

American Magazine
April, 1907

The Atlanta Riot

UPON the ocean of antagonism between the white and negro races in this country, there arises occasionally a wave, stormy in its appearance, but soon subsiding into quietude. Such a wave was the Atlanta riot. Its ominous size, greater by far than the ordinary race disturbances which express themselves in lynchings, alarmed the entire country and awakened in the South a new sense of the dangers which threatened it. A description of that spectacular though superficial disturbance, the disaster incident to its fury, and the remarkable efforts at reconstruction will lead the way naturally — as human nature is best interpreted in moments of passion — to a clearer understanding, in future articles, of the deep and complex race feeling which exists in this country.

On the twenty-second day of September, 1906, Atlanta had become a veritable social tinder-box. For months the relation of the races had been growing more strained. The entire South had been sharply annoyed by a shortage of labor accompanied by high wages and, paradoxically, by an increasing number of idle negroes. In Atlanta the lower class — the “worthless negro” — had been increasing in numbers: it showed itself too evidently among the swarming saloons, dives, and “clubs” which a complaisant city administration allowed to exist in the very heart of the city. Crime had increased to an alarming extent: an insufficient and ineffective police force seemed unable to cope with it. With a population of 115,000 Atlanta had over 17,000 arrests in 1905; in 1906 the number increased to 21,602. Atlanta had many more arrests than New Orleans with nearly three times the population and twice as many negroes; and almost four times as many as Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a city nearly three times as large. Race feeling had been sharpened through a long and bitter political campaign, negro disfranchisement being one of the chief issues under discussion. An inflammatory play called “The Clansman,” though forbidden by public sentiment in many Southern cities, had been given in Atlanta and other places with the effect of increasing the prejudice of both races. Certain newspapers in Atlanta, taking advantage of popular feeling, kept the race issue constantly agitated, emphasizing negro crimes with startling headlines. One newspaper even recommended the formation of organizations of citizens in imitation of the Ku Klux movement of reconstruction days. In the clamor of this growing agitation, the voice of the right-minded white people and industrious, self-respecting negroes was almost unheard. A few ministers of both races saw the impending storm and sounded a warning — to no effect; and within the week before the riot the citizens, the city administration and the courts all waked up together. There were calls for mass meetings, the police began to investigate the conditions of the low saloons and dives, the county constabulary was increased in numbers, the grand jury was called to meet in special session on Monday the 24th.

But the awakening of moral sentiment in the city, unfortunately, came too late. Crime, made more lurid by agitation, had so kindled the fires of hatred that they could not be extinguished by ordinary methods. The best people of Atlanta were like the citizens of

prosperous Northern cities, too busy with money-making to pay attention to public affairs. For Atlanta is growing rapidly. Its bank clearings jumped from ninety millions in 1900 to two hundred and twenty-two millions in 1906, its streets are well paved and well lighted, its street-car service is good, its sky-scrapers are comparable with the best in the North. In other words, it was progressive — few cities I know of more so — but it had forgotten its public duties.

Within a few months before the riot there had been a number of crimes of worthless negroes against white women. Leading negroes, while not one of them with whom I talked wished to protect any negro who was really guilty, asserted that the number of these crimes had been greatly exaggerated and that in special instances the details had been over-emphasized because the criminal was black; that they had been used to further inflame race hatred. I had a personal investigation made of every crime against a white woman committed in the few months before and after the riot. Three, charged to white men, attracted comparatively little attention in the newspapers, although one, the offense of a white man named Turnadge, was shocking in its details. Of twelve such crimes committed by negroes in the six months preceding the riot two were cases of rape, horrible in their details, three were aggravated attempts at rape, three may have been attempts, three were pure cases of fright on the part of the white woman, and in one the white woman, first asserting that a negro had assaulted her, finally confessed attempted suicide.

The facts of two of these cases I will narrate — and without excuse for the horror of the details. If we are to understand the true conditions in the South, these things must be told. One of the cases was that of Mrs. Knowles Etheleen Kimmel, twenty-five years old, wife of a farmer living near Atlanta. A mile beyond the end of the street-car line stands a small green bungalow-like house in a lonely spot near the edge of the pine woods. The Kimmels who lived there were not Southerners by birth but of Pennsylvania Dutch stock. They had been in the South four or five years, renting their lonesome farm, raising cotton and corn and hopefully getting a little ahead. On the day before the riot a strange rough-looking negro called at the back door of the Kimmel home. He wore a cast-off khaki soldier's uniform. He asked a foolish question and went away. Mrs. Kimmel was worried and told her husband. He, too, was worried — the fear of this crime is everywhere present in the South — and when he went away in the afternoon he asked his nearest neighbor to look out for the strange negro. When he came back a few hours later, he found fifty white men in his yard. He knew what had happened, without being told: his wife was under medical attendance in the house. She had been able to give a clear description of the negro: bloodhounds were brought, but the pursuing white men had so obliterated the criminal's tracks that he could not be traced. Through information given by a negro a suspect was arrested and nearly lynched before he could be brought to Mrs. Kimmel for identification; when she saw him she said: "He is not the man." The criminal is still at large.

