

NOTES ON LIVING PROBLEMS OF THE HOUR.

THE AFRO-AMERICAN.

As I am, in some sense, responsible for the term "Afro-American," in the general application of it to the Afro-American League, organized January 15, 1890, at Chicago, I wish to correct an error into which Senator John T. Morgan allowed himself to lapse in discussing "The Race Problem in the United States," in the September number of *THE ARENA*. Senator Morgan said:

"The Afro-Americans, as the mulattoes describe themselves, believe that a precedent has been set, by their foremost man, which they can follow, with the aid of the politicians, that will secure their incorporation, by marriage, into the white families of the country. These vain expectations will be followed with the chagrin of utter disappointment, and will increase their discontent."

Senator Morgan displays the same amount of recklessness in the general discussion of the "Race Problem" that he exhibits in specifically defining the term "Afro-American." He is so saturated with prejudice and hatred of race that the violence of his argument of fact is worth as much as, and no more than, his argument of fiction, figments of his brain.

As a matter of fact, the term "Afro-American" was first employed by advanced thinkers and writers of papers devoted to the interests of Africans in the United States, as the most comprehensive and dignified term in sight to cover all the shades of color produced by the anxiety of the white men of the South to "secure their incorporation," without "marriage, into the 'black' families of the country." If the Morgans of the South had been as virtuous, as earnest to preserve the purity of Anglo-Saxon blood, before, and even since, the war, as the Senator from Alabama now insists, there would be no mulattoes in the Republic to give them "a Roland for an Oliver."

But the term "Afro-American" was never intended to apply in the circumscribed sense implied by Senator Morgan. It was intended to include all the people in the Republic, of African origin. It does include them. It has been adopted, and is used, almost generally, by the leading newspapers. The term "negro" signifies black. Not three-eighths of the people of African parentage in the United States are black. If they were, there is no

negro race. "Colored" may mean anything or nothing, from extreme white to extreme green; and, in any event, as applied to a race, is a misnomer from every point of view, without force or dignity. Both terms are used by writers everywhere as common nouns, and in a contemptuous sense, just as Senator Morgan uses them. African is a proper name; it has a race behind it; and no writer will venture to treat it as a common noun. The same is true of the term "Afro-American," which includes every man, woman, and child in the country who is not ashamed of his race, and who insists that he shall be honorably designated as other races are.

When the Hon. Frederick Douglass exercised his undoubted right of choice to select a second wife, and took a white lady of splendid social position and acknowledged literary attainments, nearly every one of the one hundred and seventy-five Afro-American newspapers condemned him for it. The paper I edited at the time was one of the few that maintained that Mr. Douglass did perfectly right in exercising his personal preference in selecting his wife. I know that the masses of the people were in sympathy with the indignant protests hurled at Mr. Douglass. The scaffolding under the "precedent" upon which Senator Morgan rears such an imposing edifice thus falls to the ground, upon its ambitious architect, and the "Afro-American," mulatto, and others, standing on the outside of the wreck, can afford to laugh him to scorn.

It is not true, as Senator Morgan insists, that Afro-Americans desire to "secure their incorporation, by marriage, into the white families of the country." I maintain that the facts are all against Senator Morgan. The extensive hybridization of the race, all too true, in this country, is due to white men, not to black men, who exercised, when they had it in their power to do so, their brutal authority, and who now exercise their influence of wealth and of social position to corrupt the women of the race, who everywhere are regarded as the weaker vessels. White men have not shown the same manly honor and Christian self-denial in this respect that Afro-American men have done, nor do they now. Any one familiar with the facts, as Senator Morgan is, knows this to be true and deplors it. The best white blood of the South has for two hundred years gone into the black race; and if it now and in the future returns to plague those who sowed to the wind, is it not highly puerile for these men now to whine like babies over their supposed misfortune, and appeal to the rest of mankind for sympathy, where they deserve but contempt?

