

The Dangerous Classes at the South.

[From Harper's Weekly.]

The latest exploit of the dangerous class at the South is one of the most horrible of all. The Vicksburg massacre seems to have been wholly without a cause, and the results of that rage for violence and bloodshed that marks the depraved and profligate young men of a land of ignorance and barbarity. No State, indeed, had heretofore shown clearer traits of receiving prosperity than Mississippi, and nowhere had life and person been apparently more secure. A republican government, mild, tolerant, and not inequitable, had slowly produced harmony among all its people; the productiveness of the State had returned; Vicksburg and Natchez had risen from their ruins; the laboring class worked cheerfully; and good morals, education, and religion were swiftly placing Mississippi in a high rank of civilization compared with disordered Louisiana or Arkansas. In fact, we had received from one of its white citizens, apparently an honest and intelligent witness, an indignant reproof because we had denounced the White League of the South in no gentle phrases. He denied that it existed. He described the happy condition of his own county, where the whites were in the majority, yet where the colored children went freely to their schools; where the teachers were well paid, both white and colored; where "three out of five of the Board of Supervisors were black men;" where the two races lived together in perfect friendship and peace, and nothing remained to mar the work of reconstruction. "When I witness all these things," our correspondent added, "and reflect that we are only an average Southern community, I am indignant and insulted at the slanders referred to." We had never, indeed, alluded to Mississippi, and had spoken only of States in which the White League ruled. But unhappily the prosperity and good fortune of Mississippi have excited the malice of the secret assassins, and the dreadful deeds they have committed in Louisiana and Arkansas have been surpassed by the massacre of Vicksburg. The White Leaguers are evidently resolved that the harmony and progress described by our correspondent shall exist no longer. They have brought bloodshed and war into the hapless community. They have sown the seeds of endless enmity. The same demagogic wickedness which marked them at Coushatta or Grant Parish, in Texas and Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee, has risen to an extraordinary excess in Mississippi, and they have shot down helpless and harmless colored people as they begged for mercy or fled terrified to their homes.

The story, indeed, is so shocking as to be incredible if it had not been told by the latest appliances of modern civilization. Such horrible monsters apparently do not exist upon the earth as these "blood-bespattered young men of the South," to use the epithet of the Times correspondent. The White Leaguers had planned their bloody deed with that low cunning that every where marks them. They procured the indictment of the colored officials of Vicksburg, it is stated, by intimidation, for various offenses. They called a meeting of the white citizens, and declared that the time for action had come. They went to the colored Sheriff, Crosby, the School Superintendent Cardozo, and others, and ordered them to resign their offices, and threatened to hang them if they resisted. The colored men fled from the town; but Governor Ames denounced the conduct of the rioters, and a considerable number of colored people from the country approached Vicksburg to defend the men whom they had elected to office. Yet they had made no hostile demonstration, nor had apparently designed any. But the White Leaguers had now the opportunity they desired. They began at once the massacre of the negroes. Their first victim was a colored Presbyterian clergyman, whom they seem to have murdered in the street in an excess of malice. They then pursued the colored people into the country, and butchered them without mercy. Some were shot as they knelt in prayer, some as they fled from their pursuers. It is not pretended that the negroes made any resistance, and scarcely that they gave the least provocation. The number killed is stated at from one to two hundred, but it is probable, as in the similar massacres in Louisiana or Alabama, that the true number of the victims will never be known. The assassins next called a meeting of the citizens of the town, prepared an address to the people of the country, in which they confess their own violation of the laws, and which was signed by presidents of banks and other "leading" men of the place—and assured the country that peace once more reigned in Vicksburg. The associated telegraph company, so often the apologist for the murderers of Alabama and Louisiana, gave the first news of the massacre to the North in the chosen words of the conspirators against the peace of Mississippi. But Governor Ames and various trustworthy eye-witnesses of the terrible scene attest its horrors and the innocence of the colored officials. It is stated that detachments from the White League of Louisiana lent the aid of their experience to their allies in Mississippi, and shared their guilt. It is probable that the whole infamous association is every where planning mischief.

We suggested some months ago that the success of the Democratic party at the North must encourage the dangerous classes in the Southern States to new outrages, and endanger

the lives of the white and colored Republicans, not because we thought that the more intelligent members of the Democracy were willing to share in the crimes of the White Leaguers, but because the White Leaguers were so ignorant as to believe them capable of doing so. They evidently fancy that the recent election was an implied approval of all their acts, and have begun a war against all the Republican governments at the South. To this degree the Democracy must be held responsible for the recent disorders and massacres in the Southern States, and it would seem their especial duty to show in some plain way their abhorrence of such methods of gaining political power, so shameful and so perilous to freedom. But still more is it the duty of Republicans to rise from their lethargy and re-assert that strength which they really possess in every Northern State. Let the people show their hatred for murder and violence in all the new elections. Nothing but the defeat of Republicanism has made New Orleans rebellious and Vicksburg a scene of bloodshed. Nor can any thing restore peace to Mississippi, Arkansas, or Louisiana, but a perfect union of the North, East, West, in a resolute policy toward the Southern marauders. In their own section there is nothing that can resist them. Their press is dumb; the wiser majority in every Southern State, who, no doubt, fear and abhor the murderous company, are powerless before it. This desperate class of men drove the South into rebellion fourteen years ago, and left it shorn of its wealth and honor, plunged in intolerable poverty, and clamorous for the national aid.

