

McCLURE'S MAGAZINE

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Enemies of the Republic

By LINCOLN STEFFENS

The Breaking Up of the Standard Oil Trust

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The Negro—Part Two

By THOMAS NELSON PAGE

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

Illustrations in Color

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a sweetheart. That is why he raises himself from his blanket of nights and listens to the tread of every horse's hoofs on the distant road. That is why he broods suspiciously for days upon a jesting remark or an unusual movement of a tried comrade,

or the broken mutterings of his closest friend, sleeping by his side.

And it is one of the reasons why the train-robbing profession is not so pleasant a one as either of its collateral branches—politics or cornering the market.

THE NEGRO: THE SOUTHERNER'S PROBLEM

BY

THOMAS NELSON PAGE

SECOND PAPER

SOME OF ITS DIFFICULTIES AND FALLACIES

WITH A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR



HAVING described the relation between the Whites and the Blacks of the South when emancipation came, and shown that it was never more kindly, it remains to show what changes have taken place since that time; how these changes have come about, and what errors have been committed which still affect the two races.

The dissension which has come between the two races has either been sown since the Negro's emancipation or is inherent in the new conditions that have arisen.

When the War closed, and the emancipation of the Negroes became an established fact, the first pressing necessity in the South was to secure the means of living; for, in sections where the armies had been, the country had been swept clean, and in all sections the entire labor system was disorganized. The internal management of the whole South, from the general government of the Confederate States to the

domestic arrangement of the simplest household, had fallen to pieces.

In most instances—indeed, in all of which the writer has any knowledge—the old masters informed their servants that their homes were still open to them, and that if they were willing to remain and work, they would do all in their power to help them. But to remain in the first radiant holiday of freedom was, perhaps, more than could be expected of human nature, and most of the Blacks went off for a time, though later a large number of them returned.* In a little while the country was filled with an army of occupation, and the Negroes, moved partly by curiosity, partly by the strangeness of the situation, and, perhaps mainly, by the lure of the rations which the Government immediately began to distribute, not unnaturally flocked to the post of the local garrison, leaving the fields unworked and the crops to go to destruction.

* The same thing happened in Russia on the emancipation of the serfs. See Kropotkin's Memoirs.

From this time began the change in the Negroes and in the old relation between them and the Whites; a change not great at first, and which never became great until the Negroes had been worked on by the ignorant or designing class who, in one guise or another, became their teachers and leaders. In some places the action of military commanders had already laid the ground for serious misunderstanding by such orders as those which were issued in South Carolina for putting the Negroes in possession of what were termed "abandoned lands." The idea became widespread that the Government was going to divide the lands of the Whites among the Negroes. But, in the main, the military commanders acted with wisdom and commendable breadth of view, and the breach was made by civilians.

From the first, the conduct of the North towards the Negro was founded on the following principles: First, that all men are equal, and that the Negro is the equal of the White; secondly, that he needed to be sustained by the Government; and thirdly, that the interests of the Negro and the White were necessarily opposed, and that the Negro needed protection against the White.

The South has always maintained that these were fundamental errors.

It appears to the writer that the position of the South on these points is sound; that, however individuals of one race may appear the equals of individuals of the other race, the races themselves are essentially unequal.

The chief trouble that arose between the two races in the South after the War grew out of the ignorance at the North of the actual conditions at the South, and the ignorance at the South of the temper and the power of the North. The North believed that the Negro was, or might be made, the actual equal of the White, and that the South not only rejected this dogma, but, further, that the South did not accept emancipation with sincerity, and would do all in its power to nullify the work which had already been accomplished, and hold the Negroes in quasi servitude. The South held that the Negro was not the equal of the White, and further held that, suddenly released from slavery, he must be controlled and compelled to work.

In fact, as ignorance of each other brought about the conditions which pro-

duced the War between the sections, so it has brought about most of the trouble since the War.