One day weeks afterward I found the husband working alone in his field: his wife, to whom the surroundings had become unbearable, had gone away to visit friends. He told me the story hesitatingly. His prospects, he said, were ruined: his neighbors had been sympathetic but he could not continue to live there with the feeling that they all knew. He was preparing to give up his home and lose himself where people did not know his story. I asked him if he favored lynching, and his answer surprised me. "I've thought about that," he said. "You see, I'm a Christian man, or I try to be. My wife is a Christian woman. We've talked about it. What good would it do? We should make criminals of ourselves, shouldn't we? No, let the law take its course. When I came here, I tried to help the negroes as much as I could. But many of them won't work even when the wages are high: they won't come when they agree to and when they

get a few dollars ahead they go down to the saloons in Atlanta. Every one is troubled about getting labor and every one is afraid of prowling idle negroes. Now, the thing has come to me, and it's just about ruined my life.

When I came away the poor lonesome fellow followed me half-way up the hill, asking: "Now, what would you do?"

One more case. One of the prominent florists in Atlanta is W. C. Lawrence. He is an Englishman, whose home is in the outskirts of the city. On the morning of August 20th his daughter Mabel, fourteen years old, and his sister Ethel, twenty-five years old, a trained nurse who had recently come from England, went out into the nearby woods to pick ferns. Being in broad daylight and within sight of houses, they had no fear. Returning along an old Confederate breastworks, they were met by a brutal-looking negro with a club in one hand and a stone in the other. He first knocked the little girl down, then her aunt. When the child "came to" she found herself partially bound with a rope. "Honey," said the negro, "I want you to come with me." With remarkable presence of mind the child said: "I can't, my leg is broken" — and she let it swing limp from the knee. Deceived, the negro went back to bind the aunt. Mabel, instantly untying the rope, jumped up and ran for help. When he saw the child escaping the negro ran off.

"When I got there," said Mr. Lawrence, "my sister was lying against the bank, face down. The back of her head had been beaten bloody. The bridge of her nose was cut open, one eye had been gouged out of its socket. My daughter had three bad cuts on her head — thank God, nothing worse to either. But my sister, who was just beginning her life, will be totally blind in one eye, probably in both. Her life is ruined."

About a month later, through the information of a negro, the criminal was caught, identified by the Misses Lawrence, and sent to the penitentiary for forty years (two cases), the limit of punishment for attempted criminal assault.

In both of these cases arrests were made on the information of negroes.

The effect of a few such crimes as these may be more easily imagined than described: They produced a feeling of alarm which no one who has not lived in such a community can in any wise appreciate. I was astonished in traveling in the South to discover how widely prevalent this dread has become. Many white women in Atlanta dare not leave their homes alone after dark; many white men carry arms to protect themselves and their families. And even these precautions do not always prevent attacks.

But this is not the whole story. Everywhere I went in Atlanta I heard of the fear of the white people, but not much was said of the terror which the negroes also felt. And yet every negro I met voiced in some way that fear. It is difficult here in the North for us to understand what such a condition means: a whole community namelessly afraid!

The better -class negroes have two sources of fear: one of the criminals of their own race — such attacks are rarely given much space in the newspapers — and the other the fear of the white people. My very first impression of what this fear of the negroes might be came, curiously enough, not from negroes but from a fine white woman on whom I called shortly after going South. She told this story. "I had a really terrible experience one evening a few days ago. I was walking along ----- street when I saw a rather good-looking young negro come out of a hallway to the sidewalk. He was in a great hurry, and, in turning suddenly, as a person sometimes will do, he accidentally brushed my shoulder with his arm. He had not seen me before. When he turned and found it was a white woman he had touched, such a look of abject terror and fear came into his face as I hope never again to see on a human countenance. He knew what it meant if I was frightened, called for help and accused him of insulting or attacking me. He stood still a moment,

then turned and ran down the street, dodging into the first alley he came to. It shows, doesn't it, how little it might take to bring punishment upon an innocent man!"

The next view I got was through the eyes of one of the able negroes of the South, Bishop Gaines of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He is now an old man, but of imposing presence. Of wide attainments, he has traveled in Europe, he owns much property, and rents houses to white tenants. He told me of services he had held some time before in south Georgia. Approaching the church one day through the trees, he suddenly encountered a white woman carrying water from a spring. She dropped her pail instantly, screamed and ran up the path toward her house.