It is impossible for two races to live as close together as the Anglo-Saxons and the Afro-Americans do in the South without

the actual fact of miscegenation asserting itself. Laws prohibiting legal unions but aggravate the matter. They may circumscribe, they cannot stamp out the existence of the fact, I will not say the evil. It is true in the South, in the British and Spanish West Indies, in Brazil, in Africa itself, where whites and blacks are brought into contact. If any explanation were needed, it is furnished in the famous couplet of William Cooper:

“Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit Nature’s claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.”

I never saw, and Senator Morgan never saw, an Afro-American who desired social equality with any Anglo-Saxon who did not want it with him. Afro-Americans do not seek it; they do not desire it, except when it comes, as it must ever come, by reason of the mutual likes and dislikes of all the parties concerned. Most southern white men confound civil rights with social privileges. Even so good a lawyer as Senator Morgan does this. What, then, is to be expected of the baser sort? If one of these men pays for a section in a sleeping car, or a seat in an ordinary coach, the moment a black or yellow face appears upon the scene, he imagines he owns the entire car, and proceeds to assert his preposterous claim in the most savage and brutal manner. The same is true in an eating house. When Afro-Americans protest against this monstrous confounding of things, Senator Morgan, and those who share his views, cry aloud, on the floor of the Congress, and in the pages of *THE ARENA* and other literary agents, “The niggers want social equality!” “We must protect our women!” and the like. Astounding is it that a whole nation of sixty million people can and do listen with patience to this sort of hypocrisy and humbug!

The Afro-American of to-day is a new creature. Senator Morgan knows very little about him. He lives apart from him. He has no social and little business association with him. He sees him as he goes to and fro in the town he visits once a year at his home, and in Washington, where he resides the greater part of the year, but he has small contact with him. The eminent men of the race, residing in Washington, for instance,—such as Frederick Douglass, Minister Resident and Consul General to Hayti; Ex-Minister John M. Langston, John R. Lynch, Fourth Auditor of the Treasury; Ex-Senator B. K. Bruce, Ex-Register of the Treasury, Recorder of Deeds of the District; Dr. James M. Townsend, Recorder of the General Land Office; Mr. John F. T. Cook, Superintendent of the “colored” schools of the district; Bishop John M. Brown, and a hundred others at the Capi-

tal I could mention, men in whose homes are to be found as much culture, refinement, and evidences of wealth as can be found in the homes of the best Anglo-Saxons in the South,— what does Senator Morgan know about these men, who reflect in their successes the possibilities of the race ?

The men who have in the past talked most about the "Race Problem," have distorted the facts to fit their bed of Procrustes' prejudice, and misrepresented the real condition, the real sentiments, the real aspirations, of the people they arraign before the bar of public opinion and condemn unheard as aliens, as an incumbrance upon the face of the earth, and consign with the stroke of the pen to Africa, to the West Indies, to anywhere, — except to the South, where they are, where they belong, and where they are going to abide, in sunshine and in shadow, until the great Republic shall go the way of Babylon, of Greece, and of Rome, "the Niobe of nations."

There are two sides to every question. The Afro-American, — who is not all black nor all yellow, but a good deal of both complexions, — understands his side of it.

T. THOMAS FORTUNE.

THE "JEWISH QUESTION" IN RUSSIA.

THE civilized elements of European and American society have recently been aroused to the intolerableness of the physical and moral existence of the Russian political prisoners. Much interest is just now being taken in the condition of those who love not wisely but too well the suffering people of their unhappy country, and who are treated as criminals of the most degraded kind because of their belief in progress and political freedom. The sympathy for the persecuted Russian revolutionists has prompted the petitioning of the Russian government and the establishment of an English journal in London for the purpose of advocating Russian political freedom and of protesting against the brutal treatment of the Russian reformers by their despotic and reactionary government.

Every lover of liberty and human advancement can but feel gratified at this manifestation of true liberal sentiment. But it is at least doubtful that the agitation will cause any tangible improvement in the affairs with which it concerns itself. It is, of course, not to be expected that the Russian autocrat will be induced to grant his subjects any sort of freedom ; it is highly improbable that public opinion, were it most determinedly and emphatically opposed to his policy, would influence the government