The basic difficulty in the way of reaching a correct solution of the Negro problem is, as has been stated, that the two sections of the American people have hitherto looked at it from such widely different standpoints.

The North, for the present far removed and well buttressed against any serious practical consequences, and even against temporary discomfort from the policies and conditions it has advocated, acting on a theory, filled with a spirit of traditionary guardianship of the Negro, and reasoning from limited examples of progression and virtue, has ever insisted on one principle and one policy, founded on a conception of the absolute equality of the two races. The South, in direct contact with the practical working of every phase of the question, affected in its daily life by every form and change that the question takes, resolutely asserts that the conception on which that policy is predicated is erroneous, and that this policy would destroy not only the White race of the South, but even the civilization which the race has helped to establish, and for which it stands, and so, in time, would inevitably debase and destroy the nation itself.

Thus, the South holds that the question is vastly more far-reaching than the North deems it to be; that, indeed, it goes to the very foundation of race preservation. And this contention, so far from being a mere political tenet, is held by the entire White population of the South, as the most passionate dogma of the White race.

This confusion of definitions has in the past resulted in untold evil, and it is of the utmost importance that the truth, whatever it is, should be established. When this shall be accomplished, and done so clearly that both sides shall accept it, the chief difficulty in the way of complete understanding will be observed. So long as the two sections are divided upon it, the question will never be settled. As soon as they unite in one view, it will settle itself on the only sound foundation — that of unimpeachable economic truth.

To this ignorance and opposition of views on the part of the two sections, unhappily, were added at the outset the misunderstandings and passions engendered by war, which prevented reason having any great

part in a work which was to affect the whole future of the nation. With a fixed idea that there could be no justice towards the Negroes in any dealings of their former masters, all matters relating to the Negroes were entrusted by the Government to the organization which had recently been started under the name of the Freedmen's Bureau. It was a subject which called for the widest knowledge and the broadest wisdom and, unhappily, both knowledge and wisdom appeared to have been banished in the treatment of the subject.

The basis of the institution of the Freedmen's Bureau was the assumption stated: that the interests of the Blacks and of the Whites were necessarily opposed to each other, and that the Blacks needed protection against the Whites in all cases. The densest ignorance of the material on which it was to work prevailed, and the personnel of the organization was as unsuited to the work as could well be. With a small infusion of sensible men were mingled a considerable element of enthusiasts who felt themselves called to be the regenerators of the slaves and the scourge of their former masters, and a large element of reckless adventurers who went into the business for what they could make out of it. Measures were adopted which might have been sound enough in themselves if they had been administered with any practical wisdom. But there was no wisdom in the administration. Those who advised moderation and counseled with the Whites were set aside. Bred on the idea of slavery presented in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and inflamed by passions engendered by the War, the enthusiasts honestly believed that they were right in always taking the side of the down-trodden Negro; while the adventurers, gauging with an infallible appraisal the feelings at the North, went about their work with businesslike methods to stir up sectional strife and reap all they could from the abundant harvest. And of the two, the one did about as much mischief as the other.

No statement of any Southern white person, however pure in life, lofty in morals, high-minded in principle he might be, was accepted. His experience, his position, his character, counted for nothing. He was assumed to be so designing or so prejudiced that his counsel was valueless.

It is a phase of the case which has not

yet wholly disappeared, and even now we have presented the singular spectacle of evidence being weighed rather by a man's geographical position than by his character and his opportunity for knowledge.

It is one of the factors which prevents a complete understanding of the problem, and tends to perpetuate the errors which have cost so much in the past and, unless corrected, may prove more expensive in the future.

The conduct of the Freedmen's Bureau misled the Negroes and caused the first breach between them and their former masters. Ignorance and truculence characterized almost every act of that unhappy time. Nearly every mistake that could be made was made on both sides. Measures that were designed with the best intentions were so administered as to bring these intentions to wreck.

