

The Union League Club on Disfranchisement

WE are sorry that Mr. Robert C. Ogden was not present to defend his objections to the resolutions adopted at the meeting of the Union League Club of this city last week, in favor of reducing the representation in Congress of those States which limit suffrage; for there was no one to take the other side. When the subject was brought before the club nine months ago, Mr. Ogden's opposition and that of some others prevailed to postpone a vote until after further investigation by a committee, which last week brought in the resolutions that were adopted by a large majority.

The resolutions first request the Government to instruct the District-Attorneys to prosecute every case where there has been an illegal suppression of votes, if adequate evidence can be obtained. This is right, and no one could properly object to it.

The resolutions next propose that Congress shall thoroughly and impartially investigate the charges of suppression of votes, contrary to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and that, in every case where there is such limitation of the franchise, representa-

tion in Congress be proportionally reduced; and, further, that where present legislation is not sufficient to protect the free exercise of the ballot, amendatory acts be passed to remedy such defects.

It is this resolution that Mr. Ogden, who was unavoidably detained, and some others opposed last spring, on the ground that it would do more harm than good, by stirring up a general feeling against the negro race, and would keep the negro question in politics, much to the injury of the negro.

Beyond question a number of States, Massachusetts among them, have passed legislation limiting the suffrage in such a way as would come under the Amendments. They forbid the ballot to illiterates. It is only just that in such cases representation be reduced, and it is not difficult by the Census to find how many illiterates there are. In Massachusetts the number would be inconsiderable, and the law against illiterate voters is of no appreciable effect and might be repealed. In other States, Louisiana or North Carolina for example, where illiterates are excluded, exception is made of such illiterates as can understand and explain a provision of the State constitution when read to them. It is true that this provision was not meant to be impartially administered. It was intended that the registrars should apply it leniently to whites and more than stringently to negroes; but that is a matter of administration and not of law. What census can tell us how many are properly eligible to vote under the provisions of the law, and how many are excluded?

Be it understood that the provisions of these laws of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Tennessee and Arkansas require educational qualifications; but they say nothing of negroes and they apply, in language, to both races. It is their administration that is unjust and oppressive. They were framed with this purpose. It is only just that such States should have their representation reduced, but how to do it we do not see, because it seems impossible to make any enumeration of those who are ex-

cluded for not understanding what is read to them. It would be very nearly as difficult to make a census of those who are admitted or excluded under the "grandfather" provisions of four States. We wish the figures could be found and the census taken and the representation reduced, but we must face the apparent facts. We do not undervalue the righteous sentiment which underlies the action of the Union League Club; and we are not particularly concerned by the prudential considerations adduced; we simply fail to see any prospect of doing anything about it in this way.

When a total ruling community is determined that a law shall not be enforced, or that justice shall not be done, they are sure to nullify any laws. We have found it out everywhere. Our liquor laws are an example. In such a case the only practicable thing is to reform the community, which is a slow but a sure process. The Union League Club has expressed a prevailing right feeling, but its action will do no further good. We wish its object of reducing representation where the vote is suppressed might be accomplished, but it cannot. Yet another remedy can be slowly applied. It is the old remedy of education, not of the ignorant negro alone, but also of the ignorant white man. The mountaineers and the crackers must have schools, as well as the negroes. The hope of the South and the hope of the country is in the mission work of developing a sentiment that will educate and elevate the ignorant of both races, and that will slowly demand and grant equal honor to character and equal administration of law. Thus only will ignorant whites and negroes become fitted to vote, demand the right to vote and be allowed to vote, and the present injustice come to an end. Does it seem a slow process? Cosmic processes are slow, but they cannot be hastened by lashing the horses of Phœbus to make them rear. It is only forty years since emancipation, and a vast deal has been done in that time. It may take forty years more to right present wrongs; meanwhile missionary societies, and boards of education, and Mr. Ogden's excellent organizations, and schools and colleges

for both races will keep at work and will surely succeed. The action of the Union League Club will be heard as a strong utterance of a just indignation, and will prove that those who fought for equal rights have not fallen from their high moral estate; but much as we wish that what they ask might be done, we expect a slower and a surer remedy.

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