

spirituality than the setting sun of materialistic superstition.

+ + +

## THE WHITE MAN AND THE NEGRO AT THE SOUTH.

Those of us who insist that the Negro shall be accounted a man as other men when questions of human rights are at issue, are usually met with two broad statements. We are told, first, that only the Southern white man understands the Negro, and second, that Northern white men adopt the hostile Southern view as soon as they come into intimate contact with the Negro masses at the South. Both mental attitudes confront us in two letters upon which we purpose commenting.

### I.

One of these letters has to do with the tendency of Northern white men who, upon going South, adopt the Southern view of the Negro question. It comes from a correspondent who in a passage of the Atlantic last Summer participated in a desultory discussion in the smoking room of the ship, in the course of which the Negro question came up. One of the passengers, a Northern man as our correspondent believes, took the lead "in damning up and down from every point of view the Negro of the South." The letter continues:

He laid especial weight on the inherent shiftlessness of the black man, whom you can't beg or beat into work. As conversations go, this led to discussions on the South and then to investments in Southern land. "Why," he said, "I don't see why more people don't put money down there;" and then, lowering his voice as though letting us into the secret, "you know I've got 320 acres down there and I have thirteen Negro families on it. Why, I pull out over \$3,000 a year clear."

This man revealed the commercial Northern mind.

+

Northern white men do not change their opinions with reference to human rights when they go South. What they do change is their modes of expressing those opinions.

The average Northern white man of the "classes" knows no such thing as human rights. The only rights he knows or cares for are what he calls "rights of property."

And he draws no distinction between natural rights and artificial privileges in this connection. Whether the subject of proprietorship be a house, a building-site, a horse, a human being, or a public function, it is all the same to him. The proprietorship must be protected at all hazards and

regardless of whose natural rights of property or person it invades.

According to this view of human relationships the "lower classes," who are disinherited by law to make his opportunity and plundered by law for his enrichment, are an inferior order—wards to be brought up "in the way they should go" if they are docile, or beasts of prey to be wiped off the face of the earth if they are rebellious.

But he draws no distinctions of race or color. Unaccustomed to "upper" and "lower" orders distinguishable by race characteristics and color marks, he thinks of the Negro simply as of the "lower orders." He is even sympathetic with the Negro when white men of the "lower orders" abuse him.

From his point of view the Negro should have the same chance in life as any other person of the lower orders. The "door of opportunity" to compete with white bidders for work should be kept open for him; but the door of opportunity should with judicial impartiality be slammed in the face of white and black alike, if by allowing it to remain open any of the plundering privileges of the "classes" would be jeopardized.

+

When such a man comes in contact with the Negro masses of the South, he seems to alter his opinion regarding the Negro. But there is in reality no essential alteration of opinion. He merely phrases his plutocratic opinion in terms of race prejudice.

Finding in the South that the lower orders consist for the most part of Negroes, he damns them as heartily as at the North he would like to damn the poor regardless of race. If he found himself in a community where the lower orders were mostly Chinese, or Japanese, or Irish, or Scandinavian, or Hun, or Jew, he would turn his batteries upon those races.

+

In the North he has less freedom of speech regarding the abolition of the ballot for the "lower orders" than at the South regarding the Negro's ballot. While at the North he may be urgent for strict naturalization laws to lessen the voting power of the "lower orders," and may urge freely enough in the privacy of "his set" the disfranchisement of the "lower orders" who already vote, he dares not unreservedly demand disfranchisement. It would not be good form. All this is different at the South, where the lower orders are mostly Negroes. Disfranchisement of Negroes being popular among the whites of the South, the

Northern man of plutocratic instincts may freely join in the hue and cry.

But Southerners are mistaken in supposing that he is therefore a convert to their view. He has not turned from "nigger lover" to "nigger hater." Men who really believe in human equality before the law are not so easily diverted from their ideals. All he has done is to translate his long cherished plutocratic opinions into the language of race hatred.

