

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE
AFRIO-AMERICAN,
NO. 28, APRIL 15,
1892, PP. 317 - 345**

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SAMUEL J. BARROWS

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OF THE AFRIC-AMERICAN

BY
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COLLATERAL READINGS SUGGESTED:

Williams's History of the Colored Race in America; Brackett's The Negro in Maryland, and Notes on the Progress of the Colored People; Fortune's Black and White; Cable's The Negro Question, and The Silent South; Mayo's Third Estate at the South; Grady's *In Plain Black and White*, in Century, April, 1868; Bruce's The Plantation Negro as a Freeman; Blair's The Prosperity of the South Dependent on the Elevation of the Negro; Godkin's *The Republican Party and the Negro*, in Forum, May, 1890; Stetson's *Problem of Negro Education*; *Census Statistics bearing on the Increase and Illiteracy of the Colored Race*; *Statistics relating to Negro Labor in Southern Manufactures*, in Chattanooga Tradesman, 1891.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AFRIC-AMERICAN.

BY REV. SAMUEL J. BARROW.

It is a curious coincidence in American history that about the same year the *Mayflower* landed at Plymouth the first slave ship sailed up the James River. The Pilgrims, when they landed, met the race problem in the shape of the Indian. The slave ship brought a new race and a new problem to our shores. White, red, black, were three race colors which early revealed themselves in our colonial history—a narrow coast ribbon of white, a little speck of black, and a broad expanse of red of varying hue, rather thinly laid on, but tinging the map from ocean to ocean. After two hundred and seventy years, when we draw again an ethnological map of the United States, the three colors are still there. But what a change in their proportions! The fringe of white has become a great sheet, spreading over the continent and represented by sixty millions of people. The little speck of black has become a broad belt, the girdle of the Gulf States, representing seven millions of people; while the red is reduced to a few pathetic patches in the far West, representing but two hundred and fifty thousand Indians, which, if distributed, would only assign nine Indians to a county throughout the United States; while on the Pacific coast a fringe of yellow is added to the original three colonial colors. Europe, Asia, and Africa share with the red man the continent the four hundredth anniversary of whose discovery we are soon to celebrate.

From the first the white collided with the Indian, as he has since collided with the Negro and the Mongolian. The collision with the Indian was the collision of civilization with savagery; with the Mongolian the collision has been industrial and social; with the Negro there was practically no collision until emancipation. Up to that time he was not an industrial, social, or a political competitor; he was a slave.

The traveler through the South is struck with the strange fact that the Indian race is known only by the tombstones it has left behind. There are swarms of Indian names,

but the towns they designate are held only by colored people and whites. The Indian is no longer a menace to our civilization. We have continually pushed him outside of it. But a great strip of dark Africa has been woven into the tissue of our republic. Can it be unraveled?

It was the white man North as well as South that invited the Negro to come. The Negro came not because he wanted to, but because he could not help it. And now after two hundred and seventy years' residence in this country, and an increase to over seven millions of people, it is idle to ask the question, Has he come to stay? The Negro has come to stay just as certainly as the Pilgrim who came at the same time. But he has not come to stay as a Negro any more than the Pilgrim came to stay as a Pilgrim. So long as the slave trade continued, fresh importations of Negroes poured into this country—the raw and undigested material of African savagery. But when that stream was shut off, and later when manumission followed, the dark race in this country was committed to the operation and modification of the great forces of social, industrial, and religious evolution which are molding and developing American civilization on this continent.

To the Brooklyn Ethical Association, which has devoted itself so earnestly and profitably to the study and diffusion of the doctrine of evolution, I need not spend a moment in justifying the doctrine itself. It is rather my task to show its application in some measure to the dark race in this country. A few papers that have been written upon the future of the Negro base their hopeless view almost entirely upon what he is and has been in Africa, removed from the pale of civilization. Heredity is of course a great factor in social and individual development; but every student of evolution knows that you can not determine the future of an animal wholly by studying him in the egg. And those who declare that the Negro can not in this country outgrow the conditions of savagery which have marked him in Africa, utterly ignore the existence and operation here of mighty forces which did not operate upon him there. They neglect one of the most potent of evolutionary factors—the power of a new environment, and the positive forces it may represent. Thus I have seen a Sioux Indian, with no particle of white blood in him, taken right from the woods, put upon a railroad and carried from his home into the midst of white civilization. The difference

in his environment between his white home and his forest home measured on the map was two thousand miles; measured in human history, it was twenty or more thousand years. That Indian has gone through the schools with white boys; taken a high rank in a New England college; repeated his success in a medical college; graduated as a full-fledged doctor, and married a white lady of some literary reputation. With such amazing rapidity can the transition be sometimes made by a single individual from the barbarism of twenty thousand years ago to a rank far in advance of the average man in the civilization of our day. So potent are the forces which environment and education may represent.

