BLEASEISM A CONDITION RATHER THAN A THEORY

For the May issue of the Survey Graphic, James C. Derieux, formerly executive secretary to Governor R A. Cooper, now a member of the staff of the New York Globe, has written, under the title of "Crawling Toward the Promised Land," a notable article for which "Bleaseism," so-called, is the theme. Mr. Derieux, himself a South Carolinian, has, in writing this article, shown a keen insight into the conditions, historical, social and economic, which are responsible for what is known as "Bleaseism"—of which, by the way, Cole L. Blease is only the titular head. The conditions which brought about "Bleaseism" were deeply rooted before Blease himself was out of his early teens and will, doubtless, exist long years after he has ceased to be a political factor in South Carolina. To it he has merely given a name by which it is, for the time being to be distinguished—and perhaps by any other name it would sound as sweet. The following excerpts are taken from the article.

"Cole L. Blease will be running again next summer for the office of governor of South Carolina. The boll weevil has reached the peak of his destructive activities in that state. Taxes have been going up and the price of cotton has been coming down. War psychology has waned and in its stead there is a waxing public temper of the sort which speakers like to denounce and dispose of as the spirit of unrest. Therefore Blease is abroad.

"The anti-Blease man whose beliefs and desires, wishes and judgment, are synonymous will tell you that Blease is politically dead. The more observant man may not agree, for he knows that Blease, a personality, represents Bleaseism, a condition.

"The strength of Blease, the most talked of man South Carolina has produced in a generation, and the causes of Bleaseism, arise from several sources. Chief among them are the social and economic history of the state, and the quaint manner in which the one political party, the Democratic, conducts its campaigns."

The article continues to explain that the primary is all important, the general election only a matter of form, and refers to the antiquated rule that the candidates shall make a tour of the counties, speaking in each one.

The county-to-county campaign method is a decided advantage to the stump speaker who can 'whoop 'em up,' continues Mr. Derieux. "It discourages the man who has one disposition for the hustings. Blease is a past master in arousing enthusiasm and his enemies have often played into his hands by hurling at him accusations which gave him the chance to shout back his reprisals from the stump. He is strong in invective. He has personality, political acumen and political courage. He sprang from the masses and he knows them. He calls them by their first names."

Some space is devoted to a description of a South Carolina campaign meeting—all of which is familiar. Continuing:

"One after another the candidates speak. Some urge this, some that; some attack one thing, some another . . .. There are points upon which there is unanimity . All were born on the farm. All favor 'justice tempered with mercy.' All stand for 'law'n' order.' They have all followed the old gray mule . . . up and down the cotton and corn rows, have seen the sun rise up in the morning and worked on until it sank behind yon western hills." There is always appeal, too, for the old Confederate veteran.

"The time arrives for Blease to speak. There is a wave of animation. Any stranger could pick out Blease men from those who oppose him, for their faces are expectant. 'Tell 'em about it, Coley'; shouts a man in the crowd; 'Goddermighty ain't he a man'," says another.

"Blease pulls up his sleeves, looks over the audience, and launches into his subject. He denounces his enemies and sticks to his friends, declares he has nothing to explain and nothing to apologize for, hits hard at the hostile press, attacks high taxes and those in office who opposed them, gives his opinion of the creation of new offices to be filled with political 'pets,' declares his devotion to the working man's cause, and so on until the driving, dynamic, concluding rhetoric is drowned in cheering. He knows the chords to play upon. He knows the popular mind and the little things that effect it. He can be serious or can laugh, can be sentimental or vitriolic, according to the subject in hand. He can express the grouches, the hopes, the irritations, the ambitions of those who believe in him.

A vote for Bleaes, as the writer explains, is not so much an affirmative ballot, as it is a vote of protest —"of protest against conditions that existed before the War of Secession."

A picture of the charming civilization that grew up in South Carolina prior to the sixties is deftly drawn the cavalier days, the days of aristocracy and culture.

"The War of Secession broke up the tranquilty of southern colonial life . . . . and destroyed utterly the institution of slavery, upon which the agrarian masters had depended. The great plantations collapsed. The cavalier, if he survived to come home at all, came into a desolution that demanded a fresh beginning. If his home had stood in the path traversed by General Sherman's army, he came home to look wistfully upon a pile of ashes at each end of which stood a gaunt chimney—giant gravestones left there to mark the place where a manner of life that now was dead once existed. 'Sherman monuments,' they were called."

But, as the writer points out, the end of the war was not the end of the trouble for South Carolina. Reconstruction followed hard upon its heels. There was the carpet-bagger and the scallawag, negro domination, the General Assembly in which negroes were in the majority.

"Not until 1876 did the state finally emerge from the nightmare of reconstruction. Then, under the leadership of Wade Hampton, lieutenant-general in the Confederate States army and a powerful man of the old aristocracy, the native white population regained the reins of government.