## II.

Our second letter is in one respect more agreeable than the first. In the first, the sordid mind it reports leers out between the lines. But the second speaks the thought of a mind which at bottom means well to all the world, the Negro included. The writer feels much more keenly, however, the wrongs he suffers from the Negro, than he realizes the wrongs he tolerates against the Negro.

We give his letter in full (except as it is merely personal), not alone for the purpose of commenting upon it, but also, and more important still, because it breathes better than anything that we have seen in print the spirit of the average well-meaning Southern white man on the Negro question:

The writer now resides, and has all his life lived on the farm on which he was born 55 years ago in Rutherford County, Tennessee. My father owned slaves until they were freed. He was kind to them and they loved him. I had my "black mammy" like many other Southern boys, and we were affectionately attached to each other as long as she lived. My most congenial playmates were our Negro boys of my age and older.

After these Negroes were freed, my father gave them homes on his farm as tenants; and later, after I took charge of the farm, most of the Negroes continued to cultivate the land for me by my directions. We all prospered reasonably well and our work went on smoothly until the younger generation of Negroes came on in place of the older.

These old ex-slaves are now almost extinct. A few more years will mark the time away as far as they are concerned. Whenever you see one of these old Negroes they are honorable as a rule, and are held in respect and esteem by all good white people. But how different is this younger generation of Negroes. A large majority of them are without principle, are white folk haters, and for the slightest imaginary provocation, where less than fifty cents might be involved, will burn you out of house and home.

I claim to know the nature of the Negroes, their faults and their virtues, having been reared almost in their cabins, and having never had any other labor on my farm than Negroes, and otherwise having had much dealings with them. I deal honestly with them, and would be as far from cheat-

ing or defrauding them as I would be from cheating my own son.

Some years ago in giving an old Negro family the preference of working my land to another Negro of the younger generation, the latter took offense, said he had as good a right to home with me as the old family Negro who had nursed me in my infancy. My barn, full of corn and hay, was burned in a few days. I did not see the incendiary in the act, but all evidence pointed to this Negro. Later my house was burned over my head and that of my four motherless little children at 2 o'clock in the night. I had befriended this old family Negro by furnishing him a little money to prosecute a little suit against one of his own race. By doing so, I incurred the ill-will of this Negro. He, to be revenged, fired my house.

I have two young Negro men living on my farm now; one of them has not told me the truth this whole year. He is anxious to live with me another year on the same terms that he works now. I would like to dispose of him and get a more reliable man. This one, when I buy shoes for him, gambles them off his own feet, and then comes to me to buy others for him, claiming he accidentally burned them up in the fire. If I do not allow this Negro a home with me next year, he is liable to do me some private injury.

Now no doubt you think this is an overdrawn picture. If you think so you do not know the Negro of to-day that we farmers have to deal with. But what is a thousand times worse, our wives and daughters, if they leave home on a visit or on business do it at the peril of being assaulted by some Negro. Do you believe that assertion? We keep a gun loaded in my home for no other purpose than for wife to protect herself with in case of an assault in my absence, though I may be gone from home for an hour only. You can't take up a daily paper, such as the Nashville Banner, which is a most conservative paper, without reading of an assault by some Negro brute on a white woman or white child.

Put yourself in a Southern man's place. Have you a wife? Have you daughters? The thought never occurred to you of the possibility of a Negro assaulting one of your own. In that case would your counsel let the law take its own course? You say Yes; but I say No, you would not; you would leave the brute in the hands of your friends to settle. I am not an advocate of mob law. But I love the womanhood and virtue of our women more than I love my own life. If you lived here, and had to deal with the Negro as we of the South do, you would not write editorials or publish from other papers articles which, if the ignorant Negroes were to read, or hear about, would incite them to further deeds of crime.

