

# THE GOLDEN RULE IN ATLANTA

BY BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

We believe that this striking article by Mr. Washington calls for no further comment than the mere expression of our opinion that the story of the trial told at the close of the article recounts an incident which, from the point of view of both races, is one of the most significant and promising in the whole history of the real Reconstruction Era.—THE EDITORS.

THREE distinct movements looking to the improvement of the relations between the races have been started in Atlanta, Georgia, as a consequence of the September riots. The first of these, headed by ex-Governor Northern, aims to bring about the co-operation of the races along religious lines. The second has for its object the more practical education of the masses. The third is directed toward securing law and order through the practical co-operation of the better elements of both races. As a whole, I think I am safe in saying, the measures thus far taken and others proposed represent the most radical, far-reaching, and hopeful solution of the race problem that has ever been undertaken by Southern white people.

When a man's house is on fire, the fact easily publishes itself to the whole community. When he sets himself to rebuild it, the fact does not so easily attract attention. And yet if, warned by past experience, he builds in a way to avoid the danger of a second catas-

trophe, that may be the most significant fact about the whole matter. The illustration may fairly be applied to the city of Atlanta at the present time. There is hardly a man or woman in the United States who has not read of the September riots which resulted in the death of some fifteen or sixteen innocent negroes and some three or four equally innocent white people, one a woman and the other an officer of the law. On the other hand, the story of what Atlanta is doing in the direction of reconstructing the relations of mutual helpfulness between the races is probably only imperfectly known even in the city of Atlanta itself. This fact is my excuse for writing at this time of what I may call the work of "reconstruction" in Atlanta.

Immediately after the bloody and terrible events of September 22, 23, and 24, when the whole city was still in a state of terror, a public meeting of all citizens, white and black, was called to discuss the situation. As a result of that meeting a Committee of Ten was

to form, as a "committee of safety," to recommend measures that should be taken to restore order and protect the lives of the inhabitants. Upon their recommendation all the saloons of the city, some one hundred and fifty in number, were closed, and remained closed for something like ten days; strict measures against loiterers and against all forms of disorder were taken. These were the measures taken to restore order and secure the public safety.

Meanwhile a committee of five prominent colored men had been appointed to confer with the Committee of Safety to aid and support them in the work they had undertaken. At the same time a meeting was held in which ten of the prominent white ministers and a similar number of the colored ministers took part. A member of the Committee of Ten appeared at this meeting for the purpose of assuring the colored people that the white people were their friends and intended to protect them as long as they obeyed the law. He asked the ministers to take this assurance to the members of their congregations and to use their efforts to induce the colored people of the city to return to their work. For by this time the industries of the city were fairly prostrated.

It was out of these two bodies and of the conferences which followed with the leaders of the colored people that the later organizations and the larger experiments in the co-operation of the races have sprung. The first thought of those who were principally concerned was in some way or other to make permanent the organizations that had grown up to meet an emergency, and to secure in this way the continued co-operation of the better elements of both races, looking to a permanent solution of the whole problem.

The first step taken in the direction of making permanent the co-operation of the races which the crisis had brought about was taken by ex-Governor W. J. Northern, President of the Atlanta Business Men's Gospel League. He proposed the formation of the Christian League. I can best indicate the character of this organization by quoting from the official statement of its purposes

and the means by which it proposes to carry them into effect:

The executive committee and general officers of the Business Men's Gospel Union, in consultation and co-operation with the ministers of the city, have undertaken the readjustment of the relations of the races at the South, through the formation of a Christian League, to which shall be eligible approved members of both races who will agree to promote, under the direction of the Gospel Union, the highest type of citizenship, maintain all existing laws, and promote peace and good will.

The Christian League as such shall not be an organization, but its members shall consist of those who will agree to hold themselves subject to the call of the Business Men's Gospel Union, and who will agree to co-operate with the Union in its work, as outlined in its constitution.

With the Christian League effected, its members, both white and colored, will constitute themselves a sort of Southern legion of honor, hoping to be more powerful in preserving patriotism and high morality than all laws or law officers elected to enforce them.

One of the first things undertaken under this arrangement was the designation of the second Sunday in December as a day when every minister in the city, white and colored, should preach a sermon upon law and order. Preparatory to this, and to other plans which the organization has in view, weekly prayer-meetings, at which members of both races are represented, have been held at the rooms of the colored Young Men's Christian Association.

It is the purpose of ex-Governor Northern, I understand, to extend the organization to every community in the South. I believe a similar organization has already been established at Nashville, Tennessee.

On November 18 there was published in the Atlanta Constitution a letter addressed to the people of Georgia by the Interdenominational Union of Colored Ministers. This letter recites the fact that of every one hundred persons in the State of Georgia over forty are colored, and that by the last Legislature something over \$300,000 was appropriated for the establishment in every Congressional district in the State of an agricultural high school. With this preamble the letter proposes that a great central industrial school for negroes be established, and that schools of domestic

science be established in the cities. The letter suggests "that such an arrangement would be positively helpful to the relations between the races, since it would tend to turn the minds of both away from their antagonisms and furnish a point of harmonious co-operation between them."

The purpose is to give the negro population what the white people are soon to have—thorough training in every department of labor in which they are now engaged. It recognizes the fact that the race question is and will probably continue to be for a long time to a large extent a question of labor. I understand that this project is favored by the white people, and that a sum amounting to something like \$30,000 has already been subscribed toward carrying the plan into effect.