On the emancipation of the slaves, the more enlightened Whites of the South saw quite as clearly as any person at the North could have done, the necessity of some substitute for the former direction and training of the Negroes, and schools were started in many places by the old masters for the colored children.*

Teachers and money had come from the North for the education of the Negroes, and many schools were opened. But the teachers, at first, as devoted as many of them were, by their unwisdom alienated the good-will of the Whites and frustrated much of the good which they might have accomplished. They might have been regarded with distrust in any case, for no people look with favor on the missionaries who come to instruct them as to matters of which they feel they know more than the missionaries, and the South regarded jealously any teaching of the Negroes which looked towards equality. The new missionaries went counter to the deepest prejudice of the Southern people. They lived with the Negroes, consorting with them, and appearing with them on terms of apparent intimacy, and were believed to teach social equality, a doctrine which was the

* The writer knew personally of a number of these schools, which began first as Sunday-schools immediately after the War. Indeed, under the inspiration of a pious lady, the services of all the young people in the neighborhood were called into requisition in the spring of 1865, to help teach a Sunday-school for the Negro children who were at first taught their letters in the sand. A little later, through the kindness of friends at the North, enough money was secured to build a school-house which still stands and was used at first for a Sunday-school and afterwards for a day-school.

surest of all to arouse enmity then as now. The result was that hostility to the public school system sprang up for a time. In some sections violence was resorted to by the rougher element, though it was of short duration, and was always confined to a small territory.* Before long, however, this form of opposition disappeared and the public school system became an established fact.

The next step in the alienation of the races was the formation of the secret order of the Union League. The meetings were held at night, with closed doors, and with pickets guarding the approaches, and were generally under the direction of the most hostile members of the Freedmen's Bureau. The Whites regarded this movement with serious misgivings, as well they might, for, having as its basic principle the consolidation of the Negro race against the White race, it banded the Negroes in an organization which, with the exception of the Confederate Army, was the most complete that has ever been known in the South, and the fruits of which still survive to-day. Without going into the question of the charges that it taught the most inflammatory doctrines, it may be asserted without fear of question, that its teaching was to alienate the Negroes from the Whites; to withdraw them wholly from reliance on their former masters, and to drill into their minds the imperative necessity of adherence to their new leaders, and those whom they represented.

Then came the worst enemy that either race had ever had: the post-bellum politician. The problem was already sufficiently complicated when politics were injected into it. Well might General Lee say with a wise knowledge of men: "The real war has just begun." No sooner had the Southern armies laid down their guns and the great armies of the North who had saved the Union disbanded, than the vultures who had been waiting in the secure distance, gathered to the feast. The act of a madman had removed the wisest, most catholic, most conservative, and ablest leader, one whose last thoughts almost had been to "restore the Union," by restoring the government of the Southern States along constitutional lines; and well the politicians used the unhappy tragedy for their

purposes. Those who had been most cowardly in war were bravest in peace, now that peace had come. Even in Mr. Lincoln's time the radical leaders in Congress had made a strenuous fight to carry out their views, and their hostility to his plan of pacification and reconstruction was expressed with hardly less vindictiveness than they exhibited later towards his successor.*

The Southern people, unhappily, acted precisely as this element wished them to act; for they were sore, unquelled, and angry, and they met denunciation with defiance.

Knowing the imperative necessities of the time as no Northerner could know them; fearing the effects of turning loose a slave-population of several millions, and ignorant of the deep feeling of the Northern people, they hastily enacted laws regulating labor which were certainly unwise in view of the consequences that followed, and possibly, if enforced, might have proved oppressive, though they never had a trial. Most of these laws were simply reenactments of old vagrant laws on the statute books and some still stand on the statute books; but they were enacted now expressly to control the Negroes; they showed the animus of the great body of the Whites, and they aroused a deep feeling of distrust and much resentment among the Northerners. And, finally, they played into the hands of the politicians who were on the lookout for any pretext to fasten their grip on the South.

