

ERRATA

Insert on page 611, between lines 14 and 15, the following line which accidentally dropped out:

“liberty into that of license. The pendulum of sovereignty”

On page 614 of the same article, line 5, should read “epidermis” for “epirermis,” and line 11 from below should read “civilisations” for “civilsations.”

Further the name of the artist who painted the frontispiece should read “Merson,” not “Meson.”

AMERICAN POLITY.

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UNLIMITED negro suffrage has failed. By a recent decision of the United States Supreme Court, the Fifteenth Amendment has been rendered inoperative. It is unnecessary to go into the details of history to show how the Constitutional Amendments pertaining to the negro were brought about; it is unnecessary to call to mind that the Emancipation Proclamation was a war measure, and that the amendments resulting therefrom were "war amendments" -- enactments which were passed as party measures, under exasperating circumstances and in the spirit of revenge. It is sufficient to know that the historian of the future must characterize this attempt to bestow unqualified suffrage upon the ignorant negro as one of the most stupendous mistakes in American government.

We have at last become conscious of the error of attempting to place the ballot in the hands of those who convert the meaning of was drawn to one side. It was the legislation of our fathers. We are to deal with the question anew; and if we allow this pendulum to swing to the other side and to the other extreme, we will perhaps commit an act which savors more of fateful nature than that which our fathers committed. We would be compelled to meet the charge of tyranny. This is odious. It is oppressive, retrogressive, and dangerous.

Now that we have learned something of the pernicious influence arising from the privilege of a free ballot, we should profit by this knowledge. This does not mean that we are to undo all that has been done. We are to undo simply that which we have found to be detrimental to American polity. It has been learned that the right of suffrage has been given to individuals who have been unable to use it to advantage. American polity demands that these individuals be deprived of the privileges which they abuse; but bear in mind that it is the incompetent individual, not a faction, not a caste, not a race,

that is to be disfranchised. Our injunction is this: each and every individual should be disfranchised until he offers some evidence of fitness, until he evinces a real desire to acquaint himself with the duties of a sovereign, until he gives some external proof of ability to use sovereign power in behalf of self-government.

The moment an individual gives proper evidence of ability, integrity and intellect sufficient to assure wholesome action in the work of government, he should be endowed with the sacred privilege of franchise. The basal principle of our government is co-operation. It is, therefore, our conception of individual sovereignty and its functions which so clearly differentiates the occidental from the oriental and many European methods of government. Intelligent co-operation is the woof of our political fabric. The idea of supervision, of sumptuary laws, and of paternal restriction is un-American. Our government is not of the paternal type; and it is the care of the present and succeeding generations to see that it does not become paternal. The life-blood of the American polity should flow not merely through the veins and arteries of one of the important members that forms only a component part of its unity, but through the whole organism in its entirety. Our government is a government of all the people. All who can give wholesome co-operation, all who can labor intelligently in the art of government, are needed to bring this American principle of government to its highest perfection. No individual who can render such assistance can be spared. The ground-work of our government is self-government—a form of government which, we are pleased to think, graces modern history.

The South may make laws disfranchising the black men. It should do so. These laws, nevertheless, should be framed with the idea of disfranchising not merely the black men, but with the idea of disqualifying any man who can not or does not properly wield sovereign power. If there are white men who are mentally or morally incapable of acting as sovereigns in their own microcosmic spheres of life, they, in accompaniment with the black men, should be denied the right of suffrage. This conception is Pan-American. It applies both to the Africanized states of the South and to the foreignized cities of the North. Justice requires, and our polity demands, that both black and white men who can not grasp the meaning of sovereignty, and act in accordance with the spirit of sovereignty, should be deprived of the right of abusing this sacred power.

We hasten to assert, however, that to be truly expressive of the spirit of liberty, the American republic must grant the sacred right of suffrage to every American citizen who is competent to cast an

intelligent ballot; and to accord the competency to hold office to any American elector who is qualified to perform the requisite duties thereof. These are concepts of American liberty. On the other hand, in order to preserve its own integrity, to guard against the abuses which inhere in a democracy, and at the same time to strengthen the principles which have been so instrumental in making our political system the cynosure of attraction to all nations, the ballot must be denied to those who abuse their sacred rights. These are conceptions of American statesmanship and American prudence.

These two thoughts, theory and practice, should ever be linked together. They will not admit of separation. The one is a guarantee against caste authority and the despotic tyranny which arises from arbitrary use of power. The other is a safe-guard against mob action and the lawless tyranny which issue from irresponsible rule.

The notion of individual sovereignty, at one time, may move in this direction and at another time in that direction; but the oscillation should only be a movement that registers a lively appreciation of the question at issue. Now forward, and now backward, now enfranchising and now disfranchising—thus the movement of suffrage in a wholesome state should ever respond to the conditions which seem to affect the body politic.

We may justly infer, therefore, that it will be only after the most careful and thorough consideration that the proper boundaries of a zone on the subject of suffrage can be determined—and this only for the time being. Though it was a great error to give a free ballot to the negro slave, it will perhaps be a greater error to take unconditionally the ballot from the negro citizen. Enfranchisement should have been given with restriction. Disfranchisement should be enacted with careful limitation. Moderation is the maxim we should follow in this subtle, delicate and far-reaching question of negro suffrage.

Though the great mass of negroes have perhaps failed to grasp the full meaning of liberty and sovereignty, yet there are many whom we should acknowledge as co-workers in the art of government. To withhold the ballot or to preclude the competent negro from the right to hold office is subverting the principles of republican government. There are no known qualities in pigment which should lead a reflective statesman either to give or to withhold the right of suffrage. Pigment in any of its forms will not cause its possessor to be either eligible or ineligible to the right of an elector, much less to qualify or disqualify a man for the function of any office.

To disfranchise on the ground of physical attributes is impolitic. Franchise enactments should deal with the psychical attainments. The ideal of American polity should be to recognize the intrinsic value, the wholesome merit of the individual—not the texture of the epidermis. The right to suffrage or the competency to hold office should no more be based upon the color of the skin than the tyranny of absolute rule upon the divine right of kings. Inherent worth has a much more subtle conception than the external circumstances attending nativity. Intellect and moral excellencies are the qualities which count in the drama of life, and in the art of government.

The government of the American commonwealth should ever stand for self-government. This is the only government that is truly expressive of liberty. The principles of the American system of political science should stand for all eternity in opposition to the walls, the barriers, the oppression and restriction of the Old World. Let the principles of our political system carry us ever on to a fuller richer and deeper content of the words of Lincoln: "A government of the people, by the people and for the people." With this beacon as a guiding principle in our political life, the door of opportunity will ever stand ajar; as if beckoning, even to the street urchin of inherent worth, or another Booker T. Washington to come and carve on the tablet of fame.

In bold relief to the caste system of the Orient, to the empires which have flourished and decayed, and to the arrested civilisations which stand today as ominous omens to circumscribed statesmanship, "the door of hope," the "door of opportunity," should be made symbolic of American polity,—a polity in which every man may be a miniature king; a polity in which sovereignty may reside in every individual; a polity in which men, however, are not made sovereigns by the incidents of birth, but allowed to become sovereigns from sterling worth. To every American citizen, therefore, who has the character, the intellect, and the will to qualify for competency in self-government, let the right of sovereignty be accorded irrespective of "race, color, or previous conditions of servitude."