+

This letter is pathetic. It is pathetic because it describes a sad situation, and doubly pathetic because in doing so it discloses a disordered mental and moral vision. The writer attributes to a race the crimes of individuals. He attributes to race characteristics crimes and vices that are com-

mon to mankind. He assumes peculiar knowledge of a class of men as men, when he has no knowledge of them except as docile slaves or rebellious sons of freedmen—and this wholly from his own point of view and not at all from theirs.

Our correspondent claims "to know the nature of the Negroes, their faults and their virtues, having been reared almost in their cabins and having never had any other labor" on his farm. This experience may indeed enable him to know the Negro as a slave, as a tenant, as a dependent. But it does not enable him to know the Negro as a man. No one can know his own race, much less another race, unless he measures it upon the level. If he looks up at it or down at it, he does not know it. Equality is an absolute condition of knowing men. Nobles do not know their peasantry, the employing class at the North do not know the laboring class; yet for the most part all are of the same race.

That our letter writer does not know the Negro distinctively as Negro, is evident from the rest of his letter. He thinks it a peculiarity of the Negro race that while the ex-slaves are docile the younger generation are white-folk haters and vindictive. Yet this is a characteristic of all races that have passed through enslavement or other social wrongs, especially if the younger generation are made to feel the degradation of their outraged ancestors.

Our letter writer himself exhibits the very spirit he condemns, when he defends the mobbing of unconvicted Negroes accused of crime. For the sins of the criminally guilty of a race, he is vindictive against the actually or possibly innocent of the same race.

He thinks it a peculiarity of the Negro to lie. But where is the evidence that lying is a Negro vice? Shall we condemn the whole race as liars because one Negro has not told the truth for a whole year? What an absurdity even if it were a million Negroes with a million lies.

Lying is not peculiar to any race. It is simply the refuge of the weak of all races. Those who fear the vengeance of the master—whether the timid child, the cowed slave, or the hired man fearful of losing his job—these, and not Negroes as Negroes, are the classes that characteristically resort to lies.

We are told, moreover, that it is a peculiarity of the Negro to burn houses in revenge for real or fancied wrongs. But in the early days of this country the white man denounced the Indian because Indians burned houses in revenge for white aggression. In England during the corn law agitation, landlords denounced the farm laborer be-

cause farm laborers vindictively burned corn ricks. If Negroes burn white men's houses, whether in revenge for personal grievances or in recollection of the great grievance of slavery, it proves not that Negroes are different from other races in their elemental passions, but that they are like them. History is full of examples.

+

If the new generation of Negroes are vindictive, if they hate the whites as a race, shall the blame rest altogether upon the Negro, and the white be wholly excused? What man dare say this, and yet profess to be fair?

The white race of our country enslaved the Negro and held him in slavery for two centuries or more. We need not in this connection discuss the responsibility—whether it rests upon the North or the South, or both. If the Negro's nature is human nature, he doesn't allow for these fine distinctions any more than white men do. It is enough for him to know that black slavery was a fact, and that it was made a fact by the white race. If all Negroes look so much alike to white men, would it be strange if most white men look alike to Negroes?

What would the white race do if conditions were reversed? Our letter writer should know that it would do precisely what he denounces the Negro race for doing. As it came to a realization of its wrongs the white race would hate the Negro race and be vindictive. Indeed, it hates the Negro race now and is vindictive, notwithstanding that the great wrong has been done by the white race to the Negro race instead of being done by the Negro race to the white race.

+

And what is the lesson of it all?

In consequence of an historical wrong of the past and of continuing wrongs in the present, from "black codes" to peonage, the new generation of Negroes, as would be the case with the new generation of any other race of freedmen just coming into a realization of its long outraged rights, is cultivating a bitter hatred of the white race.

What then is the thing to be done?

Is it to inflict more wrongs upon the Negro, thereby demonstrating to the Negro race that its hatred of the white race as a race of conscienceless brutes is justified?

Or is it to treat the Negro race as a race of men whose rights and responsibilities are the same as those of other men?