"STUDIES IN THE AMERICAN RACE PROBLEM" ¹

THE friction caused by contact between the white and the black races is not at all local. When the whites predominate and no question arises as to control, as in England and in New England, the friction does not become acute. But when the negroes predominate or are in such proportion to the whites as to suggest control over the whites, the friction always becomes acute, whether in South Africa or in the Southern states of America. Nowhere is the proper relation between the races so pressing and painful a problem as in the United States, and it is receiving a larger share of thoughtful attention than any other such problem. The recent volume entitled "Studies in the American Race Problem," by Mr. Alfred Holt Stone, is the outcome of fifteen years of study. Its papers are addresses or articles extending over several years of this time. The publishers speak of it as "a fundamental and original study, applicable to race relations all over the world," and from some points of view it certainly is all that. Mr. Stone is a landowner and cotton-grower in Mississippi, whose knowledge of the relations between the whites and negroes is not entirely theoretical. His incidental account of his own plantation experiment, with its measurable failure and his continued purpose to develop it further, is one of the most interesting parts of the book.

Several facts combine to make the American phase of the problem peculiarly important. An element of sharpness has been infused into it by the civil war of the '60's and the painful decade of "reconstruction" which followed. It is difficult to determine calmly one's attitude towards a

¹ *Studies in the American Race Problem.* By Alfred Holt Stone: Doubleday, Page & Co., New York. Net, \$2.00.

race which has been so recently fought over. Yet the war and slavery are far enough back for sentiment to have lost something of its power, and the present generation of Southern white men do not regard the negro with the good-natured almost affectionate tolerance of the earlier generation, while he is not idealised in the North as he once was. Of course this is much better, but it complicates the situation. Then the rapid diffusion of education among the negroes is changing their own attitude toward life. Sometimes they are discussed as though their own sentiments were a negligible factor, as though they could be put here or there and they would "stay put." The day for that is past. Race friction will not be all on one side. There is instead a period of inevitable difficulty just before the American people.

It should be added that from the economic point of view the problem is increasing in difficulty. The splendid minority of the race are fitting themselves admirably for competition with other labourers and for the use of machinery. But in some quarters there is trade-union discrimination, in others the improvidence and unreliability of the untrained masses is making their tenure of labour very precarious. Over against this must be put the gratifying increase of land-holding, independent negroes, and the wise efforts of many leaders to check the urban movement which has injured more than it has helped. Further, the entry of the negro race into politics by one act of the white race has not been an unmixed blessing. One need not agree with those who call the negro a failure in politics, and certainly one may hesitate to say that the granting of the suffrage was a mistake, but it is true that whites and negroes together have blundered about as often there as anywhere in dealing with the matter. Suffrage is no natural right; it is not inherent in American citizenship; it needs some definite restrictions. But it needs no racial restriction, and white people in America have no more right to vote just because they are white than negroes although they are negroes. Democracy does not involve the right of everybody to have his finger in the pie, but it does not permit arbitrary and wilful discrimination between fingers. For these next approaching years, the leaders of

the negro race are urging no racial freedom of suffrage and are accepting intellectual and financial limitations readily, only urging that these be fairly applied to whites and blacks alike.

Such facts as these make the race problem in America very pressing, almost perilous.

The depth of the issue involved is revealed in the fact that in spite of the evident candour and kindly sympathy and broad charity of Mr. Stone, there can be no mistaking for a moment that he writes as a white man and as a Southern man. The book holds out little hope to the negroes, no hope, indeed, of any such future as their contact with the white race leads many of the best of them to desire. There are many quotations from eminent negroes which support and confirm much that Mr. Stone writes, but it is inconceivable that a negro could look into the future as Mr. Stone sees it. In all their future, so far as it concerns the white race, there is nothing but submission, a secondary place. Mr. Stone finds this approved by history and by racial characteristics, while he finds that the evidences of racial development which may change the future are discouragingly few. Utterly and generously sympathetic with the negroes, Mr. Stone does not believe that their future is big with any great promise. Anything in the nature of true racial equality seems to him improbable if not inherently impossible. Race friction must increase if the negro race demands political, economic, or social equality. "Racial antipathy is a present, latent force in us all. As to this we need not deceive ourselves." The negroes have a future as a race, the mulattoes have a better future still, but they are neither to enter the field of the whites.

This is fair to say, even though Mr. Stone steadily disclaims prophecy. He is not a propagandist, he has no panacea. He sets himself frankly to tell the truth about the race relation as he sees it in America and elsewhere. But when you are dealing with living things, you cannot avoid looking toward the future, and it is this attitude toward the future that marks the book a white man's volume, albeit a most sympathetic white man writes it.

