

THE NEGRO IN AMERICA

Sir Harry Johnston has written a really noteworthy book on this subject; excellent in matter, and no less excellent in form, for the printing is good and satisfactory to the eye, and its numerous illustrations are admirable in their interest and value. Probably no other man alive is as well fitted to treat the subject. He has had a long experience as administrator over the negro race in Africa, serving in various British protectorates, and finally as Governor in Uganda. He has ruled over tribes of widely varying qualities and capacities. He is a trained scientific observer, desirous to ascertain the facts exactly as they are, with an extraordinary fund of knowledge and remarkable insight and power of getting at the kernel of things. He has devoted an immense amount of time to the study of the negro and of his relations with the white man; he has made this study close at hand, and many of his theories he has tested by practice. He has a fine fearlessness and love of truth, and a generous scorn of all that is mean or base or hypocritical, and especially of cruelty in every form; yet he is a practical man and no mere sentimentalist. He is an excellent writer; a recent article of his on the "Rise of the Native" should be distributed as a tract to every statesman or philanthropist who is concerned with international affairs. Finally, he is exceedingly interesting; no small virtue in a writer on serious subjects. He has his own views—very positive ones—on every question, whether connected with his subject or not, and he presents these views with picturesque vividness and force. Incidentally, I may say that on most of these questions I entirely agree with him—from his denunciation of the senseless slaughter of birds and his indignation at our fatuity in giving a fine new fruit such an utterly inept name as "grape-fruit," to his surprise that American artists should lack the originality to see that the Southern States, especially the Gulf and South Atlantic States, offer an untouched field of extraordinary beauty and picturesqueness to the landscape painter. But when he suddenly assails such diverse objects of wrath as freemasonry and the American accent—why, I can only plead guilty

on both counts, and cannot even say that I am repentant!

Now, with such a temperament, it is inevitable that he should arouse antagonisms. Strongly though I agree with, and support, most of his principles, I emphatically dissent from some of his opinions—especially some of his *obiter dicta*—in the book before me. In a letter to me about this book he writes: "You will be annoyed, perhaps, at what I say about the South, but I am also attacking a Home Devil, for there are plenty of people living in England to-day who would do quite as much against public liberty to further their private ends as the South attempted in the '50s of the last century. And if I rail at the Southerners, you will see I am equally down on Britain, Holland, France, and all other early colonizing powers." Now, I am myself half of Southern blood; I am the descendant of slaveholders—until the day of their death I pensioned two of my Southern grandfather's ex-slaves, whom I had never seen, but whom I knew intimately through the stories my mother and her sister had told me of them; and there is still living one such ex-slave who does not need a pension, but who knows she would have it on the instant if she ever did need it. Nevertheless, I most heartily join with Sir Harry in his attacks on slavery wherever it existed (he is entirely impartial in making them), and in his thorough exposure of its hideous cruelty, and of the degradation it brought even more on the white man who championed it and profited by it than on the black man who suffered under it; and I think such exposure a good thing, for, as the evil no longer exists, people tend to forget how dreadful it was, and a few persons of warped morality tend to speak of it apologetically, or even in guarded praise. Moreover, I cordially admit that Sir Harry is wholly free from any insincerity or partiality or lack of uprightness in judgment, and that he condemns only conduct which ought to be condemned, and this without regard to nationality or creed. He praises with indifference the Jesuits and the Baptists when they upheld the rights of the slaves; he condemns with equal strictness Catholics and Protestants when, in the name of their church and their religion, they apolo-

gized for and defended, or failed to take action against, the infamy of slavery. He condemns slavery in the West Indies under the Englishman just as much as under the Spaniard, the Dutchman, or the Frenchman, just as much as he condemns slavery in the United States under the American; and he shows again and again not only his hearty good will towards the American, but especially his admiration for and belief in the American of the Southern States. Yet, while not merely admitting, but emphasizing, this earnest striving after complete fairness on the part of our author, I must add that I do not think that he lays sufficient stress on the extraordinary difficulty of the situation in which the Southerners found themselves—a situation which they inherited from forefathers who were little if at all more responsible for it than were the men of the Northern Colonies and of England. The men and women of the South face a situation of extraordinary difficulty; and outsiders can do most good in the matter by giving whatever aid is possible to the great multitude among them who are striving heart and soul to solve the hard problem set them in a spirit of wisdom, justice, and mercy, and with serious and painful effort to do what is for the real interest of both races. The people of each section of our country have their own especial virtues and their own especial shortcomings; and each section has something to learn from every other section.

