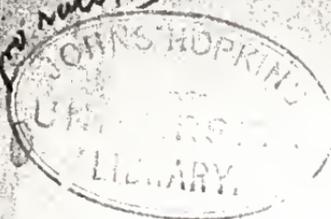






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BY

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(OF BERLIN, FORMERLY OF NEW YORK).

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# THE QUESTION OF RACES IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY JOSEPH P. THOMPSON, D.D., LL.D.,

*(Of Berlin, formerly of New York).*

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*Read before the ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE,  
at its Session in GLASGOW, October, 1874.*

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RIGHTLY to consider any social question as pertaining to the United States of America, it is of the first importance to place it in its true perspective—to determine whether it is in fact a question arising out of the organic condition of society, or is simply a local, sporadic phenomenon, some excrescence which society is throwing off through its own normal development;—whether it is at all an American question, an outgrowth of American ideas and institutions, or some extravagance of foreign importation which the healthy action of American society will presently subdue. For instance, Mormonism cannot properly be called a problem of American society, for it never has been and never can be possible that American society should either take to the practice of polygamy, or should allow polygamy to become a recognized and permanent institution. Mormonism is but a sporadic outbreak in the nineteenth century of such religious fanaticism as found vent at Münster in the sixteenth century. Expelled by American society from State after State, it took refuge in a wilderness, having the desert and the Indian tribes between it and the laws; there it was nourished mainly by European immigration; and now that the railway has brought American society to encompass it from the east and the west, the only question is, how to effect its certain destruction with the least disturbance of the public tranquillity.

Communism can hardly become a question of American society,

since, notwithstanding the advance of prices, it is still comparatively easy for the poor man in America to become the owner of a bit of land or of other property; and no property owner is found advocating the democracy of Socialism.

The questions that perplex and agitate Europe, arising out of the mixed relations of Church and State, can find no footing in the United States. In one event only can religion in America threaten the peace of society, and that is, if any ecclesiastical organization shall attempt to gain political control, and to wield the machinery of legislation in the interest of a church. But on the first sign of such an attempt being serious, the American people will deal with it in the most decisive manner. They will never submit to ecclesiastical rule.

It should also be kept in mind that many social agitations in America are tempered by the vastness of the national domain. A stone dropped in water anywhere will set in motion the same number of ever-widening circles; but the commotion which it raises in a millpond is very different from its effect in the open sea, where the regular movement of the waves soon swallows up all trace of this local agitation. In the United States there is so much sea-room that one scarcely feels a social disturbance that in other lands might go surging over all the institutions of society.

But there is one American question of pressing and even threatening importance, which I propose here to state, with some hints toward its solution, without presuming to have mastered it in all its bearings. I refer to the question of race. Four races, as distinguished from the proper American stock, have special significance for the future of American society—the Celtic, the German, the Chinese, and the Negro. By the census of 1870, the whole number of persons of foreign birth living in the United States was 5,567,229, against a native-born population of 32,991,142. Of these, more than a million were immigrants from England and British America; but these have so close an affinity with the original stock that they may be left out of account in this inquiry, or rather may be taken as fortifying the Anglo-American

stock against other foreign elements. The Romanic races exert little positive influence upon American society. Their numbers are comparatively small, and they seldom identify themselves with the United States by being naturalized. They retain a strong love for their native lands, and use their American residence for the facility of acquiring a fortune to be expended in the home of their youth. Of the foreign-born population, 1,855,827 are Irish, and 1,690,533 are German. In addition to the five-and-a-half millions of foreigners, the census gives 10,892,015 persons now living in the United States whose parents, one or both, were of foreign birth. In these the Celtic element predominates. But the Irish are not there, as in the British empire, concentrated upon a territory of their own; and though a clannish spirit is maintained by their religion and by the observance of St. Patrick's day, their elastic and adaptive temperament leads them to mingle readily with the mass of the native population, with which they are constantly fusing by marriage. There is no barrier of language between them and the American; and their descendants of the second generation lose all trace of Irish brogue, and are so thoroughly Americanized in feeling as to wish to forget their Irish ancestry. As a rule, the Irish in America begin to rise in circumstances and in position as soon as they have fairly established themselves in their new homes; and their total effect upon American society, above their large contribution to the manual labour and the household industry of the country, is likely to be the addition of an element of vivacity and of amiability, through the commingling of the races.