"If I had been some negroes," said Bishop Gaines, "I should have turned and fled in terror; the alarm would have been given, and it is not unlikely that I should have had a posse of white men with bloodhounds on my trail. If I had been caught what would my life have been worth? The woman would have identified me — and what could I have said? But I did not run. I stepped out in the path, held up one hand and said:

" 'Don't worry, madam, I am Bishop Gaines, and I am holding services here in this church.' So she stopped running and I apologized for having startled her."

The negro knows he has little chance to explain, if by accident or ignorance he insults a white woman or offends a white man. An educated negro, one of the ablest of his race, telling me of how a friend of his who by merest chance had provoked a number of half -drunken white men, had been set upon and frightfully beaten, remarked:

"It might have been me!"

Now, I am telling these things just as they look to the negro; it is quite as important, as a problem in human nature, to know how the negro feels and what he says, as it is to know how the white man feels.

On the afternoon of the riot the newspapers in flaming headlines chronicled four assaults by negroes on white women. I had a personal investigation made of each of those cases. Two of them may have been attempts at assaults, but two palpably were nothing more than fright on the part of both the white woman and the negro. As an instance, in one case an elderly woman, Mrs. Martha Holcombe, going to close her blinds in the evening, saw a negro on the sidewalk. In a terrible fright she screamed. The news was telephoned to the police station, but before the officials could respond, Mrs. Holcombe telephoned them not to come out. And yet this was one of the "assaults" chronicled in letters five inches high in a newspaper extra.

In short, Atlanta before the riot was in a condition of extraordinary nervous tension. A thorough study of the psychology of this riot, as of many others, would undoubtedly show that the chief cause was fear — fear on both sides — the sort of panic fear that strikes out blindly, not knowing or caring what it hits.

And finally on this hot Saturday half holiday, when the country people had come in by hundreds, when every one was out of doors, when the streets were crowded, when the saloons had been filled since early morning with white men and negroes, both drinking — certain newspapers in Atlanta began to print extras with big headings announcing new assaults on white women by negroes. The *Atlanta News* published five such extras, and newsboys cried them through the city:

"Third assault."

"Fourth assault."

The whole city, already deeply agitated, was thrown into a veritable state of panic. The news in the extras was taken as truthful; for the city was not in a mood then for cool

investigation. Calls began to come in from every direction for police protection. A loafing negro in a back yard, who in ordinary times would not have been noticed, became an object of real terror. The police force, too small at best, was thus distracted and separated.

In Atlanta the proportion of men who go armed continually is very large: the pawnshops of Decatur and Peters streets, with windows like arsenals, furnish the low class of negroes and whites with cheap revolvers and knives. Every possible element was here, then, for a murderous outbreak: the good citizens, white and black, were far away in their homes; the bad men had been drinking in the dives permitted to exist by the respectable people of Atlanta; and here they were gathered, by night, in the heart of the city.

And finally a trivial incident fired the tinder. Fear and vengeance generated it; it was marked at first by a sort of rough, half-drunken horseplay, but when once blood was shed, the brute, which is none too well controlled in the best city, came out and gorged itself. Once permit the shackles of law and order to be cast off, and men, white or black, Christian or pagan, revert to primordial savagery. There is no such thing as an orderly mob.

Crime had been committed by negroes, but this mob made no attempt to find the criminals: it expressed its blind, unreasoning, uncontrolled race hatred by attacking every man, woman or boy it saw who had a black face. A lame boot-black, an inoffensive, industrious negro boy, at that moment actually at work shining a man's shoes, was dragged out and cuffed, kicked and beaten to death in the street. Another young negro was chased and stabbed to death with jack-knives in the most unspeakably horrible manner. The mob entered barber shops where respectable negro men were at work shaving white customers, pulled them away from their chairs and killed them. Cars were stopped and inoffensive negroes were thrown through the windows or dragged out and beaten. They did not stop with killing and maiming: they broke into hardware stores and armed themselves, they demolished not only negro barber shops and restaurants, but they robbed stores kept by white men. Of course the Mayor came out, and the police force and the fire department, and finally the Governor ordered out the militia — to apply that pound of cure which should have been an ounce of prevention.

It is highly significant of Southern conditions — which the North does not understand — that the first instinct of thousands of negroes in Atlanta, when the riot broke out, was not to run away from the white people but to run to them. The white man who takes the most radical position in opposition to the negro race will often be found loaning money to negroes, feeding them and their families from his kitchen, or defending "his negroes" in court or elsewhere. All of the more prominent white citizens of Atlanta, during the riot, protected and fed many colored families who ran to them in their terror. Even Hoke Smith, Governor elect of Georgia, who is more distrusted by the negroes as a race probably than any other white man in Georgia, protected many negroes in his house during the disturbance. In many cases white friends armed negroes and told them to protect themselves. One widow I know of who had a single black servant, placed a shot-gun in his hands and told him to fire on any mob that tried to get him. She trusted him absolutely. Southern people possess a real liking, wholly unknown in the North, for individual negroes whom they know.

