

## THE CIVIL RIGHTS BILL.

BY WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON.

"TAKE care of the Civil Rights Bill," said the dying Sumner to an eminent member of Congress from his own state. By this he meant: "See that the bill is not so modified as to impair its stringency or materially affect any of its provisions; that action upon it is not evaded by dishonest maneuvering, nor postponed through apathy, on the one hand, or hostility, on the other, until the session is too far spent to secure final action upon it. Watch it with a vigilance that cannot slacken, urge it with a zeal commensurate with its justice, defend it with a courage born of deep conviction and unswerving rectitude." May this injunction stimulate not only the gifted senator to whom it was addressed, but every friend of equal rights in either house, to meet the issue in as speedy and direct a manner as possible. As yet the bill is in the hands of a committee; and how long it will be detained there or what changes may be found in it when reported back is problematical. One thing is certain: time is flying, and in such an attempt to redress long-inflicted wrongs delays are especially dangerous.

While it is to be expected that all the features of the bill will be objectionable to those members from the South who represent the old slaveholding régime, it is said that the one most offensive is that which abolishes all complexional distinctions in the common schools. Of course, all sorts of evil consequences are predicted if that is enforced: schools now in operation will be broken up; the whites will not send their children where colored children are admitted on equal terms, even though they must go uneducated; but, if they should, there would be constant friction between the two races. Let them all be instructed, but in separate schools; and thus all trouble can be avoided and the end harmoniously attained. Nothing can be gained and much may be lost by coercion; all great changes are effected slowly, especially where long-cherished and deeply-rooted prejudices are concerned. It is preposterous to suppose that a race despised and enslaved for centuries can be allowed to stand on the same plane with those who have held and treated them as marketable commodities until within a comparatively short period, and who would again do so if they could. These dislikes are innate and unconquerable, and Nature draws the line of demarcation by an unerring instinct!—etc., etc.

These are old objections, many times refuted by indisputable proofs, but presented in a new application; dismal fears, which have been shown to be mere phantoms of the brain wherever brought to the test. It is something wonderful to note how quick wrong-doers are to perceive what dreadful results must attend right action. There is the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God. They hear, indeed, but understand not; and they see, indeed, but perceive not. "Wherefore, thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant." And so for all injustice there comes a day

of retribution. Nature is not to be saddled with human whims and prejudices. She tests no muscles, weighs no brains, consults no complexional differences, to enable her to determine where love shall bind or hatred alienate. If the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, she was not answerable for it. If any class hold in contempt another for causes admitting of no change, she sides with those who are proscribed. Humanity is multifarious, but not discordant, in its manifestations; and whenever the strong trample upon the weak or the proud disdain the lowly, in the inner consciousness of their souls they know themselves to be without excuse. To such no quarter is to be given. Their outcries deserve no consideration; their intentions are evil and their counsels mischievous; all their predictions are falsified. Whether they appeal to God, Nature, or Humanity, their condemnation is the same.

What horrors were predicted as sure to follow in the train of immediate and unconditional emancipation! What shedding of blood, what ravaging of plantations, what bringing back of "chaos and old night"! How many timid, unreflecting, absurdly prejudiced people at the North were thus induced to be reconciled to the prolongation of slavery as a choice of evils, all the while complimenting themselves for their prudence and sagacity. What! "turn the slaves loose!"—the whole of them at once—four millions of imbruted men, women, and children! Who but Bedlamites would advocate such a jail delivery? Nay, who but those who had lost their reason could come to the conclusion that to "break every yoke and let the oppressed go free" would be a most calamitous measure? Though emancipation took place under the most unfavorable circumstances—in the midst of a gigantic civil war—nobody was injured in person or estate, the freedmen evinced no disposition to retaliate for the terrible wrongs that had been done to them, and the only enemies of peace and order were the tyrants who had been deprived of their prey.

And now we are told by these same alarmists that to abolish all complexional distinctions in the common schools of the South will but intensify prejudice of race and give a staggering blow to popular education in that section of the country; for oil and water will not mix, nor will fire and gunpowder abide in amicable contact, even if so ordered in the Civil Rights Bill!

That for a time, if that bill should be passed with such a provision, there would be evoked by it much disgust and indignation on the part of the old ruling class at the South, cannot be questioned; and that, in their pride and anger, they would in many instances rather have their children go half-educated than to attend a mixed school may be set down as more than probable. But their haughtiness (a divine judgment upon them for their trafficking in human flesh) is not to be allowed to perpetuate an aristocratic caste or to so shape legislation as to place American citizenship under ban. The public schools must be as free from class proscription as from sectarian exclusiveness. Instituted for the common good, and essential to the general welfare, they belong to no clique and cannot be advantageously divided on any colorable pretense. They are primarily and fundamentally essential to republican government, and no other government is or can be recognized by the Constitution on the American soil. Especially are they needed at the South for the elevation of all classes, the development of her resources, and the augmentation of her prosperity, based on intelligence and virtue. To them the North is immensely indebted for its accumulated and accumulating wealth, its mighty power, its boundless enterprise, its inventive talent, its diffusive intelligence. If from them none are excluded, because of the accident of birth or descent, except the children of sable parents, why should these not be included? If American citizenship is no longer complexional, why should it be subjected to insult and excommunication in matters of common interest and of public utility? Where local injustice persistently robs any portion of the people of their rights, it is for the strong arm of the General Government to smite such injustice to the dust, under the provisions of that Con-

stitution which is the supreme law of the land.

The common school must be open to all and for all, whether white or black, whether native or foreign. Those who, for any reason, do not choose to avail themselves of its benefits may consult their own choice or prejudice, as the case may be; but they must not make it subservient to their exclusiveness. To gratify them in this respect would be to lay the ax at the root of our free institutions and to engender animosities that no community can afford to tolerate. They will ultimately be obliged to conform to established usage; and, having done so, they will be glad for their own sake and for their children's children's sake that they were not permitted to have their own disorganizing way.

There is no prejudice founded in color. Southern men know this too well, as their unlimited amalgamation with their sable victims long ago attested. The color simply marks the object to be proscribed. Just as the Quaker garb did in New England two hundred years ago; nothing more. It is condition, not color, that gives rise to negro prejudice. As that condition changes for the better, colorphobia becomes increasingly vincible and mutual respect is a necessary consequence. "A man's a man for a' that" is the talisman of human brotherhood. If in the halls of legislation at the South and in the National Capitol blacks and whites are meeting as equals and in a fraternal spirit, why should not their children mingle as freely and kindly in the common schools? A thousand similar experiments at the North demonstrate the perfect feasibility of a union of this kind and the results are invariably good.

It was a long and a hard struggle in Boston to abolish colored schools, and allow colored children access to all the primary, grammar, and high schools established by the city; but it proved only "a nine days' wonder" and no trouble whatever arose from the change, and he would be laughed at as a fool who should insist on restoring the old proscriptive rule!

What more encouraging case, what more cheering example need be adduced in favor of abolishing complexional caste in educational training than that presented by Berea College, in Kentucky, of which President Fairchild is the accomplished and honored president? The experiment was there made under very trying circumstances; but it has overcome all opposition and won for itself the respect and good will of many who at the outset were extremely hostile to it, and it now has hundreds of students, irrespective of color or sex, and nearly equally divided as to numbers, all pursuing their studies fraternally, "with none to molest or make afraid." It is the most interesting educational institution to contemplate in the United States, and deserves the highest encomiums and the most liberal patronage for the good it has wrought and the grand example it has furnished how to pacificate and bless the entire South.