"There was a breathing spell, when men contented themselves with getgetting rid of a bad thing. Men looked at social arrnagements as they looked upon them before the war, but still there was no apparent friction. Reconstruction had bound all white men together in a common cause and had made of the Democratic party the white man's party. . . . . Fields were again tilled nda life was becoming reasonably happy. . . . There came other governors of the old school. The state moved along smoothly. The whites were supreme and the negroes as a mass rather enjoyed the relief from a condition into which they had been suddenly thrust without preparation. Possibly life was running too smoothly, for education and other essentials were neglected. The great trouble in the past became a state of mind, and the fine gentlemen who managed the affairs of government exerted no influence sufficitnt to effect a rejuvenation of social and economic life. . . . . Meanwhile the rural crossroads merchants was becoming a factor in the economic life of the state. He lived by virtue of a bad, but unavoidable system. He supplied the small farmers with their food and their fertilizer, taking a lien or mortgage on the crops. Then he took the crops. Country stores were social centers for men who gathered about them in leisure moments and talked. The church supplied something of a social life for the women. There was nothing bustling about life in those days. People were mostly poor, but fairly happy. They didn't care much. . . The state was sunning itself.

"Benjamin R. Tillman drove in the next mile post. This strong, high tempered, caustic tongued man—real democrat and real leader—appeared in the eighties and early nineties as the Moses to lead the 'wool hat and one gallus boys' out from the rule of the only family Pharaohs and into their political own. 'The bottom rail will be on top' was a rallying cry of the day. Tillman attacked the government, which, he said, emanated from the Episcopal church—the fashionable church of the state—and South Carolina college, the institution to which many of the old regime went for instruction. He flew into the face of the astonished and staid order of things. The conservative papers arrayed their denunciatory adjectives against him. He introduced undignified methods into public life. He used violent language, and trampled carelessly upon the traditional sense of propriety. . . . . He brought the wool hat boys into consciousness of themselves. He ignited the fires of class feeling that had smouldered imperceptibly. He was the irresistible embodiment of the white masses, and twice he was elected governor. . . . So strong was the Tillmanic force that it actually unseated from the United States the state's idol, General Wade Hampton. . . .

"There was another political relapse, another return to 'normalcy.' The state was becoming more prosperous. . . . .The cotton factory had appeared in the cotton fields. . . The cotton factory offered the small farmer a chance to get money for his labor, and he wanted money—he and the mountaineer. . . .So out of the mountains there came the operatives for the mills in the Piedmont section, and from farms here and there came operatives for the factories around Columbia and throughout Horse Creek valley. . . .The small farmer was still living without much hope. He was always a year behind. With the cotton he gathered he paid his supply merchant, and immediately started making new accounts. He was a one-crop planter because he knew no other crop to grow, and because cotton always had a cash market. . . . .The mill operative was put at work that gave him no chance for self-expression, living among others of his kind, and taking no pride in his product because it could bear no marks of individual impress. The floating population in the mill villages was large, and generally the workers were a bit restive; certainly not enthusiastic. The spirit of life in them was not being satisfied. . . . .The man who rose early for a greasy breakfast, then worked and came for a greasy dinner, going back to his toil until a fried supper was ready, could scarcely be expected to view politics or life with a sweet, philosophic calm.

"Along came Blease, a Tillmanite of old, but repudiated by Tillman after Blease's first term as governor, and described by the sententious old senator as the 'illegitimate political son of Tillmanism.' But Tillman followers were for Blease, as they had not yet seen the promised land. He came with no constructive program for deliverance. He had no far-reaching plan for effecting a rearrangement of life. He squarely opposed compulsory education and compulsory medical inspection of school children. He was no believer in sumptuary laws. But the enthusiasm he aroused was tremendous. He spoke for the poor man. That was it! He was the mouthpiece for the poor man's discontent. He articulated the poor man's unexpressed emotions, ambitions and disgruntlements; did it garishly, did it sentimentally, did it courageously. He led, and gained his leadership because he did it.

"Blease was first elected governor in 1910, and was reelected in 1912. Following the two administrations of Blease as governor, there was a spirited reaction. In 1914, before the end of his second term, he had run for United States senate but had been defeated. His successor at the state house was Richard I. Manning, a member of an old and aristocratic family. He was the choice of the conservative interests which reckoned on a pro-commercial administration. In 1916, Blease, again the turbulent factor in politics, ran a third time for governor, this time against Manning who was offering for reelelction. The anti-Blease forces 'fought the devil with fire,' as the saying goes. They won, Blease being defeated by a bare 5,000 votes."

A tribute is paid by the writer to Governor Manning in the statement as made in passing that "his efforts were more in behalf of mankind than of business."

"In 1918 Blease ran again for the United States senate, entering the race against Senator Tillman and one or two other candidates. Senator Tillman died after the entry lists closed and before the primary. His death left Blease opposed by but one man who could be counted upon as strong enough to make a real fight. Blease was defeated, however, by a decisive majority. War psychology was powerful; he was anti-Wilson if not anti-war; and the regimented bind was too much for him.