With the Germans the case is somewhat different. They are foreigners not only by birth, but by language, by institutions, by ideas, by manners and customs. They are trained to believe that they are the advancing race, or they have theories of government and of society that they would fain ventilate and reduce to practice in a new country. Less impressible than the Irish, more tenacious of their customs and traditions, they are more disposed to keep up a distinct race organization, and to propagate Germanism as the form of social life. Since the union of Germany

many of them have formed the purpose of returning to their Fatherland. By their industry and thrift, the Germans contribute to the sturdiness of American society; while, through their love of music and of social festivity, they relieve somewhat its stern and unresting activity. They serve also to invigorate the stock by intermarriage. So far their influence is good; but on the other side their Sabbath usages and drinking usages—setting them in opposition to local laws of morality and order—their common negation of religion, and their social and political vagaries, have a disturbing if not a deteriorating influence in communities where they are numerous enough to be felt. But in the end, American society influences and moulds the German more than he affects American society. Not so readily indeed in the first generation, but quite decidedly in the second and the third, does the German stock yield to the surrounding influences of climate, of society, of education, of language, and of marriage. Five millions is a fair estimate for the German element in the United States, pure and mixed, computing at somewhat more than three millions the children one or both of whose parents were German. These children find that success in life depends largely upon identifying themselves with American institutions and ideas, rather than with the imported customs and traditions of their fathers. The German Government rightfully insists that, in the provinces of Posen on the east and of Alsace on the west, German shall be the language of the schools, and of all official acts and documents; in a word, that the nation shall be unified in speech. The American people cannot do otherwise. They surely ought not to yield to the demand that their laws shall be published officially in the German language, nor that this shall be made the language of the schools in communities where Germans predominate. The immigrating race must conform itself to the language and the institutions of the country whose hospitality it accepts. Happily, laws stronger than predilections of race determine this. Though, at the first, the immigrant population in the United States is prolific, especially in the ratio of its poverty, it nevertheless shows a larger percentage of mortality. An analysis of the census of 1870, by that exact social scientist, Dr. Jarvis, gives this result:—Native-born descendants from the population of 1790, 62

per cent., of which 49 per cent. are whites, and 13 coloured; native-born from foreign parents, 24 per cent.; total of native birth, 86 per cent., of foreign birth, 14 per cent. of the whole population. This does not look as if the American stock were running out. Much as that stock has been modified in physique and in temperament through climate and other conditions, it retains the substantial qualities of the Anglo-Saxon race—sturdy good sense, practical energy, courage under difficulties, strong self-assurance, love of personal liberty, regard for law, faculty of self-government. These English qualities, sharpened and intensified by the task of mastering a Continent and framing a Government, mark to-day the American people, and impress themselves upon all who come under their influence. Reciprocal influences from foreign immigration there will be; but these will no more make the Americans a people of mixed races than the English of to-day count themselves a mixed race, because upon their soil Norman, Saxon, Dane, and Celt, Pagan and Christian, slave and master, have been fused into one.

As yet, the Chinese element in the United States can hardly enter into the question of race; it is a question of labour and of national comity. There are but sixty-three thousand Chinese in the whole country, and these are mostly in California. They do not propose to become citizens, to intermarry, nor to remain in the country longer than their pecuniary interests may require. Quick, docile, imitative, frugal, they form a good body of servants and labourers, and relieve in a measure the difficulties that grow out of strikes and working-men's unions. But there is a tendency in the poor to oppress the poor. According to the French proverb, "poverty is quarrelsome," and the labouring classes make war upon one another whenever their interests come into collision. Thus, at first, the native American despised the Irishman, and crowded him down; the Irishman, in turn, was the worst hater of the Negro; and now Irishman and Negro would join in crowding down the Chinaman. The remedy for this lies first with capital in doing justice, and with law in enforcing justice; and next, in teaching the labouring classes these simple lessons of political economy; that labour left to itself will adjust itself to the demand, and that every honest working-man is the friend and not the

enemy of every other. This Association could do a good service by the issue of tracts upon these topics for working-men.

