

AMNESTY AND CIVIL RIGHTS.

BY WILLIAM LLYOD GARRISON.

WHATEVER else may be left undone by the present Congress, it is to be hoped, by every consideration of justice and good faith, that the Civil Rights bill, submitted in the first instance by Mr. Sumner, will be seasonably passed before the adjournment; in which case there can be no doubt that it will receive the prompt approval of President Grant. Its object is to make the citizenship of our colored population as secure against an odious proscription in all respects as is that of every other class; a right which is as absolute as the possession of personal liberty or the exercise of the elective franchise, and which ought to be recognized without delay. No doubt that, with scarcely an exception, it will be strenuously opposed by the Democratic members in both branches; for the party which they represent has from the beginning been "the natural ally of the South." It hotly denounced the abolition of slavery, even under the war power; and, since the accomplishment of that great event, has resisted every measure for the bestowal of citizenship upon the liberated bondmen, and the removal of all complexional disabilities. Hydrophobia has never been more pronounced in any case, as pertaining to mad dogs and those who have been bitten by them, than negro-phobia has been, at all times and under all circumstances, in the case of the pseudo Democracy of the country. This chronic contempt for the negro race has been its ruling passion, its hideously distinctive feature, its loudest boast, its strongest bond of union, its chief political capital, and its historic disgrace; and, though nearly a whole decade has passed since the issuing of the immortal Proclamation of Emancipation (but for which the rebellion would undoubtedly have triumphed), that party is as ready to contest every new measure for their better protection as though they were still marketable commodities. Give it another opportunity to deepen its infamy, if it be so disposed, for the more signal will be its defeat in every fresh conflict with the awakened justice of the nation. Let the Civil Rights bill, if it must be so, receive the solid Republican vote in Congress; that vote will surely add alike to the political strength and the historic luster of the party. The bill, indeed, does not aim (for the attempt would be futile) to abolish or abate complexional prejudice in the breasts of individuals, or in domestic privacy, or in the social circle, as this is not the province of legislation; but only to make public hotels or taverns for the entertainment of man and beast, public modes for the conveyance of travelers, places of public amusement, common schools, etc., equally accessible to all classes in all parts of the country. Whatever is under governmental control, arrangement, or sanction must be made to conform to this rule, than which nothing can be more just or reasonable.

What an explosion would follow if our German, Irish, French, Scandinavian, or Italian naturalized and enfranchised citizens should be insultingly denied, while travelling, admission to the public inns, the ordinary public conveyances, the various places of popular recreation, and their children excluded from our public schools or compelled to attend caste schools by themselves, or, as an alternative, go uneducated, because they were Germans, Irishmen, Frenchmen, Scandinavians, or Italians, and for no other reason! Would they not be fired with indignation, resent such proscription as a stigma too intolerable to be patiently endured even for an hour, combine their political strength for the defeat of any party disposed to connive at such flagrant injustice, and demand of the government a conformity of law and usage to its fundamental principles? Whether thus ostracised as a class or as classes, the land would be made to rock with excitement, the Declaration of Independence be rehearsed with fresh emphasis, and the theory of republican government proclaimed to be at deadly variance with class legislation or the perpetuity of caste in any direction. But, though they are foreign-born and have come to us from distant shores, and no matter how degraded or ignorant they may be, to them are accorded the same rights, immunities, and privileges that are enjoyed by the most enlightened native-born citizens; nothing being denied to them that money can purchase or their necessities require.

Is it not, then, unspeakably mean and base, on the part of any of these in particular, to exert their personal or political influence for the continued proscription of those who are "to the manor born," who have never drifted to foreign strands, who stand on their native soil, who by their gaping wounds and bloody agonies have won a special title to all that freedom can give? There is a difference of feeling among these foreign classes, it is true; but, as a whole, they are either indifferent or hostile to any proposition for giving our colored population fair play. Of them all, the Irish portion is by far the most implacable, and at the same time the most sensitive to any infringement upon their own rights. This is only because—by no fault of their own—they are the most ignorant; and, being so, are the most pliant materials in the hands of political demagogues.

But, whether white native-born or white naturalized citizens, it behooves us all to remember the apostolic declaration: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" This is the test of our religious condition. And by what shall our patriotism and national unity be tested but by the Golden Rule? That rule lies at the foundation of a people's government, which is of all, by all, and for all, to the uprooting of all hereditary pretensions, to

the levelling down of the proud and the levelling up of the lowly, the recognition and fellowship of man as man, and the worship of one God and Father of us all. We must either conform to the requirements of such a government, or, for decency's sake, deny its validity and substitute absolutism in its place. To do as we would be done by is to banish all unjust inequality.

Let nothing be recognized as Republican or Democratic which seeks not the abolition of all unnatural distinctions between fellow-citizens, whether these relate to the color of the skin, to sex, to native or foreign born, or to any other accidental variance. Human rights, human interests, human wants, human aspirations, human destinies—how shall these be separated and made conflictive? Do they not include and are they not for all? Have we not the same hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Are we not fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer? Let there be an all-pervading spirit of brotherhood in the land, and our peace shall be like a river, our prosperity as the waves of the sea, our security as the everlasting mountains.

I am glad that the questions of amnesty and civil rights are to be acted upon separately. Let the latter take precedence, by all means. I have not been able to see any necessary connection between them, although Mr. Sumner deserved the highest commendation for insisting that no action should be taken upon amnesty in advance of a decision upon his civil rights amendment. Nor should the one be conceded as an equivalent to the other. The one is a righteous claim, not to be postponed without persistent injustice; the other relates to an act of amazing grace toward the prominent conspirators and leaders in a rebellion unparalleled for its magnitude, unequalled in its cost of blood and treasure. No penalty has been inflicted upon them beyond denying them official station under the State and National Government! And this exclusion has been democratically denounced as the most outrageous injustice! They have not even been disfranchised; but may vote for others to represent them, though they themselves are not eligible to office. Instead of abating so light a penalty, it ought to have been made far heavier, and never to be revoked. No good can come of its repeal; but only evil. The government that can deal thus leniently with those who have sought its life, through bloody insurrection, encourages treason, rather than strengthens loyalty. The old slaveholding spirit is not to be placated by any such false magnanimity. It will be the more exacting, the more imperious, as it is allowed to go "unwhipt of justice." Give it the official control of the South, and a new reign of terror will be the result. I repeat what I have said before: if I were a member of the Senate or House, I never would record my vote in favor of the Amnesty bill, not even to secure the passage of the Civil Rights bill; for I would not consent to any such compromise. And, if I were in the presidential chair, I would veto it, should it be sent to me for my official signature. I do not expect to see this ground maintained either by Congress or the President; but I wish to define my own position, and I am happy in believing that neither Congress nor the President will consent to amnesty unless the Civil Rights bill shall be first secured by the requisite concurrence of both houses. All honor to Senator Morton for his manly avowal of inflexible opposition to the amnesty measure!