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How enfranchisement
stops lynching.

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ORIGINAL RIGHTS MAGAZINE

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THE CENTRAL BUILDING, 25 W. 42D STREET

NEW YORK CITY

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economic system of civilized peoples and that the struggle for the survival of the fittest, destructive to life, health, and happiness was sanctioned by the God of mercy and love; to-day the wisest of men and thousands of divines boldly assert that the one is a woeful error of the human mind, and the other a relic of heathen barbarism and superstition.

Whenever, in past ages, the wisest and holiest of men have raised the standard of truth and justice in contradiction of long accepted beliefs they were ostracised by the fetish worshipers or suffered martyrdom. But truth is mighty and must finally prevail. Succeeding generations accepted the new ideas and advanced in the humane. When we turn the pages of history we shudder at the woeful tales of the death of martyrs and of the destruction of nations and realms because generations refused to accept the new and stubbornly adhered to the past. Likewise, future generations may wonder at our folly which may sweep us into anarchy and ruin because of our idolatrous veneration for antiquated institutions that by the passions of avarice, ambition, and fear have been transmitted from the Dark Ages to the age of science and democracy.

How Enfranchisement Stops Lynchings

By IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT.

THE Negro question has been present with the American people in one form or another since the landing of the Dutch Slaveship at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. For twelve years the founders of the English colony had indifferently succeeded in getting permanently established. The younger sons of the British were miserable failures as pioneers. They would not do the work necessary to wrest a livelihood from the bowels of the earth, and they could not make the Indian do it for them. One such colony perished from the face of the earth and succeeding ones lagged with indifferent success until

the coming of those fourteen African slaves, who became the hewers of wood, drawers of water and tillers of the soil. They were submissive, and easily dominated, so they were harnessed to the plow and became the beasts of burden; then the Jamestown Colony began to thrive.

So successful was this first venture into slavery, that the shores of Africa were again invaded. Men, women and children were overpowered, captured, crowded into the holds of the slaveships, brought to this new country and made the slaves of the colonists. For two hundred and fifty years this condition obtained. The original fourteen slaves became four millions. Their unrequited toil had made this country blossom as a rose, created vast wealth for the masters and made the United States one of the mighty nations of the earth, ere the American people hearkened to the voice which commanded, "Let my people go." When the mighty upheaval came which almost rent the American nation in twain, it struck the shackles from the Negro slave, and did not stop until he was not only a free man, but a citizen.

The flower of the nineteenth century civilization for the American people was the abolition of slavery, and the enfranchisement of all manhood. Here at last was squaring of practice with precept, with true democracy, with the Declaration of Independence and with the Golden Rule. The reproach and disgrace of the twentieth century is that the whole of the American people have permitted a part, to nullify this glorious achievement, and make the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution playthings, a mockery and a byword; an absolute dead letter in the Constitution of the United States. One-third of the states of the union have made and enforced laws which abridge the rights of American citizens. Although the Constitution specially says, no state shall do so, they *do* deprive persons of life, liberty and property without due process of law, and *do* deny equal protection of the laws to persons of Negro descent. The right of citizens to vote is denied and abridged in these states, on account of race, color and previous condition of servitude, and has been so denied ever since the withdrawal of the United States troops from the South. This in spite of the fifteenth amendment, which declares that no state shall do this.

These rights were denied first by violence and bloodshed, by ku-klux klans, who during the first years after the Civil War murdered Negroes by wholesale, for attempting to exercise the rights given by these amendments, and for trusting the government which was powerful enough to give them the ballot, to be strong enough to protect them in its exercise. Senator Tillman told how it was done in a speech on the floor of the United States Senate, when he said, that he and the people of South Carolina shot Negroes to death to keep them from voting. This they did till Congressional investigation of Ku-Klux methods turned the limelight on the unspeakable barbarism of those wholesale murders.

The South changed its tactics after that investigation, but never once let up on its aim to nullify and finally abrogate these amendments, and rob the Negro of the only protection to his citizenship—his ballot. Again we have the testimony of the United States Senator, on the floor of the Senate, as to how this was further done, when Senator Tillman defiantly told how he and his compatriots stuffed ballot boxes, and threw out those of that remnant of the black South, which still tried to register its gratitude at the polls.