"Blease comes forward again now with the stage all set for him to play the role of frenzied friend of the poor man. He comes when times are far from good; when men, having tasted and felt of luxury in the boom years of the war, are bitter because this new standard of living so summarily collapsed along with cotton prices, when war psychcology has given way to disappointment over non-realization of war ideals, when the pest of the cotton fields is thriving in South Carolina as never before. When, as one observer has remarked, 'Every dam boll weevil has in his shoot the making of a vote for Coley. . . . .

"Blease will surely fight hard for retrenchment. He will again voice sentiments that are in the breasts of obscure men. He will capitalize the irritations, touch on the sore spots, play on the complexes, and laugh at the futility of the cotton schemes that have been advanced. He is a devil-may-care talker, and his observations are acute.

"In the last campaign Blease was tainted, his opponents say, with Republicanism—a terrible thing to say of a man in South Carolina! He opposed the League of Nations. He eschewed the works of Wilson. Possibly this will be used against him, but the elements in his favor together with his magnetic personality, will enable him to throw a scare into the camp of his enemies. Unless he is keenly foiled, he will have his opponents on the defensive while the contest is still young. True, his old pardoning record will be brought up again, for he turned loose approximately fifteen hundred convicts. This however, was never a powerful count against him, because, while squandering pardons with a lavish hand, he broke up a nefarious convict system in the state penitentiary, a reform never freely admitted by his opponents.

"To judge by past campaigns, out of a total vote of 110,000 to 150,000 Blease generally has as the wiseacres say, some 35,000 in his vest pocket—has them before he makes a speech. 'I'd vote for him if I seen him stealin' sheep,' said one follower, and his remark illustrates the inalienable attachment of the 100 per cent Blease men. Set over against this nucleus is an equally large number, possibly a larger number, of voters who would not vote for him, though he should turn angel. The fight is for the floaters between these two groups of bitter-enders. . . . . The point in the political fight now is not the success or the defeat of Blease. The thing to be grasped is the impelling condition that invited him out from his large law practice again into public life. Though he should lose, what of it if he polls nearly half the votes? That will show, almost conclusively as his election would show, that the average man is demanding another way out than conservative mediocrity has to offer.

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT

I will make a final settlement of the estate of Frances Moore in the Probate Court for Newberry County, S. C., on Saturday, the 22nd day of July, 1922, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon and will immediately thereafter ask for my discharge as executor of said estate.

EBBIE T. MAYER,
Executor.

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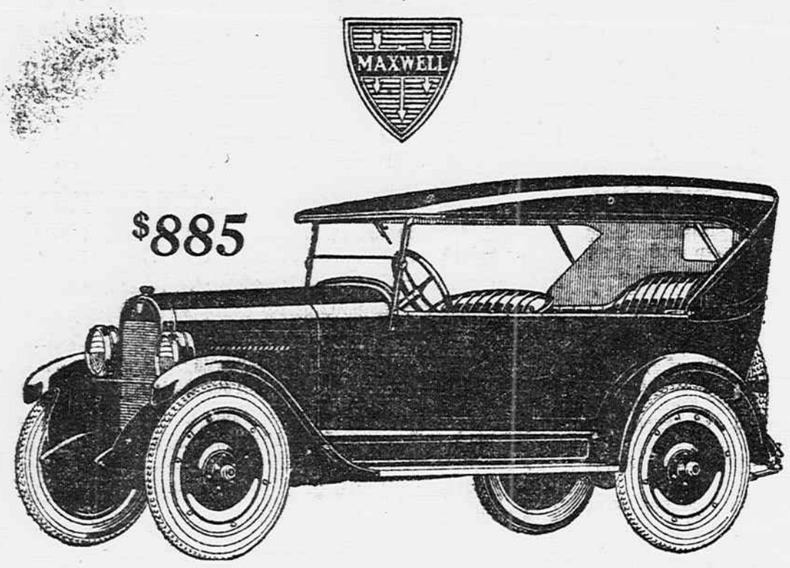

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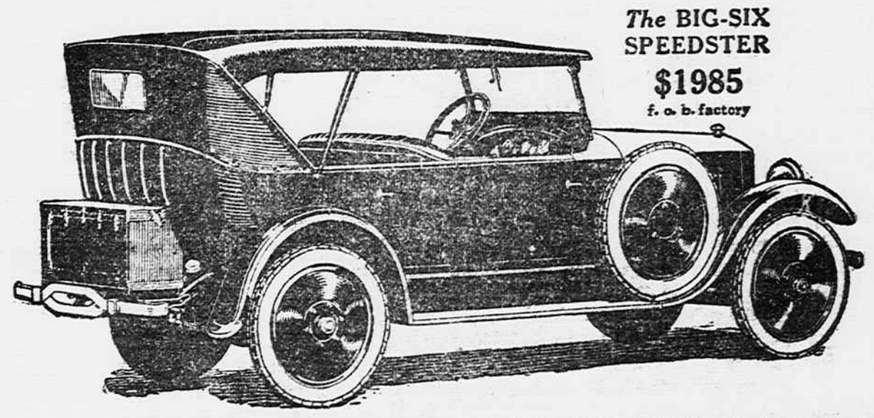

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