So much for Saturday night. Sunday was quiescent but nervous — the atmosphere full of the electricity of apprehension. Monday night, after a day of alarm and of prowling crowds of men, which might at any moment develop into mobs, the riot broke forth again — in a suburb of Atlanta called Brownsville. When I went out to Brownsville, knowing of its bloody part in the riot, I expected to find a typical negro slum. I looked for squalor, ignorance, vice. And I was surprised to find a large settlement of negroes practically every one of whom owned his own

home, some of the houses being as attractive without and as well furnished within as the ordinary homes of middleclass white people. Near at hand, surrounded by beautiful grounds, were two negro colleges — Clark University and Gammon Theological Seminary. The post office was kept by a negro. There were several stores owned by negroes. The schoolhouse, though supplied with teachers by the county, was built wholly with money personally contributed by the negroes of the neighborhood, in order that there might be adequate educational facilities for their children. They had three churches and not a saloon. The residents were all of the industrious, property-owning sort, bearing the best reputation among white people who knew them.

Think, then, of the situation in Brownsville during the riot in Atlanta. All sorts of exaggerated rumors came from the city. *The negroes of Atlanta were being slaughtered wholesale.* A condition of panic fear developed. Many of the people of the little town sought refuge in Gammon Theological Seminary, where, packed together, they sat up all one night praying. President Bowen did not have his clothes off for days, expecting the mob every moment. He telephoned for police protection on Sunday, but none was provided. Terror also existed among the families who remained in Brownsville; most of the men were armed, and they had decided, should the mob appear, to make a stand in defense of their homes.

At last, on Monday evening, just at dark, a squad of the county police, led by Officer Poole, marched into the settlement at Brownsville. Here, although there had been not the slightest sign of disturbance, they began arresting negroes for being armed. Several armed white citizens, who were not officers, joined them.

Finally, looking up a little street they saw dimly in the next block a group of negro men. Part of the officers were left with the prisoners and part went up the street. As they approached the group of negroes, the officers began firing: the negroes responded. Officer Heard was shot dead; another officer was wounded, and several negroes were killed or injured.

The police went back to town with their prisoners. On the way two of the negroes in their charge were shot. A white man's wife, who saw the outrage, being with child, dropped dead of fright.

The negroes (all of this is now a matter of court record) declare that they were expecting the mob; that the police — not mounted as usual, not armed as usual, and accompanied by citizens — looked to them in the darkness like a mob. In their fright the firing began.

The wildest reports, of course, were circulated. One sent broadcast was that 500 students of Clark University, all armed, had decoyed the police in order to shoot them down. As a matter of fact, the university did not open its fall session until October 3, over a week later--and on this night there were just two students on the grounds.

The next morning the police and the troops appeared and arrested a very large proportion of the male inhabitants of the town. Police officers, accompanied by white citizens, entered one negro home, where lay a man named Lewis, badly wounded the night before. He was in bed; they opened his shirt, placed their revolvers at his breast, and in cold blood shot him through the body several times in the presence of his relatives. They left him for dead, but he has since recovered.

President Bowen, of Gammon Theological Seminary, one of the able negroes in Atlanta, who had nothing whatever to do with the riot, was beaten over the head by one of the police with his rifle-butt. The negroes were all disarmed, and about sixty of them were finally taken to Atlanta and locked up, charged with the murder of Officer Heard.

In the Brownsville riot four negroes were killed. One was a decent, industrious, though loud-talking, citizen named Fambro, who kept a small grocery store and owned two houses

besides, which he rented. He had a comfortable home, a wife and one child. Another was an inoffensive negro named Wilder, seventy years old, a pensioner as a soldier of the Civil War, who was well spoken of by all who knew him. He was found — not shot, but murdered by a knife-cut in the abdomen — lying in a woodshed back of Fambro's store. McGruder, a brick mason who earned \$4 a day at his trade, and who had laid aside enough to earn his own home, was killed while under arrest by the police; and Robinson, an industrious negro carpenter, was shot to death on his way to work Tuesday morning after the riot.

And after the riot in Brownsville, what? Here was a self-respecting community of hard-working negroes, disturbing no one, getting an honest living. How did the riot affect them? Well, it has demoralized them, set them back for years. Not only were four men killed and several wounded, but sixty of their citizens were in jail. Nearly every family had to go to the lawyers, who would not take their cases without money in hand. Hence the little homes had to be sold or mortgaged, or money borrowed in some other way to defend those arrested, doctors' bills were to be paid, the undertaker must be settled with. Oh, a riot is not over when the shooting stops!

And when the cases finally came up in court and all the evidence was brought out every negro went free; but two of the county policemen who had taken part in the shooting, were punished. George Muse, one of the foremost merchants of Atlanta, who was foreman of the jury which tried the Brownsville negroes, said:

“We think the negroes were gathered together just as white people were in other parts of the town, for the purpose of defending their homes. We were shocked by the conduct which the evidence showed some of the county police had been guilty of.”

