

The Negro Is Organizing

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IF there had been any doubt of the status of the negro in this country—and there has been none among those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves—it could not have survived the tenth anniversary conference in Cleveland of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At this

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conference there were gathered black and brown men and women from farms and fields, physicians and preachers, educators, artists, musicians and bishops—representative of every type of mind and accomplishment of the negro race in this country. Not one of the several hundred delegates, who spoke directly for some 70,000 negroes in the United States and indirectly for several million, had escaped personal insult, injustice and injury administered for no other reason than the color of the skin.

Two conclusions the conference made inevitable. One is that the negro's patience is drawing to a close. The word fight occurred frequently, and it was with a militant sense of the value of freedom, that speakers and delegates pledged themselves to attain it. The second conclusion concerns the ballot. Negroes want to vote. They realize, and their speakers proclaimed, that no sheriff in a southern state will protect a negro from the violence of a mob while the members of the victim's race are powerless to apply any pressure upon that sheriff. The negro knows that without the ballot he is a slave—that he is denied education, trial in the courts, opportunity to work—and that there is little likelihood that he will be made really free by appeals to conscience.

If it is true that the United States, for its own safety, cannot tolerate oppression in Turkey, in Galicia, in Ireland, it is doubly true that it cannot permit one section within its borders to treat as its own affair nullification of three amendments to the Federal Constitution and contempt for process of law in the courts. If the statement of fact seems extreme there are numerous typical cases to substantiate it.

It is not so much at cases of violence, frequent as these are, that the growing membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and negro voters is directing its attack. It is at a system of society built upon violation of the law. Cheap labor and ignorance are inseparable. It is for this reason that Louisiana, for example, has spent something like 5 per cent of her educational appropriations on negro schools and 95 per cent on white. If you educate negroes you cannot so easily exploit them, in the North or in the South. "That there is considerable opposition in the South to the education of the negro and a still greater measure of indifference, no one will deny," said Mr. Leo M. Favrot, supervisor of rural schools in Louisiana. And later he said: "The white race accepts education for its own children as a matter of course, just as it accepts its position as the ruling class and the dominant race." It is natural that in these circumstances plantation owners should, as Mr. Favrot said, have paid less attention to "the need for better houses, schools, sanitation and the promotion of common decency and the ordinary virtues of humanity" than to "protection for sugar, the price of cotton, matters of business administration, and public questions."

The seepage of this consciousness of mastery on the one hand and powerlessness on the other has been disastrous. Professor George A. Towns, of Atlanta University, told of journeying thru the worst of the Georgia counties, where "a negro might be as wise as Socrates, as rich as Cræsus and as good as Jesus, and still have ten chances of being lynched every week." And he told of the consequences of this state of affairs in inadequate labor supply due to the migration to the North, depreciated land values, loss and reduction of productivity. A clergyman from one of those counties told of the contract system of land lease with its attendant evil, overseers, under which negroes on a trumped-up charge of crime or disorder are driven out just as their crops are ripe; a system in which the negro is so ground down



Whitelaw in London Passing Show

The Spectators: Before we throw the life line, we ought to make quite sure that he isn't a reactionary!"

that his person is no more respected than are the agreements the white man makes with him.

Not only colored men but women as well stood before their audiences in Cleveland, recited the sorry tale of insult, persecution, miserable schools, and still more miserable wages paid to colored school teachers. "I know of no class of women that has suffered so much from immorality and injustice as southern white women," said the principal of one well-known colored school in the South, "and they cannot be delivered from that injustice until they lock hands and work with colored women." On the part of the women there was an intense realization of the economics of race prejudice, a realization that human values must be affirmed against material interests. It is appropriate that the issue of woman suffrage should have stirred the South as has no other in years to a sharp division over the dangers of impending democracy.

Not even Southerners fail to realize that a struggle is beginning which has as its object the enfranchisement of the millions of citizens now deprived of their vote.

Meanwhile ill feeling in the South is growing. Delegates to the Cleveland conference said it had never been worse. Enraged by the migration of their best and cheapest labor, communities are endeavoring to retain negroes by violence. It was reported by delegates that some have to leave the South by night, fugitives from the men and the society that holds them in involuntary servitude. But the migrations to the north, if they have begun to create new problems in the North, have also caused the South to ponder. And of this thought it is to be hoped the fruits will be schools, adequate sanitation and policing for negroes, justice in the courts—in short a realization that people will not stay where they are badly treated. In the South and the North the negro will fight for civic and political equality. It will have to be granted to him on the basis of his citizenship or the thought of the nation and its self-respect will be poisoned as it has been in the past by slave civilization.