The struggle just then became intensified between the President and his opponents in Washington, with the presidency and the control of the government as the stake, and with the South holding the balance of power; and, unhappily, the Negroes appeared to the politicians an element that could be utilized to advantage by being made the "permanent allies" of what Mr. Stevens, Mr. Wade, and Mr. Sumner used to term "the party of the Union."

So the Negro appeared to the politicians a useful instrument, and to the doctrinaires "a man and brother" who was the equal of his former master, and, if he were "armed with the weapon" of the ballot, would be able to protect himself and would inevitably rise to the full stature of the White.

* See Report of Congressional Committee in Government Ku-Klux Trials.

* See "Reconstruction in the South during the War."

A large part of the people of the North were undoubtedly inspired by a missionary spirit which had a high motive beneath it. But a missionary spirit undirected by knowledge of the real conditions is a dangerous guide to follow. And the danger was never better illustrated than in this revolution. Doubtless, some of the politicians were inspired partly by the same idea; but the major portion had but one ruling passion—the securing of power and the down-treading of the Whites.*

Then came the crowning error: the practical carrying out of the theories by infusing into the body politic a whole race just emerging from slavery. The most intelligent and conservative class of the Whites were disfranchised; the entire adult Negro population were enfranchised.

It is useless to discuss the motives with which this was done. No matter what the motives, it was a national blunder; in its way as great a blunder as secession.

It is not uncommonly supposed that Mr. Lincoln was the originator of this idea. The weight of his name is frequently given to it by the uninformed. Mr. Lincoln, however, was too level-headed and clear-sighted a statesman ever to have committed so great a folly. The furthest he ever went was in his letter to Governor Hahn, of Louisiana, in which he "suggested" the experiment of entrusting the ballot to "some of the colored people, for instance . . . the very intelligent," and as a reward for those who had fought for the Union.†

In fact, for a year or two after the War no one in authority dreamed of investing the Negro race at once with the elective franchise. This came after the South had refused to tolerate the idea of the franchise being conferred on any of them, and after passions had become inflamed.

The eight years of reconstruction possibly cost the South more than the four years of war had cost her. To state it in mere figures, it may be said that when the eight years of Negro domination under carpet-bag leaders had passed, the public indebtedness of the Southern States had increased about fourfold, while the property values in all the States had shrunken, and in those States which were under the Negro rule had fallen

to less than half what they had been when the South entered on that period. In Louisiana, for instance, the cost of Negro rule for four years and five months amounted to \$106,020,337, besides the privileges and franchises given away to those having "pulls," and State franchises stolen. The wealth of New Orleans shrank during these eight years from \$146,718,790 to \$88,613,930, while real estate values in the country parishes shrank from \$99,266,083 to \$47,141,699.*

In South Carolina and Mississippi, the other two States which were wholly under Negro rule, the condition was, if anything, worse than in Louisiana,† while in the other Southern States it was not so bad, though bad enough.

But the presentation of the statistics gives little idea of what the people of the South underwent while their State Governments were controlled by Negroes.

A wild Southern politician is said to have once truculently boasted that he would call the roll of his slaves at the foot of the Bunker Hill Monument. If the tradition is true, it was a piece of insolence which naturally offended deeply the sentiment of the people of that proud Commonwealth. But this was mere gasconade. Had he been able to carry out his threat, and then had he installed his Negroes in the State-house of Massachusetts, and, by a travesty of law, filled the legislative halls with thieves and proceeded to disfranchise the best and the proudest people of the Commonwealth; then had he, sustained by bayonets, during eight years ridden rough-shod over them; cut the value of their property in half; quadrupled their taxes; sold out over twenty per cent. of the landed property of the State for forfeiture; appointed over two hundred Negro trial justices who could neither read nor write, put a Negro ex-convict on the bench of their highest court, and paraded through the State something like 80,000 negro militia, armed with money stolen from the State, to insult and overawe the people, while the whole South looked coolly on and declared it was just; then might there be a partial but not a complete parallel to what some of the States of the South endured under Negro rule.

