

*The Negro Problem:
Booker Washington's
Platform*

In *The Outlook* of last week we gave a summary of the platform adopted at the second annual meeting of the so-called Niagara Movement held at Harper's Ferry under the special leadership of Dr. Du Bois. It is instructive to compare with this platform the address by Dr. Booker Washington before the meeting of the National Negro Business League, of which he is President, held last week at Atlanta, Georgia. This address may fairly be regarded as embodying the platform of this League; and just as the Niagara Movement stands for the more

political and assertive spirit in the negro race, so the National Business League, as represented in Dr. Washington's address, stands for the industrial and pacific spirit. Dr. Washington expressed this tersely when he said, "Let constructive progress be the dominant note among us in every section of America; an inch of progress is worth more than a yard of faultfinding." He declared that "while the world may pity a crying, whining race, it seldom respects it." As to the progress actually made, he pointed out that in Georgia alone the negroes own \$20,000,000 worth of taxable property, and that in the whole country, at a conservative estimate, the negro is now paying taxes upon over \$300,000,000 worth of property, while in the Southern States negroes are conducting thirty-three banks. In fact, Dr. Washington believes that there is practically no section of the South where encouragement cannot be found for the negro farmer, mechanic, merchant, and even banker, with reasonable opportunity for prosperity, and he reaffirms his formerly expressed opinion that the Southern States offer the best permanent abode for the negro. He would welcome immigration, for he believes that healthy competition is much needed in the South, and that the salvation of his race is to be found "not in our ability to keep another race out of the territory, but in our learning to get as much out of the soil, out of our occupations or business, as any other race can get out of theirs." Dr. Washington spoke strongly and plainly as to crime on the part of the negro; he admitted the seriousness of the problem, did not hesitate to say that the large number of crimes committed by members of his race was deplorable, but challenged his hearers to show instances of crime committed by graduates of the educational institutions, or, with rare exceptions, by negroes who own their homes, are taxpayers, have regular occupation, and have received education. From these facts he argued that "ignorance will always mean crime, and crime will mean an unwieldy burden fastened about the neck of the South." The crime of lynching was equally denounced. Dr.

Washington said: "Let us bear in mind that every man, white or black, who takes the law into his hands to lynch or burn or shoot human beings supposed to be or guilty of crime is insulting the executive, judicial, and lawmaking bodies of the State in which he resides. Lawlessness in one direction will inevitably lead to lawlessness in other directions. This is the experience of the whole civilized world." The trend and force of Dr. Washington's address might almost be summed up in this sentence: "The more I study our conditions and needs, the more I am convinced that there is no surer road by which we can reach civic, moral, educational, and religious development than by laying the foundation in the ownership and cultivation of the soil, the saving of money, commercial growth, and the skillful and conscientious performance of any duty with which we are intrusted." Comparing this utterance with the platform quoted last week, it will be seen that they are not antagonistic, but that they differ in spirit. One makes demands for the negroes, the other lays its demands upon the negro; one emphasizes his rights, the other his duties; one complains of the wrongs the white inflicts upon the negro, the other asks for co-operation between the white and the negro. We see far more hope for the negro in the spirit of the Business Men's League than in that of the Niagara Movement.