The phase of the race question in the United States which presents serious difficulties, and which just now threatens the peace of society, is that of the negro race in the Southern States of the Union. The President of this Association in his Inaugural Address referred to "the conflict of colour in America" as one of the signs of a "dark and troubled night," through which society is now passing. Such a conflict, on a scale so broad as the area of the Southern States of the American Union, and involving fourteen millions of people, would not alone disturb the peace of one nation nor concern the welfare of one race; it would so seriously affect one of the great staple industries of society as to be a disturbing influence in the trade and manufactures of the civilized world, and it would retard that development of humanity for which both science and religion have raised our hope. Hence it belongs to the sphere of Social Science, where the Earl of Rosebery has so properly introduced the topic, to study to avert so great a calamity, or, if this be not possible, at least to mitigate its evils.

As yet there has been no general outbreak in the Southern States of a war of races, nor does there seem to be sufficient ground for apprehending such a war. Much of the insecurity, the lawlessness, the terrorism that afflict Southern society are inevitable consequences of the sudden and violent subversion of that society as based upon the system of slavery. This would have been, must have been—quite apart from any question of race and colour. Such evils time must remedy; the process is painful, and is likely to require a generation for the cure. That the state of society in the South is not so bad as is sometimes represented is plain from the fact that the production of cotton has now reached four-fifths of its maximum before the war; that industry and trade are reviving in many parts; that the freedmen have considerable sums in savings banks; and that not a few planters have regained the means of living comfortably at home, and of sending their children abroad to be educated. Yet, with all these abatements, the condition of Southern Society is bad enough, and in some of the States truly ominous.

The total negro population in the United States is 4,835,106; but of these, 4,450,605 are concentrated within the area of the former Slave States, where the white population is but 9,378,077; and in some States, of which South Carolina is the most conspicuous example, the blacks outnumber the whites.\* By the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, the negroes who were formerly held in slavery, and had no civil rights, are declared citizens of the United States, and of the State wherein they reside, and are practically clothed with the right to vote at any election for officers of the State, or of the United States. That is to say, the article declares that when the right to vote "is denied to any of the male inhabitants of a State, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States, or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such State." Such then are the elements of the race problem in the Southern States. The black race, numbering four-and-a-half millions, against whom three causes of prejudice exist, viz., their former state of servitude, their present condition of comparative ignorance and of inexperience in affairs, and their ineffaceable colour. And of this race all the males twenty-one years of age are clothed with the attribute of political sovereignty, can elect the rulers of the State or become its rulers in their own persons. And this race is confronted with the white race composed of their former masters and those affiliated with them, long accustomed to political power, now smarting under the loss of that power, or the participation of it with their former menials, and also under the loss of property and position through the fortunes of war. How to reconcile these two races to a peaceful and durable future is a problem of such gravity that it demands the attention of all friends of humanity and of social order.

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\*Arkansas has 521,334 whites, 475,510 blacks.  
 Georgia ,, 638,926 ,, 545,142 ,,  
 Louisiana ,, 362,065 ,, 364,210 ,,  
 Mississippi ,, 382,896 ,, 444,201 ,,  
 South Car. ,, 239,667 ,, 415,814 ,,

If the political element of the problem could be withdrawn, the so-called "conflict of races" would be greatly modified, if, indeed, it would not wholly cease. The right to vote was put into the hands of the negro for his protection; but the advocates of indiscriminate voting do not seem to have thought of the protection of society, nor even of the negro himself, against the sudden influx of ignorance and barbarism at the polls,\* nor to have considered how naturally at first the unlettered slave, newly-enfranchised, would become the tool or the victim of wily and unscrupulous demagogues. The present commotion in the South, though marked by the formation of the "white man's league," is more to be ascribed to political misrule than to prejudice of race. But we must accept the facts as they are, and strip the problem down to its bare conditions. The negro is on the soil, he is free, he is a citizen and he is a voter, and in solving the race problem as it stands, there is no going back of these facts. No wise man would wish to change these facts, except by some temporary qualification of the use of the ballot, in the interest of intelligence and order. The deportation of the blacks, of which some have wildly dreamed, is not to be thought of as a remedy for present troubles. The great majority of the negroes in the South were born there, and have a right to call America their home. Upon what ground, then, could it be demanded that they should quit the country of their birth or of their choice? The State has no right to expatriate such a body of innocent citizens, and no right to discriminate against race or colour in any birthright of those born upon its soil. The deportation of such a mass of people would be physically and financially impossible; and, could it be effected, it would react upon the State with disasters such as followed the expulsion of the Huguenots from France. For the negro is more necessary than the white man to the productive industry of the South; he is adapted to the soil and the climate of the country, and to the labour that its crops require. Moreover, as a man, he is fast rising in his value as a citizen in the view of political economy. He is emerging from a state of