The White League of 1866 was composed of the same elements of cruelty and ignorance that now mark its successor of 1874. And the people of the South were driven into the civil war often with the knives of the assassins at their breasts. At its close, when peace and repose might have restored a new prosperity to the fair land from the Potomac to the Rio Grande, the White League once more interfered. In the form of the Ku-Klux it spread terror and bloodshed through every Southern State, and checked that influx of immigration and capital which was also needed to make Georgia and Mississippi as prosperous and as happy as the great Northwest. Its fatal influence was strikingly apparent in Louisiana. During the period from the close of the rebellion to the year 1868 a remarkable prosperity seemed to have dawned upon the State. Its fertile lands were eagerly sought for; a tide of immigration flowed in upon it; New Orleans was full of commercial activity, and its shops and warehouses, hotels and private buildings, could scarcely contain the growing population or the active trade. In 1867 the Ku-Klux association began its assassinations and outrages, and capital, immigration, and commerce fled at once from the distressed community. Since 1868 the fear of its dangerous class and the constant insecurity of life and property have made New Orleans no attractive place for merchants and mechanics. Its shops and houses are untenanted, or let for only a meagre return; its streets have been the scene of frequent conflicts between the White Leaguers and their opponents; and in the midst of their recent outbreaks, when they held the city for two or three days, the lives of the most conspicuous Democrats who counseled moderation and compromise were in plain danger from their murderous allies. The majority were forced to follow the guidance of the most violent and least reputable of their own party, and countenance a scene of massacre and woe. The New Orleans Times, a paper strongly Democratic, yet apparently opposed to riot and murder, seems to have felt itself in danger. It was threatened with suppression, yet it bravely defied the White Leaguers in the midst of their brief power. It denounced the "brag-gart and boasting Boabdils of the ultra-Southern journals," and warned New Orleans of the perils of treason. Yet the dangerous classes have evidently overpowered the moderate opposition in Louisiana and Mississippi, and their reign of terror has reached at last to Vicksburg. They are united, unopposed, of savage cruelty, yet need but to be resisted to be overthrown.

The moderate Democracy at the South has plainly lost all control over the violent members of its party, and it is quite impossible to say where this spirit of massacre may next reach. The whole people may soon be forced to interfere in order to save the South from utter ruin. Yet it is with natural regret that one must survey the fate of this fair territory, reaching from the Potomac to the Rio Grande, so full of the finest attributes of nature, so fitted to make millions happy and prosperous, suddenly checked in its new career of progress, deprived of education, peace, repose, turned back into a savage barbarism, and ruled by a class of men whose brutality, ignorance, and cruelty seem doubly monstrous in the light of a general civilization. It is only in the return to republican principles and a severe enforcement of good order that the Southern States can hope for an escape from the control of their criminal classes.

Recent reports from the neighborhood of Steyport show that the whole section of country has fallen into a kind of anarchy. General Merrill, a brave and cultivated officer, noted for having suppressed the Ku-Klux of South Carolina, has re-established order in the town itself, but through all the inland districts of Northwestern Louisiana there is neither law nor justice, no safety for human life nor security for property. The White Leaguers hunt the negroes from their farms and homes to the woods, and shoot them as they formerly shot fugitive slaves. A newspaper in Shreveport directs the as-

assassinations, and advocates a war of races. The same bitter hostility, we are told by the colored people, who seem to have but scanty means of relating their wrongs so the public, prevails through Georgia and Alabama. The courts deny them justice, the White Leaguers rob them of their wages. They plan a general emigration, but scarcely know where to go. The plots of the White League already threaten the peace of the Carolinas and the Virginia. Anarchy and ruin hang over the South, and the lawless deeds of a small minority of its population have made land almost valueless in Georgia, and threaten to leave Louisiana in great part an uncultivated waste.

To remedy these disorders is the first step in restoring the prosperity of the Southern States, and in this labor public opinion will have a large share. There is a general desire that every official at the South who betrays his trust should be punished; that every white or colored man who is a speculator or a thief should feel all the severity of the law. But the massacres of the White Leaguers are evidently done not to enforce law, but to destroy it. Their pretenses are falsehoods, their aim the general ruin. Against them the press may well direct all its weapons. Already they are beginning to feel the force of public opinion, and Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia labor honestly to repress crime. Such horrible deeds as that at Vicksburg, or the endless outrages in Louisiana and Alabama, show the need of some vigorous and resolute action. The colored people will make quiet and valuable citizens if protected in all their rights. On their industry and progress rests the chief productiveness of the South. To suffer them to be destroyed would bring commercial disaster to St. Louis and New York; and already the malicious deeds of the White League have cost the country untold millions, besides fixing a lasting stain upon its humanity.

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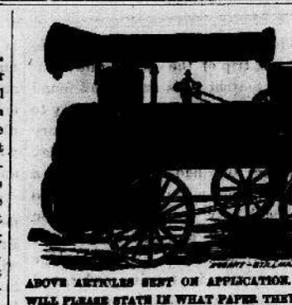
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