

LACK OF CULTURE OUR GREATEST HANDICAP SAYS R. S. ABBOTT

Editor Also Scores Our Self-Segregation Tendencies as a Hindrance

INSTALLMENT XV

By ROBERT S. ABBOTT

IT IS indeed regrettable that a country so rich in natural resources as America, whose soil is so fertile and productive as to make her a self-sustaining power, should be so poor in spiritual qualities. Nature has so abundantly blessed her that children of other nations are irresistibly drawn into her as into a magnetic vortex. The traveler from foreign shores is struck with awe by the beauty of the landscape, by the natural sense of architectural proportion.

Yet, viewing this superb panorama of wonderland, it seems paradoxical that with such magic charms America should not virtually constitute a terrestrial paradise for the races of mankind. It is, nevertheless, a haven for all those who seek shelter and wealth within her bosom, but exception is made in the case of those who were forcibly brought upon her shores by adventurous and unscrupulous traders. There are those who believe yet that discrimination as it is exercised here is a natural consequence of direct economic competition. This is nothing more than a rhetorical declaration, for no one who is familiar with the laissez-faire attitude of the Race men would contenance such a view.



Robert S. Abbott

That may be true. As I said before, I am not going into the merits of that phase of the argument, I am merely concerned for the moment with the fact that we are not producers of any rare and useful and indispensable articles on a scale that should excite the envy and incur the animosity of our neighbor. If, then, this be true, and I don't think anybody with an ounce of common sense would attempt to controvert it, why are we so sharply separated from the rest of our common world? Obviously the reason must be sought somewhere outside the economic hypothesis.

PREJUDICE NOT CAUSED BY COMPETITION

Competition implies proficiency in some definite mercantile lines. We are so weak financially as to represent not a challenge, but a negligible quantity in the competitive bargaining power of the nation. We consume a great deal but we produce little or nothing. Whatever may be the causes I am not going into them now, but the fact nevertheless remains that we haven't a single commodity competing with other marketable articles on a wide front. Well, you may argue that our opportunities have been so limited that we have not been able to fashion an economic world into our liking.

Historically we should constitute a preferred unit of this melting pot, for, as a rule the fusion of racial stocks in a population goes on without exciting opposition or popular concern. This is especially true, says one authority, in cosmopolitan centers habituated to the existence of a variety of racial groups. A phenomenon which is not given a political or social import. On the contrary, such an admixture tends to do away with "any problem created by the presence of physically divergent and culturally unassimilated elements."

EXCLUSION DUE TO LACK OF ATTAINMENTS

I believe that we are objected to primarily on account of our inability to assimilate certain definite cultural traits, which traits would attenuate our racial origin by removing the marks of identification. We have lifted our voices against a system which seeks to make our isolation mandatory. We have marshaled facts and arguments to prove the inhumanity of such a practice. We have tried to sing brotherhood into the souls of

the people in order to assuage our pain and woe.

We have made no specific performance that would defeat the purpose of prejudiced minds and refute their contentions. As a matter of fact we have aided prejudice by a process of self segregation on the one hand and by a tacit refusal to improvement on the other. It is not enough to say "down with exclusion," but we must earn the right to admission into social institutions by the force of our personalities, by intelligent and inconspicuous conduct.

BAHAISM OPENS THE WAY

I know of no religion which is more sincere in its invitation to humanity than Baháism. Its tenets are absolutely in opposition to any difference based upon color or creed. Here the magnificent temple at Winnetka bids all to come to pray and to sing as one great family. To do otherwise is subversive of the fundamental affirmations which form a pivotal point in the religious teachings of Baha-Ullah, the greatest spiritual leader and interpreter of divine will that has appeared since the death of the Child of Bethlehem. Mirza Hussein Ali taught the oneness of mankind as an essential attribute in a system of religious philosophy based upon love, hope and charity. We trust that here where freedom to worship a consecrated God is a privilege accorded to all, that our people will not commit the error of some of the Race men who went all the way from America to France to establish Jim Crow quarters in Paris. We trust that they will not huddle themselves together and mix and talk among themselves as though they were not wanted.

If a newcomer should make his appearance they should not rush to him as though to prevent others from associating with him. Here is an open door to freedom; why go there if you can't mix or will not mix with the people? We should fraternize with others with the same spirit of ease and naturalness as they. If we can't do that then I say go somewhere else. Go to Race churches where we worship to a segregated God and where we do not fraternize with the members of the other races. This beautiful religion recognizes no cast, no color, no social position. It is the religion of the people. Let us not pervert its purpose and invite discrimination by unwarranted conduct.

WE SEGREGATE OURSELVES

We witness again the same situation at the annual Y. M. C. A. banquet, where each branch has its own table. This is done in order to obviate undesirable intermingling and our group further accentuates the purpose by huddling every Race brother to their table. During the war the British slogan was: "British blood calling for British compatriot," and the American slogan read something like this: "American white blood calling for white Americans." But we answered the call to the colors and rightly so, for the blood of the white man flows in the veins of nine-tenths of us. The difference is only one of degree. Some of us have more white blood in our veins than others. But white blood or no white blood we belong to this nation. We have shed our mixed blood for the preservation of its ideals, for its independence. We have therefore earned the right, the unchallenged right to participate in its affairs whether they be political, social or religious.