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\* In Louisiana are 257,184 over 10 years who cannot read, one-third of population.  
 In Mississippi " 291,718 " " " " " "  
 In South Carolina, 265,892 " " " " " "

ignorance, for which he was not responsible; and, under the stimulus of freedom and of acquisition, is substituting enterprise and frugality for the indolence and the shiftlessness of slavery. The South cannot afford to part with him. Neither is the solution of the problem to be looked for in the subjugation of the black race by violence, or its extinction by natural causes of decline. The negroes are too many and too strong to be subdued by violence; nor would the nation nor the moral sentiment of the world suffer this to be so much as attempted. Slavery is done with forever. The negro does not seem to be destined, like the Indian and the Sandwich Islander, to fade away before the advance of civilization. For, unlike the Indian and the Polynesian, he shows an aptitude for the arts of civilized life, and thrives and prospers in the exercise of freedom.

So far as we can yet see, the problem of society in the Southern States is not to be solved through an amalgamation of the races. For two generations at least, the remembrances of slavery, and of the social contrasts which it created, will form an insuperable barrier to miscegenation upon an extensive scale; and back of all these lies the prejudice of colour. How far this is due to the associations of slavery, it is not easy to determine. History is not without examples of the fusion of a conquered race with the conquerors, of an emancipated race with their former lords and masters; but I recall no instance in which so marked a contrast of colour has been overcome by fusion upon the scale of a whole race. Man is said to be of all animals the least fastidious in the gratification of the sexual instinct. But what the sailor may indulge in among barbarous tribes, or the master upon the slave plantation, gives no precedent for the tastes of men in forming a permanent marriage union. And at this point, with occasional exceptions, there seems to be between the black and the white races an antipathy strongly marked upon both sides. A comely Irish girl in my service in New York eloped with my neighbour's black waiter. After her marriage she was obliged to take lodgings in a negro quarter of the city. All her white acquaintances cut her, feeling that she had lowered herself, though she had married an honest worthy fellow, who was

a handsome specimen of his race. But this feeling was even more than reciprocated on the coloured side, and I heard one worthy black dame say with scornful indignation, "Don't see why white folks can't learn to know dare own place. Don't want 'em comin' round marryin' *my* gals, no-how—'taint neither one thing nor t'other!"

Before proposing a solution of the present complications of Southern society, let me premise that any and every step toward the remedy of existing evils must be based upon equal and exact justice toward all members of the community, and that an attempt to discriminate against the black race, either in the laws themselves or in the administration of them, would certainly, and, I may add justly, entail upon the South a chronic intestine strife. But it may be allowed to one who gave his full measure of service and of sacrifice for the emancipation of the slave to remind the freedmen of the South that their safety and their progress require that they should be delivered from the rule of ignorance and corruption, *though* this proceed from men of their own race and colour. The first condition of prosperous industry is security, —not merely the security of the working-man in his person and work, but the security of the community in which he lives against disorder and misrule; the security of the political society of which he is a component part against the despotism of demagogues and charlatans. For a State in the unhappy predicament of South Carolina there seems no present mode of relief; but in other States there are surely enough black men of intelligence, and enough white men of honesty, to join in the attempt to establish the commonwealth upon the basis of education and virtue. The true and honest men of both races must have the resolution and self-denial to come to the front, and to rally around them a movement for saving society. The time demands a moral heroism that will rise above prejudices and interests, and give itself solely to the common good of all. A few bold earnest men of both colours would soon command a majority for the work of reform. Inaction is cowardice, despair is destruction.