* See Congressional debates and questions put to witnesses before the various High Commissions organized by Congress for the inquiry of affairs at the South, in 1865 and 1866.

† See Mr. Lincoln's letter to Governor B. F. Hahn, January 23, 1864.

* See "Noted Men on the Solid South," p. 427.

† See "Noted Men on the Solid South," paper by Hon. John J. Hemphill, pp. 94 to 104.

It is little wonder that Governor Chamberlaine, Republican and carpet-bagger though he was, should have declared as he did in writing to the New England Society: "The civilization of the Puritan and Cavalier, of the Roundhead and Huguenot, is in peril."

The South does not hold that the Negro race was primarily responsible for this. Few reasonable men now charge the Negroes at large with more than ignorance and an invincible faculty for being worked on. But the consequences were none the less disastrous.

The injury to the Whites was not the only injury caused by the reconstruction system. To the Negroes, the objects of its bounty, it was no less a calamity.

However high the motive may have been, no greater error could have been committed; nothing could have been more disastrous to the Negro's future than the teaching he thus received. He was taught that the white man was his enemy when he should have been taught to cultivate friendship. He was told he was the equal of the White when he was not the equal; he was given to understand that he was the ward of the nation when he should have been trained in self-reliance; he was led to believe that the Government would sustain him when he could not be sustained. In legislation, he was taught thieving; in politics, he was taught not to think for himself but to follow slavishly his leaders (and such leaders!); in private life, he was taught insolence. A laborer, dependent on his labor, no greater misfortune could have befallen him than to estrange himself from the Southern Whites. To instill into his mind the belief that the Southern White was his enemy; that his interest was necessarily opposed to that of the White, and that he must thwart the White man to the utmost of his power, was to deprive him of his best friend and to array against him his strongest enemy.

To the teachings which led the Negro to feel that he was "the ward of the nation"; that he was a peculiar people whom the nation had taken under its wing and would support and foster; and that he could, by its fiat, be made the equal of the White, and would, by its strong arm, be sustained as such, may, perhaps, be traced most of the misfortunes of the Negro race, and, in-

deed, of the whole South, since the War. The Negro saw the experiment being tried; he saw his former master, who had been to him the type of all that was powerful and proud, and brave, and masterful, put down and held down by the United States Government, while he, himself, was set up and declared his full equal. He is quick to learn, and during this period, when he was sustained by the Government, he was as insolent as he dared to be. The only check on him was his lurking recognition of the Southerner's dominant force.

The one thing that saved the Southerners was that they knew it was not the Negroes but the Federal Government that held them in subjection.

The day the bayonets were withdrawn from the South, the Negro power, which but the day before had been as arrogant and insolent as ever in the whole course of its brief authority, fell to pieces.

It is little less than amazing that the Whites of the South should, after all that they went through during the period of reconstruction, have retained their kindly feeling for the Negroes, and not only retained but increased their loyalty to the Union. To the writer, it seems one of the highest tributes to the White people of the South, that their patriotism should have remained so strong after all they had endured.

The explanation is that the hostility of the Southern people was not directed so much against the United States or its Government, to form which they had contributed so much and in which they had taken so much pride, as against that element among the people of the North that had always opposed them, particularly where slavery was concerned. In seceding, the Southerners had acted on the doctrine enunciated by so distinguished a Northerner as John Quincy Adams in 1839, when he declared that it would be better for the States to "part in friendship from each other than to be held together by constraint," and look forward "to form again a more perfect friendship by dissolving that which could not bind, and to leave the separated parts to be reunited by the law of political gravitation to the center,"* and now,

* See debates in Congress, April 3, 1839; January 23, 1842; seq.: when John Quincy Adams presented a petition to Congress from Haverhill, Mass., praying that Congress would "immediately adopt measures possible to dissolve the union of the States."



