THE FUTURE OF
THE AMERICAN NEGRO

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CHAPTER VI.

It has become apparent that the effort to put the rank and file of the coloured people into a position to exercise the right of franchise has not been the success that was expected in those portions of our country where the Negro is found in large numbers. Either the Negro was not prepared for any such wholesale exercise of the ballot as our recent amendments to the Constitution contemplated or the American people were not prepared to assist and encourage him to use the ballot. In either case the result has been the same.

On an important occasion in the life of the Master, when it fell to him to pronounce judgment on two courses of action, these memorable words fell from his lips: "And Mary hath chosen the better part." This was the supreme test in the case of an individual. It is the highest test in the case of a race or
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a nation. Let us apply this test to the American Negro.

In the life of our Republic, when he has had the opportunity to choose, has it been the better or worse part? When in the childhood of this nation the Negro was asked to submit to slavery or choose death and extinction, as did the aborigines, he chose the better part, that which perpetuated the race.

When, in 1776, the Negro was asked to decide between British oppression and American independence, we find him choosing the better part; and Crispus Attucks, a Negro, was the first to shed his blood on State Street, Boston, that the white American might enjoy liberty forever, though his race remained in slavery. When, in 1814, at New Orleans, the test of patriotism came again, we find the Negro choosing the better part, General Andrew Jackson himself testifying that no heart was more loyal
and no arm was more strong and useful in defence of righteousness.

When the long and memorable struggle came between union and separation, when he knew that victory meant freedom, and defeat his continued enslavement, although enlisting by the thousands, as opportunity presented itself, to fight in honourable combat for the cause of the Union and liberty, yet, when the suggestion and the temptation came to burn the home and massacre wife and children during the absence of the master in battle, and thus insure his liberty, we find him choosing the better part, and for four long years protecting and supporting the helpless, defenceless ones intrusted to his care.

When, during our war with Spain, the safety and honour of the Republic were threatened by a foreign foe, when the wail and anguish of the oppressed from a distant isle reached our ears, we find the Negro forgetting his own
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wrongs, forgetting the laws and customs that discriminate against him in his own country, and again choosing the better part. And, if any one would know how he acquitted himself in the field at Santiago, let him apply for answer to Shafter and Roosevelt and Wheeler. Let them tell how the Negro faced death and laid down his life in defence of honour and humanity. When the full story of the heroic conduct of the Negro in the Spanish-American War has been heard from the lips of Northern soldier and Southern soldier, from ex-abolitionist and ex-master, then shall the country decide whether a race that is thus willing to die for its country should not be given the highest opportunity to live for its country.

In the midst of all the complaints of suffering in the camp and field during the Spanish-American War, suffering from fever and hunger, where is the official or citizen that has heard a word
of complaint from the lips of a black soldier? The only request that came from the Negro soldier was that he might be permitted to replace the white soldier when heat and malaria began to decimate the ranks of the white regiments, and to occupy at the same time the post of greater danger.

But, when all this is said, it remains true that the efforts on the part of his friends and the part of himself to share actively in the control of State and local government in America have not been a success in all sections. What are the causes of this partial failure, and what lessons has it taught that we may use in regard to the future treatment of the Negro in America?

In my mind there is no doubt but that we made a mistake at the beginning of our freedom of putting the emphasis on the wrong end. Politics and the holding of office were too largely
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emphasised, almost to the exclusion of every other interest.

I believe the past and present teach but one lesson,—to the Negro's friends and to the Negro himself,—that there is but one way out, that there is but one hope of solution; and that is for the Negro in every part of America to resolve from henceforth that he will throw aside every non-essential and cling only to essential,—that his pillar of fire by night and pillar of cloud by day shall be property, economy, education, and Christian character. To us just now these are the wheat, all else the chaff. The individual or race that owns the property, pays the taxes, possesses the intelligence and substantial character, is the one which is going to exercise the greatest control in government, whether he lives in the North or whether he lives in the South.

I have often been asked the cause of and the cure for the riots that have
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taken place recently in North Carolina and South Carolina.* I am not at all sure that what I shall say will answer these questions in a satisfactory way, nor shall I attempt to narrow my expressions to a mere recital of what has taken place in these two States. I prefer to discuss the problem in a broader manner.

In the first place, in politics I am a Republican, but have always refrained from activity in party politics, and expect to pursue this policy in the future. So in this connection I shall refrain, as I always have done, from entering upon any discussion of mere party politics. What I shall say of politics will bear upon the race problem and the civilisation of the South in the larger sense. In no case would I permit my political relations to stand in the way of my speaking and acting in the manner that I believe would be for the per-

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manent interest of my race and the whole South.