The third and perhaps the most important and far-reaching effort to bring about co-operation among the forces of law and order in both races has been due to Charles T. Hopkins, a young lawyer who has been prominent in politics in the city—a graduate, I am told, of Williams College and attorney for Atlanta University. Mr. Hopkins was one of the more influential members of the original Committee of Safety, and has taken a leading part in all the efforts to suppress violence since that time. The organization which he is now engaged in forming is to be known as the Civic League, and aims to make permanent the condition of peace that now reigns. This movement was started on Thanksgiving Day at a meeting of the Unity Club in Atlanta. The following is a copy of the notice which has been or will eventually be sent out to some five thousand prominent and public-spirited citizens:

One of the results of the recent riot has been a rapidly growing sentiment that some intelligent action should be taken in order to prevent a repetition. Further loss of prestige, injury to business, anxiety, and bloodshed should be avoided if possible.

Inspired with the belief that such measures should be adopted as will in the future prevent similar trouble, and in harmony with the growing sentiment, we, the undersigned, have consented to take the initiative towards an organization having but this one end in view.

This is done after conference with a suffi-

cient number of citizens to justify us in the statement that the great, overwhelming majority of law-abiding people in this country are opposed not only to riots and lynchings, but to any other form of injustice or violation of law.

The letter goes on to state that the objects of the organization are not political, and no one with a political ambition is desired as a member. The purpose of the organization will be to take such steps as will tend to promote peace between the races, secure an impartial administration of justice, and secure permanent protection to white and black alike. A similar association is in process of organization among the colored people. It is believed that no less than 1,500 members of the negro race in Atlanta will be eventually enrolled in this organization, the purpose of which is to co-operate with the organization of the other race in its efforts to secure peace and order in the community.

Already much has been accomplished by the co-operation of the races in this direction. Nineteen of the forty-two negroes originally indicted have been released. Twenty others remain to be tried. The cases against the members of the mob who attacked the negroes have been pressed, and if some who have been guilty have escaped, it has been due, perhaps, to the fact that it is impossible to change in so brief a time the state of feeling which made such an outbreak possible.

Meanwhile an earnest effort has been made through the medium of the newspapers to change public sentiment and enforce a new reverence for law and order. A remarkable series of letters from prominent ministers of the city has been published in the Atlanta Constitution. I can perhaps best give a notion of the tenor of these letters by quoting a few words from the letter of Bishop Seth Ward, of the Methodist Church, to the Constitution, dated October 31. He says:

The race problem in the South can only be solved by raising the moral tone of both races. . . . Dives and all sorts of evil resorts that breed crime in blacks and whites alike must be suppressed. The safety of our Southland demands it. But while the work of suppression and correction is going on, we must give ourselves earnestly to the work

of making moral character among all our people. It can be done. The church, the pulpit, the industrial school, must undertake the task. We dare not shrink from the work because it is slow and beset with difficulties. We of the white race, boasting ourselves the "superior race," must show our superiority by treating with exact justice and Christian consideration the weaker race—the unfortunate race—that dwells in our common territory.

The discussions in the papers in emphasizing different sides of the question have widened the point of view from which the public at large has been disposed to look at the race problem and suggested many new methods for effecting improvement. One of the matters which have been discussed by the committees that are now engaged in forming the Civic League among the white and the colored peoples is the plan of establishing in Atlanta what already exists in Macon, Georgia, namely, a force of colored policemen to preside in the parts of the city occupied almost entirely by colored people. These policemen would be appointed on the recommendation of the members of the Colored Civic League, and, being in a sense their policemen, it is believed that they would have the moral support of the colored population.

Another measure that has been proposed by the League is to employ an attorney to attend the court and, where necessary, assist in the defense of negroes who, through ignorance and a sort of indifference of despair that seems sometimes to overtake them when they are brought before the judge, have need of a friend in court to look after their case. The necessity for this is emphasized by the experience which Charles T. Hopkins, and two other attorneys who recently defended a man who was charged with having committed an assault upon a woman, had. Joe Glenn, the man arrested, was a prosperous farmer and property-owner. He was arrested upon suspicion November 13, and taken to the house of the woman, who positively identified him. It was with difficulty that the officers succeeded in getting him to the city and safely lodged in the city prison. After this had been accomplished Mr. Hopkins went at once to Trial Justice Roan and suggested

to him that it was to the interest of the city at large that the man have a speedy but a fair trial. The Judge agreed, and appointed Mr. Hopkins to try the case, which he did with the assistance of two other well-known attorneys. Upon an examination of the evidence the attorneys became convinced that Glenn was an innocent man, and saw themselves compelled to secure the man's acquittal. They had taken up the case with no other expectation or desire than that the man should be quickly and decently hanged. They secured some of the best citizens in Atlanta to serve upon the jury. Glenn was regularly tried. Twenty-five of his white neighbors swore to his good character. The evidence was so strong that even though he was positively identified by the woman in question, who lost control of herself and denounced him on the witness stand, he was acquitted. The jury was out but four minutes. A circumstance that contributed to his acquittal was the arrest, upon another charge, of the man who has since turned out to be the real criminal.

In an editorial entitled "A Lesson to Rashness" the Atlanta Constitution says:

Never was a stronger plea made for the saner course than in the dramatic ending of this remarkable trial. It is the province of laws to deal impartial justice—punishment to the guilty, vindication to the innocent. Here, without the intervention of the law, an innocent life would have been sacrificed.

This is the first important task accomplished in the spirit, if not in the name, of the new Atlanta Civic League. It is undoubtedly the first time that a negro accused of this crime, who had been positively identified by his supposed victim, ever escaped death. Glenn's attorneys bought him a suit of clothes and gave him a ticket to reach a farmer in Alabama, where he might go and live safely until excitement in the neighborhood of his own home should pass away.

The foregoing, then, is my warrant for the statement that the efforts now being made represent the most radical, far-reaching, and hopeful solution of the race problem that has ever been undertaken by Southern white people.

Tuskegee, Alabama, December 8, 1906.