paralyze the incipient spirit of independence in politics, and again insure for a time the undisputed sway of one party, with the consequent opportunity for machine rule.

A threatening, meddling attitude on the part of the North would help these men; but such men as Governor Aycock, Hoke Smith, and Hilary A. Herbert, who have broader and more statesmanlike plans for the South, it would put at a serious disadvantage. This fact is well illustrated by the Booker Washington dinner incident of last year, of which Governor Aycock said:

"I am endeavoring to support measures for the education of all children without regard to color. By this action President Roosevelt has hampered and retarded efforts which are being made to educate the negro. He has furnished opponents of negro education with the argument of social equality, which is hard to meet."

It should also be said that this seeming bit of meddling, this seeming recognition of the "social equality" idea by the then untried President, was incorrectly regarded by many as a declaration of hostility to the South, and turned the tide then setting strongly toward Republican policies and the organization of a

strong minority party in the South. The best government is not possible where the dominant party is conscious that it has nothing to fear from the opposition, and it was this blow to the independent movement that the majority of the Democrats with whom I talked (business and professional men, to be sure, not politicians) regarded as perhaps the most regrettable result of the President's action. This opinion was also expressed by one of the best-known Southern dailies in these words: "The real Southern man and Democrat grieves over it. He would greatly like to see two honorable parties in the South; not so with the groundling and whipper-snapper."

I can think of but two other classes besides these Democratic agitators that would be benefited by national interference: (1) Northern demagogues, more desirous of pleasing the rabble than of serving the country, and (2) the baser sort of Republican politicians in the South—members of those organizations criticised by President Roosevelt in his Lyon interview (August 20, 1902) as "existing only for federal patronage and delegates to National Conventions"; "that considerable class of Southern Republicans," as ex-Senator Marion Butler says, "who do not desire to build up a strong and respectable opposition to the Democratic Party, but, on the contrary, really want their party to remain weak that they may have the least possible competition at the federal pie-counter." The influence of this element is doubtless greater than most people believe; the men who compose it realize that conditions which would attract better men to their party would probably end their official careers.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The South, beset by perils on right and left, has evolved a new method of dealing with that White Man's Burden which she has borne for more than thirty years—a method that, in spite of appearances of injustice, promises better government, fairer elections, greater political freedom, and more generous treatment of the negro than would be possible were the National Government to compel a return to the policy of so-called unrestricted suffrage. And its interference in this problem that the South is slowly working out, would add only another blunder to the long list of those already made in a spirit of misguided, long-range philanthropy.

CLARENCE H. POE.

## AMERICA MISTRESS OF THE SEAS.

BY CAPTAIN R. P. HOBSON, U. S. N.

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THE two facts of the century just closed that portend most for the human race are the rise of Russia and the growth of the United States.

Within these two nations are gathering mighty factors of national power, mightier factors than have yet appeared in the history of the world, factors resembling in general nature but exceeding in magnitude those that brought forth the Empire of Rome and the British Empire—cumulative factors that mark Russia for a military empire destined to throw Rome into the shade, and the United States for a mighty Naval Power toward which the vast power of Great Britain is but a stepping-stone.

In the United States we find elements of power, numbers and vigor of population and material resources, without a parallel in history, together with conditions never yet equalled—maritime frontiers, vast material interests, and sacred principles—which demand the growth of power upon the sea.

In population, the United States is half again as large as Germany, nearly twice as large as the white population of the British Empire, nearly twice as large as Austria-Hungary, and more than twice as large as France. The population of the United States is increasing twice as rapidly as the population of Germany, and three times as rapidly as the population of Great Britain and the other nations of Europe, while it has from twelve to fifteen times the space to expand in, with a richness of soil that would enable the United States to support a population equal to the present population of the earth, without taxing the soil beyond the degree now existing in Europe; and every improvement in transportation and means of intercommunication will cause the United States to draw off more and more the hardy and vigorous people