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A Negro State?

What about the negro? What are we going to do with him, about him, to him? Here is the most important, by long odds, of all American problems, and the most insistent in its demand for early solution—and yet we are making no progress whatever toward solving it. The sagacity of any given American statesman, in truth, may be very fairly measured by his dexterity in evading it altogether. Even Mr. Roosevelt, that insatiable wrestler with riddles, fights discreetly shy of this one. We assume that, as a good Republican, he believes in the political equality of the races, but after all, that assumption may be far from well founded. He may, indeed, actually wish that the Fifteenth Amendment were in Gehenna, and the lowly ex-chattel with it—a wish already expressed in private, and even in public, by many otherwise orthodox members of his party.

So far as the negro's future is discussed at all among us, it is discussed emotionally rather than logically. We have, at the one extreme, the ridiculous negromaniacs of New England, with their dream of a black race of Shakespeares and Huxleys; and we have, at the other extreme, the no less preposterous negrophobes of certain parts of the South, with their dream of a renaissance of slavery. The spellbinders who exhort us from various slumps in the middle ground are little more plausible. All of them think a bit too indignantly to be able to think clearly. The rest of us, though our interest in the negro, and our consequent enthusiasm for or against him, may be less, are alike unable to reason about him without yielding to prejudice and emotion. We are all in brief a bit too close to him to see him without distortion.

An Englishman's Views

In view of all this there should be some profit in listening to the opinion of an impartial outsider—of a man with enough interest in the negro problem to come all the way across the Atlantic to study it, and yet one without any perceptible sentimental bias for or against the African himself. Such a man is William Archer, the English critic. Mr. Archer's conclusions, perhaps, actually gain weight by the fact that he is what might be called an amateur. His proper business in life is dramatic criticism; he is neither a sociologist nor a politician; he has no ready-made outfit of economic formulae to apply to the negro's opportunities and aspirations; he is merely a man of strong common sense, trained to observe accurately, and eager to separate the kernel of fact from the husk of doctrine and hypothesis.

Mr. Archer came to the United States last year and made a rather extensive tour of the South, visiting not only Tuskegee and other such show places, but also those regions in which the negro has been most dramatically a failure. He talked to Booker T. Washington, the apostle of industrial education; to W. E. B. DuBois, the prophet of social equality; to judges and educators in Atlanta, Charleston and other cities; to negro haters of all degrees and to the negroes themselves, high and low. The result is an entertaining and excellent book, "Through Afro-America" (Dutton, \$3); a book showing an evident effort to be fair, to steer clear of doctrines and theories, and to get at the bottom of the problem.

Well then, what is Mr. Archer's verdict? Is he hopeful that the white man and the black man will someday understand each other better and live together in peace? Does he believe that we are working, at present, toward that end?

The answer is discouraging enough. It is the answer, indeed, of an unwilling pessimist. Mr. Archer sees no dawn of a better day. All of the remedies and expedients so far proposed impress him as inadequate. He believes that a truce between the races, in the South, is entirely out of the question. He believes that things will grow no better, but worse. In the end, he says the South will have to get rid of the negro, and if circumstances make it impossible to do so in peace, then there will have to be a resort to force.

The Failure of Education

In Mr. Archer's view, the industrial education scheme of Booker Washington, far from solving the problem of the Southern negro, will merely complicate and enlarge it. The negro artisan, he says, has a future of but limited usefulness. So long as he remains a jack carpenter and tinker, there is work for him to do, but once he begins to challenge the white man as a skilled workman (assuming that he is actually capable of developing that degree of skill) he will find the door locked against him.

The negro problem, in brief, will then be complicated by the labor problem: and the result will be a vast increase in the animosity between the races. Today the white workman looks upon the negro with contempt, as a somewhat inefficient helper, but once he has to consider that same negro as a rival, his somewhat tolerant contempt will change into bitter hatred.

Socially, Mr. Archer sees no hope for the negro whatever. The more he raises himself from his wallow, the more nearly he places himself on a footing with the white man, the more serious will become the obstacles to his progress. Setting aside the vain question whether the black race has within it the making of a people as efficient as the American whites, he submits the indubitable fact that the two are different, and that their difference must ever keep them miles apart.

"The permanent difficulty," he says, "underlying all impermanent ones, that time, education, Christian charity, and soap and water may remove is that of sheer unlikeness. The two races are essentially, irreconcilably different; and instincts rooted through untold centuries lead the white man to associate ugliness and a certain tinge of animation with the negro physiognomy and physique."

Mr. Archer is firmly convinced that this ineradicable animosity must rise, from time to time, to open warfare. He even looks for a bloody massacre of negroes in the South, and believes that it may come at any moment.

"Once let a dozen white men be killed by armed negroes," he says, "and a flame would burst out which would work untold devastation before either authority or humanity could check it. Everywhere the white man would insist on searching for arms in the negro quarters: the negroes would inevitably attempt some panic stricken defensive organization; and the more effective it proved, the more terrible would be the calamity to their race."

Segregation As A Remedy

But is there no hope at all? Mr. Archer apparently believes that there is very little, but he inclines to the theory that a peaceful exodus of all the negroes in the South—made under control, and by degrees, to avoid economic paralysis—might conceivably solve the problem. The plan of an independent negro republic, of course, does not appeal to him, for he is well aware how dismally the negro has failed to govern himself in Liberia and Haiti, but he

seems to think that it might be possible to establish a negro territory or state somewhere in the continental area of the United States—a state given over entirely to negroes, but in direct control of the Federal authorities.

In such a state, he says, the negroes “would be members of a negro community without ceasing to be American citizens. Legislative aberrations would be checked by the Supreme Court of the United States, and if things went thoroughly wrong and a new Haiti threatened to develop in the heart of the republic, why, United States troops would always be at hand to hold a black mob or black adventurer in awe. It would doubtless be a fundamental principle that no white man could vote or hold office in the negro state, while, reciprocally, no colored man could vote or hold office in the white states. The abrogation of the Fifteenth Amendment would remove from the Constitution a constant source of trouble.”

Mr. Archer is not blind to the staggering difficulties of his plan, but he argues that every other plan so far proposed shows difficulties even more serious. If the negro remains in the South, he says, an actual race war must inevitably break out, and that race war may easily mark the beginning of another contest like that of 1861-63—another vain and futile pouring out of blood and treasure, with the problem still unsolved at its close.

No Hope In The South

“There is no reasonable hope,” he says, “that the two races will ever live together, yet apart, in economic solidarity, yet without social or sexual contact. The essence of the whole situation lies in the negro’s inevitable ambition—even though it be unformulated and largely unconscious—to be drawn upward, through physical coalescence, with the white race and the white man’s intense resolve that, on a large and determining scale, no such coalescence shall take place. Now this state of war, for such it undoubtedly is, shall not correct itself by lapse of time. It will continue to degrade and demoralize both races until active measures are taken to put an end to it. The truth is, in fact, that constant inter-racial irritation leaves neither race entirely sane, and that abominable crime and no less abominable punishment are merely the acutest symptoms of an ill-omened conjunction of things, which puts an unfair and unnatural strain upon both black and white human nature.”

A depressing picture, certainly. But here it is for whatever it is worth.