In 1873 the Negro in the South had reached the point of greatest activity and influence in public life, so far as the mere holding of elective office was concerned. From that date those who have kept up with the history of the South have noticed that the Negro has steadily lost in the number of elective offices held. In saying this, I do not mean that the Negro has gone backward in the real and more fundamental things of life. On the contrary, he has gone forward faster than has been true of any other race in history, under anything like similar circumstances.

If we can answer the question as to why the Negro has lost ground in the matter of holding elective office in the South, perhaps we shall find that our reply will prove to be our answer also as to the cause of the recent riots in North Carolina and South Carolina.
Before beginning a discussion of the question I have asked, I wish to say that this change in the political influence of the Negro has continued from year to year, notwithstanding the fact that for a long time he was protected, politically, by force of federal arms and the most rigid federal laws, and still more effectively, perhaps, by the voice and influence in the halls of legislation of such advocates of the rights of the Negro race as Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, Benjamin F. Butler, James M. Ashley, Oliver P. Morton, Carl Schurz, and Roscoe Conkling, and on the stump and through the public press by those great and powerful Negroes, Frederick Douglass, John M. Langston, Blanche K. Bruce, John R. Lynch, P. B. S. Pinchback, Robert Browne Elliot, T. Thomas Fortune, and many others; but the Negro has continued for twenty years to have fewer representatives in the State and na-
tional legislatures. The reduction has continued until now it is at the point where, with few exceptions, he is without representatives in the law-making bodies of the State and of the nation.

Now let us find, if we can, a cause for this. The Negro is fond of saying that his present condition is due to the fact that the State and federal courts have not sustained the laws passed for the protection of the rights of his people; but I think we shall have to go deeper than this, because I believe that all agree that court decisions, as a rule, represent the public opinion of the community or nation creating and sustaining the court.

At the beginning of his freedom it was unfortunate that those of the white race who won the political confidence of the Negro were not, with few exceptions, men of such high character as would lead them to assist him in laying a firm foundation for his develop-
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ment. Their main purpose appears to have been, for selfish ends in too many instances, merely to control his vote. The history of the reconstruction era will show that this was unfortunate for all the parties in interest.

It would have been better, from any point of view, if the native Southern white man had taken the Negro, at the beginning of his freedom, into his political confidence, and exercised an influence and control over him before his political affections were alienated.

The average Southern white man has an idea to-day that, if the Negro were permitted to get any political power, all the mistakes of the reconstruction period would be repeated. He forgets or ignores the fact that thirty years of acquiring education and property and character have produced a higher type of black man than existed thirty years ago.

But, to be more specific, for all prac-
tical purposes, there are two political parties in the South,—a black man's party and a white man's party. In saying this, I do not mean that all white men are Democrats; for there are some white men in the South of the highest character who are Republicans, and there are a few Negroes in the South of the highest character who are Democrats. It is the general understanding that all white men are Democrats or the equivalent, and that all black men are Republicans. So long as the colour line is the dividing line in politics, so long will there be trouble.

The white man feels that he owns most of the property, furnishes the Negro most of his employment, thinks he pays most of the taxes, and has had years of experience in government. There is no mistaking the fact that the feeling which has heretofore governed the Negro—that, to be manly and stand by his race, he must oppose the South-
ern white man with his vote—has had much to do with intensifying the opposition of the Southern white man to him.

The Southern white man says that it is unreasonable for the Negro to come to him, in a large measure, for his clothes, board, shelter, and education, and for his politics to go to men a thousand miles away. He very properly argues that, when the Negro votes, he should try to consult the interests of his employer, just as the Pennsylvania employee tries to vote for the interests of his employer. Further, that much of the education which has been given the Negro has been defective, in not preparing him to love labour and to earn his living at some special industry, and has, in too many cases, resulted in tempting him to live by his wits as a political creature or by trusting to his “influence” as a political time-server.
Then, there is no mistaking the fact, that much opposition to the Negro in politics is due to the circumstance that the Southern white man has not become accustomed to seeing the Negro exercise political power either as a voter or as an office-holder. Again, we want to bear it in mind that the South has not yet reached the point where there is that strict regard for the enforcement of the law against either black or white men that there is in many of our Northern and Western States. This laxity in the enforcement of the laws in general, and especially of criminal laws, makes such outbreaks as those in North Carolina and South Carolina of easy occurrence.

Then there is one other consideration which must not be overlooked. It is the common opinion of almost every black man and almost every white man that nearly everybody who has had anything to do with the making of
laws bearing upon the protection of the Negro's vote has proceeded on the theory that all the black men for all time will vote the Republican ticket and that all the white men in the South will vote the Democratic ticket. In a word, all seem to have taken it for granted that the two races are always going to oppose each other in their voting.