Then Mr. Stone is writing from the Southern point of

view. In his judgment there have been incidental errors and excesses in the attitude of the Southern states towards the negroes, but fundamentally their course was inevitable. According to the measure of their danger, white people everywhere have followed the same course. In Massachusetts there are 1,155 negroes for every 100,000 people; in Mississippi there are 141,552 negroes for every 100,000 whites. If the proportions were reversed, would not the attitudes change? In the British Isles there are approximately 39,000,000 people. Before passing judgment on Mississippi, imagine that 26,000,000 of these were negroes, mostly ignorant, with the prevailing vices of improvidence and immorality; then what would the British whites do? Probably what they do in South Africa. At any rate and by some means they would govern the land.

All this might deteriorate into a cheap *tu quoque* argument. In Mr. Stone's hands it does not do so. He uses it only as a call to calmer judgment and as a means to lessen the misunderstanding which now disturbs the two great sections of the American people. The better sentiment of the Southern people could hardly be more clearly presented than by Mr. Stone. He states the case for the subordination of the negroes with force and cogency. It is unfortunate that in one chapter are embalmed certain unimportant incidents connected with Mr. Roosevelt's name. The argument could have been made quite as strong if they had not been used in illustration of a principle with which Mr. Roosevelt is no more concerned than any other man. But, that aside, you find clear statement of the theorem that the negroes are fundamentally an inferior race. Anything that looks toward recognising their political, economic or social equality is instantly resented.

By many Northern people, on the other hand, though Mr. Stone has no occasion to say so, the negroes are recognised as an actually but not fundamentally inferior race. It is not to be assumed that there are no points of political, economic and social equality available for some to-day and for the developed race ultimately. On most matters of present fact, the two sections agree, and with them agree most leaders of

the negroes themselves. Mr. Stone states it capitally when he says: "The negro masses of America at present form a peasant class, and we could much more truly help them by frankly recognising that fact. Every race has its peasant stage and in the evolutionary processes the negro is no exception to the rule." The race "does not need politics and it does not need agitation." In the words of Mr. Roosevelt and of Dr. Booker T. Washington, it needs "the friendship and co-operation of the Southern whites among whom and with whom its life must be lived. It needs trained and educated teachers; it needs education on moral lines; it needs an honest, moral and educated ministry; it needs protection, encouragement and advice from the white man nearest at hand; and it needs to be let alone."

With all that, so far as it deals with matters of present fact, there is well-nigh universal agreement in America. Many negro leaders declare without hesitation that the South is the place of opportunity for the negroes and that the Southern people are their best friends. The later intelligent Northern movements for their aid presuppose their remaining in the South. They seek to develop the race into economic reliability and efficiency. But the root difference between such writers as Mr. Stone and the most thoughtful Northern men lies deeper than that. Shall we set out upon the theory that the negroes are fundamentally an inferior race, that they must be taught their place and kept in it, that they must be ruled by the whites when the two races come into contact? Mr. Stone sees no escape from friction except when the stronger race dictate the terms of relationship which the weaker race must accept. With no love for slavery, he yet points out that it constituted the soundest basis of agreement between the two races. To many Northern men this theory is impossible. The negroes are actually an inferior race, but they need not be fundamentally so. They are and always will be different from the white race, but that difference need not continue to generate antipathy or friction. It is perfectly true that the stronger race must dictate terms and that the feebler must accept them, but it will still be pertinent to enquire whether those terms shall presuppose the continued

and inevitable inferiority of the feebler race or whether instead the terms shall have an eye to the uplift of the inferior until government can be shared with it. There are excellent people who question the wisdom of so much negro education. They fear that it will simply dissatisfy those who receive it and open before them vistas which they can never traverse. Immediately we agree that the negroes are essentially and inevitably inferior to the whites, we give ground for that question. Mr. Stone insists in a striking chapter that we must distinguish between the mulatto and the negro, that it is generally the mulatto whose achievements indicate the progress of the race. Yes, but the distinction is impossible, so long as they identify themselves with the negro race. There are hundreds of negroes who are in heart-sick rebellion against the theory that just because they are negroes they are inferior to the whites. There are few finer pieces of English writing than the little volume by Dr. DuBois on "The Souls of Black Folk," and in it the chapter on "How it Feels to be a Problem" deserves reading frequently. Here is a man who identifies himself, because by blood he is identified, with the negro race. There are increasing hundreds like him. One theory will say to them, You are negroes and you belong to an inferior however excellent race; no matter what you do or are, we cannot for your sake and ours admit you to equality politically, economically, or socially; we will not break bread with you on terms of equality; we honour your aspirations, but we cannot forget that your racial characteristics mark you as inferior to us. The other theory will say: You have become what we hope and believe the race will become; you are first-fruits of the new race, now inferior, ultimately not inferior to us though always different from us; we acknowledge your right to recognition on your own merits, and our social reserves are for racial unity and advancement; economically and politically we recognise your equality.