After the riot was over, many negro families, terrified and feeling themselves unprotected, sold out for what they could get — I heard a good many pitiful stories of such sudden and costly sacrifices — and left the country, some going to California, some to Northern cities. The best and most enterprising are those who go; the worst remain. Not only have negroes left Brownsville, but they have left the city itself in considerable numbers. Labor will thus be still scarcer and wages may be higher in Atlanta because of the riot.

It is significant that *not one of the negroes killed and wounded* in the riot was of the criminal class. Every one was industrious, respectable and law-abiding. A white committee, composed of W. G. Cooper, Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and George Muse, a prominent merchant, and backed by the sober citizenship of the town, made an honest investigation and has issued a brave and truthful report. It is a report which deserves to be read by every American. Here are a few of its conclusions:

1. Among the victims of the mob there was not a single vagrant.
2. They were earning wages in useful work up to the time of the riot.
3. They were supporting themselves and their families or dependent relatives.
4. Most of the dead left small children and widows, mothers or sisters with practically no means and very small earning capacity.
5. The wounded lost from one to eight weeks' time, at 50 cents to \$4 a day, each.
6. About 70 persons were wounded, and among these there was an immense amount of suffering. In some cases it was prolonged and excruciating pain.
7. Many of the wounded are disfigured, and several are permanently disabled.
8. Most of them were in humble circumstances, but they were honest, industrious and law-abiding citizens and useful members of society.
9. These statements are true of both white and colored.

10. Of the wounded, ten are white and sixty are colored. Of the dead, two are white and ten are colored; two female, and ten male. This includes three killed at Brownsville.

11. Wild rumors of a larger number killed have no foundation that we can discover. As the city was paying the funeral expenses of victims and relief was given their families, they had every motive to make known their loss. In one case relatives of a man killed in a broil made fruitless efforts to secure relief.

12. Two persons reported as victims of the riot had no connection with it. One, a negro man, was killed in a broil over a crap game; and another, a negro woman, was killed by her paramour. Both homicides occurred at some distance from the scene of the riot.

The men who made this brave report did not mince matters. They called murder, murder; and robbery, robbery. Read this:

13. As twelve persons were killed and seventy were murderously assaulted, and as, by all accounts, a number took part in each assault, it is clear that several hundred murderers or would-be murderers are at large in this community. At first, after the riot, there was an inclination in some quarters to say: "Well, at any rate, the riot cleared the atmosphere. The negroes have had their lesson. There won't be any more trouble soon." But read the sober conclusions in the Committee's report. *The riot did not prevent further crime.*

14. Although less than three months have passed since the riot, events have already demonstrated that the slaughter of the innocent does not deter the criminal class from committing more crimes. Rapes and robbery have been committed in the city during that time.

15. The slaughter of the innocent does drive away good citizens. From one small neighborhood twenty-five families have gone. A great many of them were buying homes on the installment plan.

16. The crimes of the mob include robbery as well as murder. In a number of cases the property of innocent and unoffending people was taken. Furniture was destroyed, small shops were looted, windows were smashed, trunks were burst open, money was taken from the small hoard, and articles of value were appropriated. In the commission of these crimes the victims, both men and women, were treated with unspeakable brutality.

17. As a result of four days of lawlessness there are in this glad Christmastime widows of both races mourning their husbands, and husbands of both races mourning for their wives; there are orphan children of both races who cry out in vain for faces they will see no more; there are grown men of both races disabled for life, and all this sorrow has come to people who are absolutely innocent of any wrong-doing.

In trying to find out exactly the point of view and the feeling of the negroes — which is most important in any honest consideration of conditions — I was handed the following letter, written by a young colored man, a former resident in Atlanta; now a student in the North. He is writing frankly to a friend. It is valuable as showing a *real* point of view — the bitterness, the hopelessness, the distrust:

"... It is possible that you have formed at least a good idea of how we feel as the result of the horrible eruption in Georgia. I have not spoken to a Caucasian on the subject since then. But, listen: How would you feel, if with our history, there came a time when, after speeches and papers and teachings you acquired property and were educated, and were a fairly good man, it were impossible for you to walk the street (for whose maintenance you were taxed) with your sister without being in mortal fear of death if you resented any insult offered to her? How would you feel if you saw a governor, a mayor, a sheriff, whom you could not oppose at the polls, encourage by deed or word or both, a mob of 'best' and worst citizens to slaughter your people

in the streets and in their own homes and in their places of business? Do you think that you could resist the same wrath that caused God to slay the Philistines and the Russians to throw bombs? I can resist it, but with each new outrage I am less able to resist it. And yet if I gave way to my feelings I should become just like other men . . . of the mob! But I do not . . . not quite, and I must hurry through the only life I shall live on earth, tortured by these experiences and these horrible impulses, with no hope of ever getting away from them; they are ever present, like the just God, the devil, and my conscience.