In all the foregoing statements I have not attempted to define my own views or position, but simply to describe conditions as I have observed them, that might throw light upon the cause of our political troubles. As to my own position, I do not favour the Negro's giving up anything which is fundamental and which has been guaranteed to him by the Constitution of the United States. It is not best for him to relinquish any of his rights; nor would his doing so be best for the Southern white man. Every law placed in the Consti-
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tution of the United States was placed there to encourage and stimulate the highest citizenship. If the Negro is not stimulated and encouraged by just State and national laws to become the highest type of citizen, the result will be worse for the Southern white man than for the Negro. Take the State of South Carolina, for example, where nearly two-thirds of the population are Negroes. Unless these Negroes are encouraged by just election laws to become taxpayers and intelligent producers, the white people of South Carolina will have an eternal millstone about their necks.

In an open letter to the State Constitutional Convention of Louisiana, I wrote: "I am no politician. On the other hand, I have always advised my race to give attention to acquiring property, intelligence, and character, as the necessary bases of good citizenship, rather than to mere political agitation."
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But the question upon which I write is out of the region of ordinary politics. It affects the civilisation of two races, not for to-day alone, but for a very long time to come.

"Since the war, no State has had such an opportunity to settle, for all time, the race question, so far as it concerns politics, as is now given to Louisiana. Will your convention set an example to the world in this respect? Will Louisiana take such high and just grounds in respect to the Negro that no one can doubt that the South is as good a friend to him as he possesses elsewhere? In all this, gentlemen of the convention, I am not pleading for the Negro alone, but for the morals, the higher life, of the white man as well.

"The Negro agrees with you that it is necessary to the salvation of the South that restrictions be put upon the ballot. I know that you have two serious problems before you; ignorant and corrupt
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government, on the one hand; and, on the other, a way to restrict the ballot so that control will be in the hands of the intelligent, without regard to race. With the sincerest sympathy with you in your efforts to find a good way out of the difficulty, I want to suggest that no State in the South can make a law that will provide an opportunity or temptation for an ignorant white man to vote, and withhold the opportunity or temptation from an ignorant coloured man, without injuring both men. No State can make a law that can thus be executed without dwarfing, for all time, the morals of the white man in the South. Any law controlling the ballot that is not absolutely just and fair to both races will work more permanent injury to the whites than to the blacks.

"The Negro does not object to an educational and property test, but let the law be so clear that no one clothed with State authority will be tempted to
perjure and degrade himself by putting one interpretation upon it for the white man and another for the black man. Study the history of the South, and you will find that, where there has been the most dishonesty in the matter of voting, there you will find today the lowest moral condition of both races. First, there was the temptation to act wrongly with the Negro's ballot. From this it was an easy step to act dishonestly with the white man's ballot, to the carrying of concealed weapons, to the murder of a Negro, and then to the murder of a white man, and then to lynching. I entreat you not to pass a law that will prove an eternal millstone about the necks of your children. No man can have respect for the government and officers of the law when he knows, deep down in his heart, that the exercise of the franchise is tainted with fraud.

"The road that the South has been
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compelled to travel during the last thirty years has been strewn with thorns and thistles. It has been as one groping through the long darkness into the light. The time is not far distant when the world will begin to appreciate the real character of the burden that was imposed upon the South in giving the franchise to four millions of ignorant and impoverished ex-slaves. No people was ever before given such a problem to solve. History has blazed no path through the wilderness that could be followed. For thirty years we have wandered in the wilderness. We are now beginning to get out. But there is only one road out; and all makeshifts, expedients, profit and loss calculations, but lead into swamps, quicksands, quagmires, and jungles. There is a highway that will lead both races out into the pure, beautiful sunshine, where there will be nothing to hide and nothing to explain, where both
races can grow strong and true and useful in every fibre of their being. I believe that your convention will find this highway, that it will enact a fundamental law that will be absolutely just and fair to white and black alike.

"I beg of you, further, that in the degree that you close the ballot-box against the ignorant you will open the school-house. More than one-half of the population of your State are Negroes. No State can long prosper when a large part of its citizenship is in ignorance and poverty, and has no interest in the government. I beg of you that you do not treat us as an alien people. We are not aliens. You know us. You know that we have cleared your forests, tilled your fields, nursed your children, and protected your families. There is an attachment between us that few understand. While I do not presume to be able to advise you, yet it is in my heart to say that, if your convention would do
something that would prevent for all time strained relations between the two races, and would permanently settle the matter of political relations in one Southern State at least, let the very best educational opportunities be provided for both races, and add to this an election law that shall be incapable of unjust discrimination, at the same time providing that, in proportion as the ignorant secure education, property, and character, they will be given the right of citizenship. Any other course will take from one-half your citizens interest in the State, and hope and ambition to become intelligent producers and taxpayers, and useful and virtuous citizens. Any other course will tie the white citizens of Louisiana to a body of death.