These objections are merely to matters of detail. The net judgment must be that the book is a capital book, wholesome and sound; there is no other on the subject to be compared with it; and it is equally valuable to the student, and to the intelligent man who, without being a student, is interested in the great questions of the present time. Nowhere else can be found so vivid and truthful a presentation of the negro in the Western Hemisphere. The first chapter treats with frankness of the negro in his own home. Sir Harry has as little sympathy for an unhealthy sentimentalist as for a callous moneyed exploiter of poor men, or for a greedy and cruel poor man who is equally willing to prey on rich men and on other poor men. He shows that the negro in his own land has tended, if anything, to go backward

rather than forward, and that the chief hope for him in Africa arises from the growth of influence from without and from the entry of other races into the dark continent. In another chapter he treats of the slave trade, and scourges it as it deserves; there never was a greater crime against humanity than the African slave trade with America, nor one which, of and by itself, wrought more signal vengeance on the race that perpetuated it, for the ease and profit of the slave-traders and slave-buyers has been paid for, with a price of incredible bitterness, by us their descendants. In the West Indies it caused the ethnic loss of half the islands to the offending race.

Then come a number of exceedingly interesting chapters on slavery in the New World under the Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, French, and English, and a sketch of the present position of the former slave territories of these peoples. One curious point which is brought out is the extraordinary change in the treatment of the blacks by each white nationality in different periods and under different conditions. The Portuguese were among the most callously brutal of all the slave-traders; they have clung to what is practically slavery in Africa long after all other nations have abandoned it; and yet their treatment of the negroes in Brazil has been particularly good. The Spaniards were the most merciless oppressors of the "Amerindians" (the name Sir Harry, quite properly, applies to the American Indians, who have never had a general name that either really belonged to them or was exclusively theirs), and yet on the whole they behaved better to their negro slaves than any other people. The Dutch in Guiana showed themselves the worst and most cruel of taskmasters; yet nowadays the condition of the negroes in Guiana is exceptionally fortunate. Sir Harry's description of Hayti is altogether too short; but it is far and away the best we have, and is a healthy antiseptic to much of the stuff that has been written about the island and its people. There is one point which his writings make clear: the great loss Hayti suffered, compared to the other West Indian islands, from the success of its revolution and the ensuing complete severance from all white leader-

ship. At this moment Hayti is more backward than any other West Indian island, her average negro citizen is less well off than the corresponding negro in any of the other islands, and the general social condition is worse and contains less promise than in any other island; and all because the other islands have been through a process of evolution instead of revolution. There was ample moral warrant for the Haytian revolution at the end of the eighteenth century; nevertheless, its success was a curse, for its success, with the dreadful accompanying atrocities, put off the day when emancipation came to the other islands; and, moreover, in a short time emancipation would have inevitably come to Hayti anyhow, with comparatively little shock and dislocation; and then there would have been left in the island, as in the other islands, an element naturally fit for uplifting leadership. But Sir Harry makes clear how grossly exaggerated are some of the slanders which have been repeated about Hayti ever since Spencer St. John published his interesting but wholly one-sided and therefore mischievous volume.

Incidentally Sir Harry's book shows the strong influence for good which has been exercised by our own Nation in Cuba and San Domingo. There was never a war in which so much was accomplished for humanity, at so small a cost of blood, as the war which resulted in the freeing of Cuba and the starting of the Philippines on the road towards self-government and civilization; while the more recent action of the United States in San Domingo gave that island its first chance to move forward along the path of honest and orderly liberty. It will always remain a marvel that the loudest self-styled champions of devotion to a high ideal of international righteousness should have been either lukewarm or else violently hostile in their attitude towards both these great movements for national morality and decency.

The chapters on the negro in the United States naturally possess for us a peculiar interest; and of these chapters those that treat of the negro and the white man as they now are appeal most to Americans whose chief concern is to deal with existing American problems, and to solve aright the questions pressing for settlement by

the present generation, and who realize that in fighting the evil of to-day it is wise for the good men of to-day to join together without regard to their views of the past.