Mark it, these are the outside theories of the case stated broadly and with no reference to large modifications of which both are capable. One hesitates to say that the first is the prevailing thoughtful theory of the Southern section because so much exception could be taken to any one wording of it.

One need not hesitate to say that the second is the most thoughtful theory of the Northern section of the country. But it should be quickly added that the practice in the South is much finer than the theory, and that the theory in the North is much finer than the practice. Mr. Stone is absolutely right in saying that the practice does not differ much the country over. The humiliations of negroes who know their humanity and instinctively claim their place with other men are sometimes more bitter in the North than in the South. The increase of such men makes more and more difficult our easy claim to such superiority that we must deny to them the forms of equality.

And it must be said that there are few more troublesome and evasive phrases than that of "racial equality." One race may very properly declare that another has not and cannot have racial identity with itself. One race may even insist that its traits give it a superiority over another for the meeting of certain conditions. But no race has any right to declare its own inevitable superiority to another race, so that membership in the second in its very self involves inferiority. There are large numbers of British people who are never quite sure of the sincerity of men who prefer to be Frenchmen or Americans. Certainly there are Americans who are simply sorry for people who are not Americans. We think that only childish. But it is not different from our ready feeling that for some reason being a white man is necessarily finer than being a negro. That it is finer to-day probably all white and virtually all black men think. That it must always be finer is quite another matter. There is no good reason why the day may not come when there will be a negro racial pride, when a negro will be as glad and proud to be black as white men are to be white. Anglo-Saxons who see a Chinaman slipping along their city streets, meekly accepting whatever treatment comes to him, generally suppose that he is sorry to be of such a race and wishes he were Anglo-Saxon, not realising that he is glad not to be Anglo-Saxon and proud to be a Chinaman instead. The feeling of superiority works on both sides. Each race has traits which give it right to claim equality with the others, while it may never become absorbed into or amal-

gamated with the others. It is no idle dream that such a future is before the negro race.

Miss Kingsley's saying, quoted by Mr. Stone, is familiar to the readers of this JOURNAL: "The African who turns into the Europeanised man is the exception that proves the rule and whose isolated conduct misleads the white man dazzled by the performance of one in a hundred thousand; we seem blind to the inertia of the great mass that we have to deal with to-day in a state practically unaltered by the white work of four hundred years' duration." Yes, because a large part of the white work has been an effort to Europeanise the African. It has gone on the assumption that the negro is a white man with a black skin and that his differences from a white man are items in his condemnation. When under wise leadership the negro race pushes its development along its own lines: becoming economically dependable, learning the dignity and fine manliness of toilsome labour, forgetting the contempts and sneers of slavery; becoming morally established and sanely religious; becoming politically thoughtful and unselfish; becoming socially pure and self-controlled; leaving all effort to copy or cajole the white race, and developing a racial pride—then there will be another story to tell. Nowhere is there better opportunity for the development of that race consciousness than in the United States. The difficulties are tremendous; they are not insurmountable. The rise of the race, marked as it is from some points of view, has not satisfied its own leaders nor its white friends. The introduction of immigrant labour in the Southern cotton fields gives competition where there was none before, but competition makes for fibre. The very repressions which are so galling and sometimes so iniquitous will throw the race upon its own resources, which are after all socially and economically adequate. As for political phases, they are of least importance. Slowly the race will meet any conditions imposed by that race in whose hands the government is safer than in others, and then the complications will lessen. Upon none do the grievances of the present conditions bear more heavily than upon the sane, sagacious leaders of the negro race, cultured ministers, educators, and others. It seems

much to ask them to bear the burden for the race, but it may be asked in the assurance that in so doing they are preparing their own race for a future which will be finer than any that would come through identification with the white race.

Meanwhile, such books as Mr. Stone's are great helps to patience and sympathy. This one will be widely read in America, specially by those who live north of the large negro population, and they will appreciate more fully than before the situation of both races in the South. It deserves reading over the sea, not because it states the whole problem, but because the phases it does state are the present, pressing ones. It must not be taken as expressing the whole outlook of the American people, white and black; it frankly disclaims having solved any of the problems caused by their contact; but it is a contribution towards a discussion of that question which, just because it is a national one, cannot be left to the South nor to the North, but must come from the intelligence and conscience of people north and south, white and black, working all together.

The volume has much added value in the three striking statistical chapters of Professor Walter F. Willcox of Cornell University, a leading authority on the subject. The paper on Negro Criminality has been widely quoted and variously estimated heretofore, but it makes available the figures on which anyone may base his own estimates. The digest of the latest census figures in another chapter is very interesting and furnishes food for thought to both races. Probably the most suggestive of the three chapters is that on the Probable Increase of the Negro Race in the United States, whose conclusion is that the race is proportionately losing ground, and that it will be a much less influential factor numerically a century hence than now.

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