Hence I have not thought it worth while to spend much time in showing what the Negro is or has been in Africa. Such a study is valuable mainly to show what are the racial characteristics with which the new civilization has to deal. The more important question is, What do facts show it is possible to do with the African in this country? It is a short historic journey back to the barbarism of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors; if they had not been caught up and included in the spreading stream of Greek and Roman civilization we should probably have been living in rude cabins surrounded by domestic animals and drinking not from Dresden or Royal Worcester, but from rude pottery or the skulls of our enemies. The Afric-American race in this country is being merged in the same historic stream, and the question is, Will it sink or swim? I have no hesitation in saying that it will swim.

The remarkable difference which environment will produce upon a race is nowhere better illustrated than in the different fortunes of the Negro and Indian races in this country. A few tribes of Indians were absorbed by the whites and lost their racial distinction. But the majority were kept wholly outside of the pale of white civilization. They were penned in reservations and left to their language and their traditions. The Negroes, on the contrary, were not imported tribe by tribe, and no tribal lines were preserved. They were diffused through the civilization of the whites. They worked in the white man's field, lived in his home, learned his language, and copied, as far as permitted, his institutions. Without waiting for act of Congress, the imported heathen African eventually became a naturalized American. The average colored boy of the South no more thinks of Africa as his home than the son of the Pilgrim

thinks of England as his home. The term Negro is no longer an appropriate scientific term to apply to the dark race in this country. The Afric-American or the colored American is the truer designation. The Negro is a purely African product. The Afric or colored American is the Negro plus the environment and development represented by periods of ancestral residence varying from fifty to two hundred and fifty years.

What, then, has been the influence of his life in this country upon the African?

His history in this country is divisible into a period of slavery and a period of freedom. The period of slavery covers over two centuries. The period of freedom is less than thirty years.

I. His life under slavery was marked by important changes in his physical condition. The Negroes imported to this country were not all of one type. Though largely from the coast, they represented different tribes of varying intelligence brought from the interior in the slave trade. One of the effects of redistribution in this country has been to blend more or less these different tribes and to extinguish all sense of tribal heritage or division. Thus the pure-blooded Africans in this country are far more homogeneous than the Indians who are separated by ancient tribal animosities and by boundaries of custom and speech.

But there is another physical fact which the ethnologist must recognize; it is that a new race, which is neither white nor black, but which partakes of the qualities of both, has sprung into being on this continent. Two centuries ago there was a black band and a white band; now there is a shaded Afghan. It is impossible to tell where white begins and black ends. You can not draw absolutely the color line, because there is no color line left; there is simply a blending of shades. The extremes, the pure-blooded white and the pure-blooded African, may be identified; but you may place a row of men between them of varying shades who can not be said to belong to either race because they belong to both. They are not Africans or Europeans; they are Afric-Americans. This is one of the most important results of the colonization of the African in this country. The question is raised, Shall the races mix? The answer is, They *have* mixed. And the question, Shall they continue to mix? will probably be answered in the future to some degree as it has been in the past. This is one of

the most important contributions which the Southern white man has made to the problem—the contribution of his own blood. Laws were early passed against the intermarriage of whites and blacks, but how little they availed is seen in the vast population of mulattoes and octoroons through the South. Undoubtedly amalgamation would have gone on had both races been entirely free. The rigid caste lines drawn by slavery tended to prevent it, but the fact that the slave was only a piece of property, like a horse or a cow, tended to promote it. And one of the most terrible features of slavery as it now appears to us was, that under the system of slave concubinage men held their own offspring, a race of semi-white slaves, in bondage, and even sold them as merchandise.

But the forces which operated upon the Negro in slavery were not only physical; they were intellectual, social, and moral. There were forces which hindered and there were forces which helped. To note the hindrances we need only to turn to the statute books of the Southern States in slave times. It is very evident that all influences were to be withheld from the Negro which should prevent him from ever being anything but a slave. It was possible to buy his personal freedom; but his intellectual, social, and political freedom were to be forever withheld. In the case of several of the States it was a penal offense to teach slaves the elements of common learning. In Virginia the fine for teaching reading or writing to slaves, or even to free colored persons, was from \$10 to \$100; in Alabama from \$250 to \$500; in Mississippi the punishment was imprisonment for one year; in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi no one could emancipate a slave except by authority of the Legislature. "In Georgia a will setting free a slave was null and void; any person attempting to execute it was fined \$1,000." The discriminations against the Negro extended to the criminal code. There was one set of laws for the white and another for the black. That the Negro made little progress in education in two hundred years of slavery is easily explained—the white man did not mean that he should. He was looked upon as under a divine curse which it was only the duty of the white man to perpetuate. "He was doomed," as Judge Ruffin, of North Carolina, sorrowfully declared, "to live without knowledge and without the capacity to make anything his own, and to toil that another may reap the fruits."