Discarding all fictitious and impossible solutions of the race

problem in the South, I would offer four suggestions for relieving its pressing difficulties, and paving the way for the tardy but sure solution of time.

*First.*—Let the people of the South, by whom I mean both whites and blacks of competent intelligence, have the courage to accept the penalty of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, and to disfranchise themselves for the National Congress for the sake of securing good government at home. Let them enact a law, which ought to be enacted in every State, at the North as well as at the South, fixing a standard of education, of intelligence, of character, a standard of manly competence for the high and sacred trust of voting. This standard being attainable by all, would be unjust to none. It would not be a rule of race nor of caste; and if, at the first, it should bear hard upon the negro, it would be his own fault if with schools and trades open to qualify his manhood, he should long fail to take his place as a voter. Many negroes would be voters from the first under such a rule; and it is for their interest, and for the welfare of their race, that they should be relieved from the ignorant and misguided rule of the hundreds of thousands who cannot read nor write; of officers who make laws to which they can only sign their mark, and who lay taxes and vote away money, when they cannot add up a column of figures. To show their honesty and impartiality in such an educational test, the whites should agree to elect to office a fair proportion of blacks who already meet the test, and to admit all persons to vote as fast as they reach the standard, at the same time making education compulsory. Many a white man at the South would be disfranchised by the same rule. The process would give time for society to adjust itself to a new order of things, and for government to settle down into a normal condition. Perhaps the 14th Amendment could not have been better phrased; but the unwisdom of its penalty is seen in that the effect of this attempt on the part of a State to train its citizens to be intelligent, worthy, and competent voters by excluding the ignorant from the polls, would be to deprive itself of a representation in Congress in the ratio of its citizens in this needful and wholesome school. The repeal or modification of this

Amendment is not to be thought of. Yet any State could well afford to part awhile with a portion of its representation at Washington for the sake of getting rid of demagoguism, ignorance, and barbarism in its local government.. Besides, it would retain its two seats in the Senate of the United States.

*Second.*—Let the white race at the South by all its actions, public and private, show that it means to deal justly with the negro, and to guard his rights equally with its own. The effect of this will be to relieve the negro of that suspicion and fear which now compel him to organization for his own defence, and to relieve the whites themselves from apprehensions which all leagues, based upon colour or race, tend only to aggravate. Moreover, justice being established between man and man, and especially between the employer and the employed, the South would attract to itself the Irish, the German, the Chinese, in such numbers that the race question would lose its threatening importance, and any one race would cease to be a power to be cared for socially and politically. In a word, the negro would then be neither more nor less than any other citizen.

*Third.*—Let the general government refrain from all further legislation or interference on behalf of the negro as such. If riots arise that the State authorities cannot quell, the National government, duly invoked, should interfere, to preserve the public peace; and also, if necessary, it should use the arm of power to sustain the courts in putting down injustice, outrage, and wrong, by the arm of the law. But all this without making a point of caring for the negro in distinction from any other man; for the best way of caring for the negro is to cease to know him as a negro, and to treat him always and only as a man. Above all, should the government refrain from legislating upon social customs, instincts, or prejudices. A legal injustice can be done away by law; a moral wrong, in the form of overt action, can be dealt with by law; but a taste, a sentiment, a feeling, an instinct, a prejudice, these pass the bounds of all legislation, and the attempt to rectify or regulate these by law serves only to irritate opposition. At these points human nature has much in common with the porcupine.

*Fourth*, and last.—The black race should be taught that they are to depend upon themselves. Having freedom, schools, the rights of citizens guaranteed by the law, and the inducement to self-culture presented by opportunities of political action, they should be made to feel that their future is in their own hands, that if they would rise to a position of respect and of responsibility as men, they must show themselves to be men. There is no other way for any race. If they cannot do this, they must go under. If they will not do this, they ought to go under. But no one who knows the Negro race in America can doubt that with time upon their side, and patience and justice toward them on the part of others, they will rise to the full measure of their opportunities; and with their capacity for work, their docility, their kindness, their adaptivity, their mirthfulness, their religious faith, will form as good a part as any in the social system of the Future. Time, patience, justice, will cause the friction of races to disappear in the working of the American system of harmonized humanity.