The account of Hampton and Tuskegee is admirable. The tribute to General Armstrong is as fine as it is well deserved; he is described as "good without being pietistic, essentially manly, hard-gritted and practical, having no delusions about the Negroes' or Amerindians' defects of character and racial drawbacks, but most large-hearted and universal in his sympathies . . . and treating every human being on his or her merits and capabilities." Sir Harry approves the curriculum at Hampton, though he desires a greater amount of scientific teaching; here he is undoubtedly right, as well as in his denunciation of over-insistence upon a barren theological dogmatism; but, rather curiously, he undervalues Bible teaching; if he would turn to what the great scientist Huxley said of the Bible, he would find well expressed the views of those of us who believe that the rising generation knows too little, and not too much, of this great storehouse of wisdom and morality. He states with admirable clearness the purpose of Hampton. It "endeavors to steer clear of any burning question, either State or Federal. It hopes to effect its purpose in the improvement of the Negro's social status by concentrating all its efforts on imparting a sound industrial training, and on the creation of a moral standard and a standard of domestic culture amongst the Negro students which may, by its spreading from this center (and from Tuskegee), create in time a self-respect amongst the colored people, a racial conscience which shall set up and maintain such high ideals of industry, talent, and morality that these qualities, becoming at last characteristic of the Negro race in the United States, may dissipate the race prejudice of the Caucasian and cause him to yield with a good grace a full recognition of the right on the part of his Negro fellow-citizen to absolutely equal treatment. . . . Least of all is there the slightest attempt to revive the bitterness between North and South." Surely such ideals are good for any institution of learning, whether the students be black or white.

With similar clearness, and complete

approbation, Sir Harry describes Tuskegee and the aims of Booker Washington. "He has brushed aside all discussion of the political claims of the Negro, and the justice or the injustice of his treatment by the South, to concentrate his own attention and that of his listeners on the supreme necessity of making the Negro a valuable citizen of the United States. He wants the Negro to become the most industrious race in the United States, to live as well as possible, to eat well-cooked, wholesome food, set forth daintily; to build no house without a bath-room, to be fastidiously neat in person and dress, to be able to do everything, but most of all to be accomplished masons, architects, carpenters, cooks, dressmakers, tailors, hatters, plowmen, gardeners, cotton-growers, poultry-keepers, horse-breeders, carriage-builders, boot-makers, botanists, electricians," etc. Surely, again, a good ideal for any race!

Among the most interesting and valuable chapters in the book are those dealing with the negro as a citizen, especially in the Southern States, and with life in the Southern States. I by no means agree with all that Sir Harry says; I should often put the emphasis differently from the way in which he puts it; I think that his judgments are sometimes too favorable, and sometimes too unfavorable; but no one can read his book without appreciating his transparent sincerity and honesty, his acuteness and quickness of vision, his courage, and his hatred of all that is cruel and unclean. He deserves the gratitude of decent citizens for his protest against the method of treatment of one of the most loathsome forms of vice in New Orleans—and he could have written in substantially the same terms of most of the big cities of the country, North or South. The "flagrant man-swine" is seen at his worst when he both causes flaunting public scandal and tramples his victims into the mire, while at the same time refusing to accept any of the punishment visited with his approval on the vice for which he is himself mainly responsible.

It is a pleasant thing to read the final judgment of a visitor so obviously endeavoring to tell the exact truth:

"Yet, with all these imperfections in the social acceptance of the colored people of

the United States—imperfections which with time and patience and according to the merits of the Neo-negro will disappear—the main fact was evident to me after a tour through the Eastern and Southern States of North America; that nowhere else in the world, certainly not in Africa, has the Negro been given such a chance of mental and physical development as in the United States. Also that nowhere else has the Negro so greatly availed himself of his opportunities. Intellectually, and perhaps physically, he has attained his highest degree of advancement as yet in the United States. Politically he is freer there, socially he is happier than in any other part of the world."

The book is of great interest and permanent value; and it should be in the library of every American who cares to devote a little thought to one of the largest of the problems of to-day.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Khartum, March 15, 1910.