When this bewildered race turned in dazed appeal to the Government which gave it freedom and the ballot, awaiting explanation and beseeching protection, it was told that the Government had made a mistake in enfranchising them; that it had offended the South by so doing, and was now busy repealing the civil rights bill, affirming Jim Crow legislation, upholding disfranchising state constitution, and removing in every way possible the constitutional guarantees to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, removing everything, in fact, which was offensive to those who had fired on the flag and tried to break up the union, and the Negro must now look out for himself.

This he has done for the past thirty years as best he could. He was advised that if he gave up trying to vote, minded his own business, acquired property and educated his children, he could get along in the South without molestation. But the more lands and houses he acquired, the more rapidly discriminating laws have been passed against him by those who control the ballot, and less protection is given by the law makers for his life, liberty and property. The Negro has been given separate and inferior schools, because he has no ballot.

He therefore cannot protest against such legislation by choosing other law makers, or retiring to private life those who legislate against his interests. The more he sends his children to school the more restrictions are placed on Negro education, and he has absolutely no voice in the disposition of the school funds his taxes help to supply. His only weapon of defense has been taken from him by legal enactment in all of the old confederacy—and the United States Government, a consenting Saul stands by holding the clothes of those who stone and burn him to death literally and politically.

With no sacredness of the ballot there can be no sacredness of human life itself. For if the strong can take the weak man's ballot, when it suits his purpose to do so, he will take his life also. Having successfully swept aside the constitutional safeguards to the ballot, it is the smallest of small matters for the South to sweep aside its own safeguards to human life. Thus "trial by jury" for the black man in that section has become a mockery, a plaything of the ruling classes and rabble alike. The mob says: "This people has no vote with which to punish us or the consenting officers of the law, therefore we indulge our brutal instincts, give free rein to race prejudice and lynch, hang, burn them when we please." Therefore, the more complete the disfranchisement, the more frequent and horrible has been the hangings, shootings, and burnings.

The records show that beginning with 1882, in which year there were fifty-two persons lynched, there was steady increase until 1892, when two hundred and fifty persons were lynched with the utmost cruelty, publicity and barbarism. Public sentiment condoned and approved this method of disposing of Negroes suspected or accused of misdemeanor or crime against white persons. The custom spread to the North, East and West and lynchings and burnings occurred in any community in which a crime was committed and suspicion put on the Negro. An effort made in 1893 to get these facts before the conscience of the world, proved by statistics based on charges made by the lynchers themselves, that less than one-fourth of the persons hanged, shot and burned by white Christians were even accused of the usual crime—that of assaulting white women.

From the year 1894 lynching decreased year by year for the next decade. The conscience of the nation was again lulled to sleep and

the record of the past ten years shows a surprising increase in lynchings and riot even in the North. No Northern state has more frequently offended in this crime than Illinois, the State of Lincoln, Grant and Logan. Since 1893 there have been sixteen lynchings within the State, including the Springfield riot. With each repetition there has been increased violence, rioting and barbarism. The last lynching, which took place November 11th of last year in Cairo, was one of the most inhuman spectacles ever witnessed in this country.

The Negroes of Illinois have taken counsel together for a number of years over Illinois' increased lynching record. They elected one of their number to the State Legislature in 1904, who secured the passage of a bill which provided for the suppression of mob violence, not only by punishment of those who incited lynchings, but provided for damages against the City and County permitting lynchings. The Bill goes further and provides that if any person shall be taken from the custody of the Sheriff or his deputy and lynched, it shall be prima facie evidence of failure on the part of the Sheriff to do his duty. And upon that fact being made to appear to the Governor, he shall publish a proclamation declaring the office of Sheriff vacant, and such Sheriff shall not thereafter be eligible to either election or reappointment to the office. Provided, however, that such former Sheriff may within ten days after such lynching occurs file with the Governor his petition for reinstatement, and give ten days' notice of the filing of such petition. If the Governor upon hearing the evidence and argument, shall find that such Sheriff has done all within his power to protect the life of such prisoner then the Governor may reinstate the Sheriff and the decision of the Governor shall be final. This Bill passed both houses, was signed by Governor Deneen and became a law in 1905.

In the Springfield riot and lynching of two years later, the only parts of this law that were applicable were those providing punishment for the persons inciting rioting and lynching, and damages for the relatives of the victims of the mob. The men lynched then were not prisoners in the custody of the Sheriff, but peaceable, lawabiding citizens whom the mob lynched at their homes for the fun of it. Because of the dangerous public sentiment, which says it is all right to kill so long as the victim is a Negro, no jury has been found in