“If there were no such thing as Christianity we should be hopeless.”

Besides this effect on the negroes the riot for a week or more practically paralyzed the city of Atlanta. Factories were closed, railroad cars were left unloaded in the yards, the street-car system was crippled, and there was no cab-service (cabdrivers being negroes), hundreds of servants deserted their places, the bank clearings slumped by hundreds of thousands of dollars, the state fair, then just opening, was a failure. It was, indeed, weeks before confidence was fully restored and the city returned to its normal condition.

One more point I wish to make before taking up the extraordinary reconstructive work which followed the riot. I have not spoken of the men who made up the mob. We know the dangerous negro class — after all a very small proportion of the entire negro population. There is a corresponding low class of whites, quite as illiterate as the negroes. The poor white hates the negro, and the negro dislikes the poor white. It is in these lower strata of society, where the races rub together in unclean streets, that the fire is generated. Decatur and Peters streets, with their swarming saloons and dives, furnish the point of contact. I talked with many people who saw the mobs at different times, and the universal testimony was that it was made up largely of boys and young men, and of the low criminal and semi-criminal class. The ignorant negro and the uneducated white; there lies the trouble!

This idea that 115,000 people of Atlanta — respectable, law-abiding, good citizens, white and black — should be disgraced before the world by a few hundred criminals was what aroused the strong, honest citizenship of Atlanta to vigorous action. The riot brought out all that was worst in human nature; the reconstruction has brought all that is best and finest. I think there has been no more hopeful or courageous movement in the South since the war than this effort of the good men of Atlanta to get hold of the monumentally complex negro problem in a new way.

Almost the first act of the authorities was to close every saloon in the city, afterward revoking all the licenses — and for two weeks no liquor was sold in the city. The police, at first accused of not having done their best in dealing with the mob, arrested a good many white rioters, and Judge Broyles, to show that the authorities had no sympathy with such disturbers of the peace, sent every man brought before him, 24 in all, to the chain-gang for the largest possible sentence, without the alternative of a fine. The grand jury met and boldly denounced the mob; its report said in part: “That the sensationalism of the afternoon papers in the presentation of the criminal news to the public prior to the riots of Saturday night, especially in the case of the Atlanta News, deserves our severest condemnation.”

But the most important and far-reaching effect of the riot was in arousing the strong men of the city. It struck at the pride of those men of the South, it struck at their sense of law and order, it struck at their business interests. On Sunday following the first riot a number of prominent men gathered at the Piedmont Hotel, and had a brief discussion; but it was not until Tuesday afternoon, when the worst of the news from Brownsville had come in, that they gathered in the courthouse with the serious intent of stopping the riot at all costs. Most of the prominent men of Atlanta were present. Sam D. Jones, president of the Chamber of Commerce,

presided. One of the first speeches was made by Charles T. Hopkins, who had been the leading spirit in the meetings on Sunday and Monday. He expressed with eloquence the humiliation which Atlanta felt.

“Saturday evening at eight o’clock,” he said, “the credit of Atlanta was good for any number of millions of dollars in New York or Boston or any financial center; today we couldn’t borrow fifty cents. The reputation we have been building up so arduously for years has been swept away in two short hours. Not by men who have made and make Atlanta, not by men who represent the character and strength of our city, but by hoodlums, understrappers and white criminals. Innocent negro men have been struck down for no crime whatever, while peacefully enjoying the life and liberty guaranteed to every American citizen. The negro race is a child race. We are a strong race, their guardians. We have boasted of our superiority and we have now sunk to this level— we have shed the blood of our helpless wards. Christianity and humanity demand that we treat the negro fairly. He is here, and here to stay. He only knows how to do those things we teach him to do; it is our Christian duty to protect him. I for one, and I believe I voice the best sentiment of this city, am willing to lay down my life rather than to have the scenes of the last few days repeated.”

In the midst of the meeting a colored man arose rather doubtfully. He was, however, promptly recognized as Dr. W. F. Penn, one of the foremost colored physicians of Atlanta, a graduate of Yale College — a man of much influence among his people. He said that he had come to ask the protection of the white men of Atlanta. He said that on the day before a mob had come to his home; that ten white men, some of whose families he knew and had treated professionally, had been sent into his house to look for concealed arms; that his little girl had run to them, one after another, and begged them not to shoot her father; that his life and the lives of his family had afterward been threatened, so that he had had to leave his home; that he had been saved from a gathering mob by a white man in an automobile.

“What shall we do?” he asked the meeting — and those who heard his speech said that the silence was profound. “We have been disarmed: how shall we protect our lives and property? If living a sober, industrious, upright life, accumulating property and educating his children as best he knows how, is not the standard by which a colored man can live and be protected in the South, what is to become of him? If the kind of life I have lived isn’t the kind you want, shall I leave and go North?”