Photograph by Davis & Sanford

THOMAS NELSON PAGE

Slavery and Secession having finally been disposed of, they naturally and necessarily gravitated back to the old feeling for the Union.

It is not less remarkable that, notwithstanding all the humiliation they had to

endure during the period of Negro domination, they should still have retained their feeling of kindness for the race. The fact, however, was that they did not charge against the race in general the

enormities which were committed by them during that period. However they might be outraged by their insolence and their acts, they charged it rather against the leaders than against the followers. The Southerners knew the Negroes; knew their weaknesses and their merits, and knew how easily they were misled. And it was always significant that though the Negroes universally followed their leaders and, when they felt themselves in power, conducted themselves with intolerable insolence, at other times they exhibited their old kindliness, and no sooner was the instigation removed than they were ready to resume their old relation of dependence and affection.

Indeed, those who had been the worst and most revolutionary, had no sooner sunk back into their former position of civility, than they were forgiven and treated with good-natured tolerance.*

With the overthrow of the carpet-bag governments, and the destruction of Negro domination at the South, the South began to shoot up into the light of a new prosperity. Burdened as she was by debt; staggering under disasters that had well-nigh destroyed her; scarred by the struggle through which she had gone, and scorched by the passions of that fearful time, she set herself with all her energies to recovering through the arts of peace her old place in the path of progress. The burden she has borne has been heavy, but she has carried it bravely and triumphantly.

Her property values have steadily increased. Mills have been started and manufactories established, and this not only by Southern investors, but, to a considerable extent, by Northern capital, until the South has become one of the recognized fields for investment. This, among other causes, has made the South restive under an electorate which has confined her to one political party, shut her off from ability to divide on economic questions, and which, to a certain extent, withdrew her from her due participation in the National Govern-

ment. With this, another cause is the change of the relation between the two races. It is useless to blink the question. The old relation of intimacy and affection that survived to a considerable extent even the strain and stress of the reconstruction period, and the repressive measures that followed it, has passed away, and in its place has come a feeling of indifference or contempt on the one side, and indifference or envy on the other. In some places, under some conditions, the old attitude of reliance and the old feeling of affection still remain. For example, in many families, the old relation of master and servant, of superior and retainer, may still exist. In some neighborhoods or towns, individuals of the colored race, by their ability and character, have achieved a position which has brought to them the respect and sincere good-will of the Whites. A visit to the South will show any one that, in the main, the feeling of kindness and good-will has survived all the haranguing of the politician and all the teaching of the doctrinaire. Ordinarily, the children still play together, the men work together, the elders still preserve their old good-will. The Whites visit the sick and afflicted, help the unfortunate, relieve the distressed, console the bereaved, and perform the old offices of kindness. But this is, to some extent, exceptional. It is mainly confined to the very young, the old, or the unfortunates and dependents. The rule is a changed relation and a widening breach. The teaching of the younger generation of Negroes is to be rude and insolent. In the main, it is only where the Whites have an undisputed authority that the old relation survives: where the Whites are so superior in numbers that no question can be raised; or again, where, notwithstanding the reversed conditions, the Whites are in a position so dominant as not to admit of question, harmony prevails.

When the relations are reversed there is danger of an outbreak. The Negro, misled by the teaching of his doctrinaire friends into thinking himself the equal of the White, asserts himself, and the White resents it. The consequence is a clash, and the Negro becomes the chief sufferer so invariably that it ought to throw some light on the doctrine of equality.

* For years, one of the popular paper-carriers of Richmond was a certain Lewis Lindsay who, during the early period of reconstruction, had been one of the most violent of the Negro leaders, and became noted for a speech in which he declared that he wished to wade in White blood up to his knees. In Charleston, another leader, equally violent, later sold fish in the market, and among his customers were the very persons toward whom he had once been so outrageous. In New Orleans, another was a hostler. The coincidences could readily be multiplied.

NOTE:—In the May number Mr. Page will close the discussion in a third paper.