"The Negroes are not unmindful of the fact that the poverty of the State prevents it from doing all that it desires for public education; yet I be-
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lieve that you will agree with me that ignorance is more costly to the State than education, that it will cost Louisiana more not to educate the Negroes than it will to educate them. In connection with a generous provision for public schools, I believe that nothing will so help my own people in your State as provision at some institution for the highest academic and normal training, in connection with thorough training in agriculture, mechanics, and domestic economy. First-class training in agriculture, horticulture, dairying, stock-raising, the mechanical arts, and domestic economy, would make us intelligent producers, and not only help us to contribute our honest share as tax-payers, but would result in retaining much money in the State that now goes outside for that which can be as well produced at home. An institution which will give this training of the hand, along with the highest mental culture, would soon
convince our people that their salvation is largely in the ownership of property and in industrial and business development, rather than in mere political agitation.

"The highest test of the civilisation of any race is in its willingness to extend a helping hand to the less fortunate. A race, like an individual, lifts itself up by lifting others up. Surely, no people ever had a greater chance to exhibit the highest Christian fortitude and magnanimity than is now presented to the people of Louisiana. It requires little wisdom or statesmanship to repress, to crush out, to retard the hopes and aspirations of a people; but the highest and most profound statesmanship is shown in guiding and stimulating a people, so that every fibre in the body and soul shall be made to contribute in the highest degree to the usefulness and ability of the State. It is along this line that I pray God the thoughts
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and activities of your convention may be guided."

As to such outbreaks as have recently occurred in North Carolina and South Carolina, the remedy will not be reached by the Southern white man merely depriving the Negro of his rights and privileges. This method is but superficial, irritating, and must, in the nature of things, be short-lived. The statesman, to cure an evil, resorts to enlightenment, to stimulation; the politician, to repression. I have just remarked that I favour the giving up of nothing that is guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the United States, or that is fundamental to our citizenship. While I hold to these views as strongly as any one, I differ with some as to the method of securing the permanent and peaceful enjoyment of all the privileges guaranteed to us by our fundamental law.

In finding a remedy, we must recog-
nise the world-wide fact that the Negro must be led to see and feel that he must make every effort possible, in every way possible, to secure the friendship, the confidence, the co-operation of his white neighbour in the South. To do this, it is not necessary for the Negro to become a truckler or a trimmer. The Southern white man has no respect for a Negro who does not act from principle. In some way the Southern white man must be led to see that it is to his interest to turn his attention more and more to the making of laws that will, in the truest sense, elevate the Negro. At the present moment, in many cases, when one attempts to get the Negro to co-operate with the Southern white man, he asks the question, "Can the people who force me to ride in a Jim Crow car, and pay first-class fare, be my best friends?" In answering such questions, the Southern white man, as well as the Negro, has a duty to perform.
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In the exercise of his political rights I should advise the Negro to be temperate and modest, and more and more to do his own thinking.

I believe the permanent cure for our present evils will come through a property and educational test for voting that shall apply honestly and fairly to both races. This will cut off the large mass of ignorant voters of both races that is now proving so demoralising a factor in the politics of the Southern States.

But, most of all, it will come through industrial development of the Negro. Industrial education makes an intelligent producer of the Negro, who becomes of immediate value to the community rather than one who yields to the temptation to live merely by politics or other parasitical employments. It will make him soon become a property-holder; and, when a citizen becomes a holder of property, he becomes a conservative and thoughtful
voter. He will more carefully consider the measures and individuals to be voted for. In proportion as he increases his property interests, he becomes important as a tax-payer.

There is little trouble between the Negro and the white man in matters of education; and, when it comes to his business development, the black man has implicit faith in the advice of the Southern white man. When he gets into trouble in the courts, which requires a bond to be given, in nine cases out of ten, he goes to a Southern white man for advice and assistance. Every one who has lived in the South knows that, in many of the church troubles among the coloured people, the ministers and other church officers apply to the nearest white minister for assistance and instruction. When by reason of mutual concession we reach the point where we shall consult the Southern white man about our poli-
tics as we now consult him about our business, legal and religious matters, there will be a change for the better in the situation.

The object-lesson of a thousand Negroes in every county in the South who own neat and comfortable homes, possessing skill, industry, and thrift, with money in the bank, and are large tax-payers co-operating with the white men in the South in every manly way for the development of their own communities and counties, will go a long way, in a few years, toward changing the present status of the Negro as a citizen, as well as the attitude of the whites toward the blacks.

As the Negro grows in industrial and business directions, he will divide in his politics on economic issues, just as the white man in other parts of the country now divides his vote. As the South grows in business prosperity it will divide its vote on economic issues,
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just as other sections of the country divide their vote. When we can enact laws that result in honestly cutting off the large ignorant and non-tax-paying vote, and when we can bring both races to the point where they will co-operate with each other in politics, as they do now in matters of business, religion, and education, the problem will be in a large measure solved, and political outbreaks will cease.