“When we aspire to be decent and industrious we are told that we are bad examples to other colored men. Tell us what your standards are for colored men. What are the requirements under which we may live and be protected? What shall we do?”

When he had finished, Col. A. J. McBride, a real estate owner and a Confederate veteran, arose and said with much feeling that he knew Dr. Penn and that he was a good man, and that Atlanta meant to protect such men.

“If necessary,” said Col. McBride, “I will go out and sit on his porch with a rifle.”

Such was the spirit of this remarkable meeting. Mr. Hopkins proposed that the white people of the city express their deep regret for the riot and show their sympathy for the negroes who had suffered at the hands of the mob by raising a fund of money for their assistance. Then and there \$4,423 was subscribed, to which the city afterward added \$1,000.

But this was not all. These men, once thoroughly aroused, began looking to the future, to find some new way of preventing the recurrence of such disturbances.

A committee of ten, appointed to work with the public officials in restoring order and confidence, consisted of some of the foremost citizens of Atlanta:

Charles T. Hopkins, Sam D. Jones, President of the Chamber of Commerce; L. Z. Rosser, President of the Board of Education; J. W. English, President of the Fourth National Bank; Forrest Adair, a leading real estate owner; Captain W. D. Ellis, a prominent lawyer; A. B. Steele, a wealthy lumber merchant; M. L. Collier, a railroad man; John E. Murphy, capitalist; and H. Y. McCord, President of a wholesale grocery house.

One of the first and most unexpected things that this committee did was to send for several of the leading negro citizens of Atlanta: the Rev. H. H. Proctor, B. J. Davis, editor of the Independent, a negro journal, the Rev. E. P. Johnson, the Rev. E. R. Carter, the Rev. J. A. Rush and Bishop Holsey.

This was *the first important occasion* in the South upon which an attempt was made to get the two races together for any serious consideration of their differences.

They held a meeting. The white men asked the negroes, "What shall we do to relieve the irritation?" The negroes said that they thought that colored men were treated with unnecessary roughness on the street-cars and by the police. The white members of the committee admitted that this was so and promised to take the matter up immediately with the street-car company and the police department, which was done. The discussion was harmonious. After the meeting Mr. Hopkins said:

"I believe those negroes understood the situation better than we did. I was astonished at their intelligence and diplomacy. They never referred to the riot: they were looking to the future. I didn't know that there were such negroes in Atlanta."

Out of this beginning grew the Atlanta Civic League. Knowing that race prejudice was strong, Mr. Hopkins sent out 2,000 cards, inviting the most prominent men in the city to become members. To his surprise 1,500 immediately accepted, only two refused, and those anonymously; 500 men not formally invited were also taken as members. The League thus has the great body of the best citizens of Atlanta behind it. At the same time Mr. Proctor and his committee of negroes had organized a Colored Co-operative Civic League, which at this writing has a membership of fifteen hundred of the best colored men in the city, and a small committee which meets the committee of the white league.

Fear was expressed that there would be another riotous outbreak during the Christmas holidays, and the League proceeded with vigor to help prevent it. New policemen were put on, and the committee worked with Judge Broyles and Judge Roan in issuing statements warning the people against lawlessness. They got an agreement with the newspapers not to publish sensational news; the sheriff agreed, if necessary, to swear in some of the best men in town as extra deputies; they asked that saloons be closed at four o'clock on Christmas Eve; and through the negro committee, they brought influence to bear to keep all colored people off the streets. When two county police got drunk at Brownsville and threatened Mrs. Fambro, the wife of one of the negroes killed in the riot, a member of the committee, Mr. Seeley, publisher of *The Georgian*, informed the sheriff and sent his automobile to Brownsville, where the policemen were arrested and afterward discharged from the force. As a result, it was the quietest Christmas Atlanta had had in years. But the most important of all the work done, because of the spectacular interest it aroused, was the defense of a negro charged with an assault upon a white woman. It is an extraordinary and dramatic story. Although many people said that the riot would prevent any more negro crime, several attacks on white women occurred within a few weeks afterward. On November 13th Mrs. J. D. Camp, living in the suburbs of Atlanta, was attacked in broad daylight

in her home and brutally assaulted by a negro, who afterward robbed the house and escaped. Though the crime was treated with great moderation by the newspapers, public feeling was intense. A negro was arrested, charged with the crime. Mr. Hopkins and his associates believed that the best way to secure justice and prevent lynchings was to have a prompt trial. Accordingly, they held a conference with Judge Roan, as a result of which three lawyers in the city, Mr. Hopkins, L. Z. Rosser and J. E. McClelland, were appointed to defend the accused negro, serving without pay. A trial-jury composed of twelve citizens, among the most prominent in Atlanta, was called — one of the ablest juries ever drawn in Georgia. There was a determination to have immediate and complete justice.

The negro arrested, one Joe Glenn, had been completely identified by Mrs. Camp as her assailant. Although having no doubt of his guilt, the attorneys went at the case thoroughly. The first thing they did was to call in two members of the negro committee, Mr. Davis and Mr. Carter. These men went to the jail and talked with Glenn, and afterward they all visited the scene of the crime. They found that Glenn, who was a man fifty years old with grandchildren, bore an excellent reputation. He rented a small farm about two miles from Mrs. Camp's home and had some property; he was sober and industrious. After making a thorough examination and getting all the evidence they could, they came back to Atlanta, persuaded, in spite of the fact that the negro had been positively identified by Mrs. Camp — which in these cases is usually considered conclusive — that Glenn was not guilty. It was a most dramatic trial; at first, when Mrs. Camp was placed on the stand she failed to identify Glenn; afterward, reversing herself she broke forth into a passionate denunciation of him. But after the evidence was all in, the jury retired, and reported two minutes later with a verdict "Not guilty." Remarkably enough, just before the trial was over the police informed the court that another negro, named Will Johnson, answering Mrs. Camp's description, had just been arrested, charged with the crime. He was subsequently identified by Mrs. Camp.

Without this energetic defense, an innocent, industrious negro would certainly have been hanged — or if the mob had been ahead of the police, as it usually is, he would have been lynched.

But what of Glenn afterward?

When the jury left the box Mr. Hopkins turned to Glenn and said: "Well, Joe, what do you think of the case?"

He replied: "Boss, I 'spec's they will hang me, for that lady said I was the man, but they won't hang me, will they, 'fore I see my wife and chilluns again?"

He was kept in the tower that night and the following day for protection against a possible lynching. Plans were made by his attorneys to send him secretly out of the city to the home of a farmer in Alabama, whom they could trust with the story. Glenn's wife was brought to visit the jail and Glenn was told of the plans for his safety, and instructed to change his name and keep quiet until the feeling of the community could be ascertained.

A ticket was purchased by his attorneys, with a new suit of clothes, hat and shoes. He was taken out of jail about midnight under a strong guard, and safely placed on the train. From that day to this he has never been heard of. He did not go to Alabama. The poor creature, with the instinct of a hunted animal, did not dare after all to trust the white men who had befriended him. He is a fugitive, away from his family, not daring, though innocent, to return to his home.

Another strong movement also sprung into existence. Its inspiration was religious. Ministers wrote a series of letters to the *Constitution*. Clark Howell, its editor, responded with an

editorial entitled "Shall We Blaze the Trail?" W. J. Northen, ex-Governor of Georgia, and one of the most respected men in the state, took up the work, asking himself, as he says:

"What am I to do, who have to pray every night?"

He answered that question by calling a meeting at the Colored Y. M. C. A. building, where some twenty white men met an equal number of negroes, mostly preachers, and held a prayer meeting.

The South still looks to its ministers for leadership — and they really lead. The sermons of men like the Rev. John E. White, the Rev. C. B. Wilmer, the Rev. W. W. Landrum, who have spoken with power and ability against lawlessness and injustice to the negro, have had a large influence in the reconstruction movement.

Recently ex-Governor Northen has been traveling through the State of Georgia, making a notable series of speeches, urging the establishment of law and order organizations, and meeting support wherever he goes. He has talked against mob-law and lynching in plain language. Here are some of the things he says:

"We shall never settle this until we give absolute justice to the negro. We are not now doing justice to the negro in Georgia.

"Get into contact with the best negroes; there are plenty of good negroes in Georgia. What we must do is to get the good white folks to leaven the bad white folks and the good negroes to leaven the bad negroes."

There must be no aristocracy of crime: a white fiend is as much to be dreaded as a black brute.

Another great movement, headed by the Rev. John E. White, plans the appointment of committees by the governors of the various Southern States to consider broadly the whole negro question.

These movements do not cover specifically, it will have been observed, the enormously difficult problems of politics, and the political relationships of the races, nor the subject of negro education, nor the most exasperating of all the provocatives — those problems which arise from human contact in street cars, railroad trains, and in life generally.

That they will meet the greatest difficulties in their work is shown by such an editorial as the following, published December 12th by the Atlanta *Evening News*:

"No law of God or man can hold back the vengeance of our white men upon such a criminal (the negro who attacks a white woman). If necessary, we will double and treble and quadruple the law of Moses, and hang off-hand the criminal, or failing to find that a remedy, we will hang two, three, or four of the negroes nearest to the crime, until the crime is no longer done or feared in all this Southern land that we inhabit and love."

But these reconstructive movements are, in their beginnings, full of significance and hope: they mean that the strong people in the South, stirred by a moral impulse, are trying to grapple with these problems in a new way — a constructive way.