SOCIALISMS IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

The cancerous disease which has struck its roots into the heart of so many of the oldest and most civilized American communities, assumes in different States different aspects. In Massachusetts—a State which has in some densely settled parts a large and ignorant working population, and, at the same time, by keeping alive the power and influence of the bar, has preserved the traditions and usages of a period when it was governed by lawyers—the government has passed into the hands of a legal demagogue, who originally got his power by cajoling a local proletariat, and has kept it by getting control of the powerful Federal Administration, which, silently but ceaselessly working year in and year out, gradually sapsthe foundations of the feeble and mutable State government. In New York, a community far less homogeneous and law-abiding than Massachusetts, with a population continually changing and intent only on making money, the preliminary moves in the game were found to be easy enough by a totally different sort of leader. In New York, neither education nor a regular profession proved necessary. All that was needed was to begin with “sympathy with the masses.” After that, stealing and forging did the rest. It was Tweed’s great misfortune that he belonged to a losing party. If he not made the mistake of allying his fortunes with the Democrats, and so losing the chance of getting permanent control of the Custom-house and Post-office, he might still be distributing coal to the poor of New York, and hold a position second only to Mr. Thomas Murphy or Mr. Butler himself in the affections of the head of the Administration. Tweed is now in jail, while Butler is the leader of the House, but they are both products of the same general causes, with just such individual differences as we might expect from the different localities which have produced them. The same disease has been rotting away the fibre of the South Carolina government, and has produced, to feed and fatten on the corruption which engenders them, not one, but a swarm of little Tweeds and little Butlers, some black and some white. South Carolina, perhaps from her impoverished condition, has not yet reached the point at which a single demagogue or thief, armed with some Federal judge’s order or backed by some Custom-house gang of hired voters, gets control of the local machinery and bids defiance to law and morality. “Butlerism” in South Carolina is a more complex affair.

The present condition of South Carolina can only be understood by a consideration of the character of the population and the changes which have taken place in it since the close of the war. There are now about three hundred thousand whites in the State to four hundred thousand blacks. The general effect of the Reconstruction acts may be put in a few words. They left the property of the State in the hands of the disfranchised whites, and the governing power in the hands of the negroes. From that time to this, politics in South Carolina have consisted of determined efforts on the part of a few designing men, with the aid of the negro vote, to plunder the property-holders. The first set who succeeded in doing this were the carpet-baggers, who from 1868 to 1872 ruled the State through the negroes. Just as Tweed got the votes of the ignorant Irish in New York, or as Butler gets the votes of the “poor boys” in the shoemaking districts of Massachusetts, the carpet-baggers got the votes of the negroes. There is undoubtedly a great deal of difference among the South Carolina negroes in intelligence and morality. Among the small number of negroes in the cities who have always been free there is a good deal of industry, intelligence, and good conduct. But the average of intelligence among the rest is very low—so low that they are but slightly above the level of animals. On the sea-coast and on the rivers they talk an outlandish idiom which is so different from English that in the witness-box they are with difficulty understood by judge or jury, and when on the jury itself they must certainly be very far from understanding either the address of counsel or the charge of the judge. As they are ignorant, they are of course credulous. The quality of their minds and their fitness for the discharge of delicate political duties may be gathered from the fact that in one of the State elections held since the war, in which Judge Carpenter, an old South Carolinian and a Republican, ran against the carpet-bag candidate, the two most serious charges brought against him were, first, that if he was elected, he would return them to slavery again, and, second, failing that, he would not allow their wives and daughters to wear hoop-skirts. On the other hand, the great argument used on the carpet-bag side—an argument which was urged on the stump from one end of the State to the other—was that the real owners of the lands, dwelling-houses, gin-houses, and everything in the State were not the advengers, but the loyal blacks; or, as Speaker Beverly Nash, himself a negro leader, and one of the small Butlers of the State, said in a speech at Columbus to six or eight thousand men, after the taxpayers had begun their attempt at reform, “The reformers complain of taxes being too high. I tell you that they are not high enough. I want them raised until they put these lands back where they belong, into the hands of those who worked for them. You worked for them, you labored for them, and were sold to pay for them, and you ought to have them.” Such was the “key-note” of the campaign during the carpet-bag period.

The Convention of 1868 which drew up a State constitution was composed of seventy-two negroes and forty-nine whites. This convention made provision for a levy of $2,230,956, yet only 13 of these negroes paid taxes. In the Legislature of 1869, there were 12 black and 20 white senators. Eight of these 12 paid no taxes. In the House, there were 86 black and 37 white members; 68 of the 86 paid no taxes. This was the machinery which was set in motion to produce the South Carolina of to-day. It would be a waste of time to attempt to trace in detail the operation of these causes in producing their legitimate results. We will state the results themselves.

The days of the carpet-baggers are gone by. South Carolina is governed by its own native-born citizens as much as Massachusetts or Illinois. In the House of Representatives (we quote the observations of Mr. J. S. Pike, who traveled through the State only a year ago), 124 members. Of these, 30 are pure white men, and the remainder black; but as 7 out of the 30 white men vote with the black, the real strength of the opposition is only 23. The Speaker is black, the clerk is black, the doorkeepers are black, the pages are black, the chairman of the committee of ways and means is black, and the chaplain is black. “At some of the desks sit colored men whose types it would be hard to find outside of Congo; whose costume, visages, attitude, and expressions only befit the forecastle of a buccaneer.” The Lieutenant-Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, the Treasurer, are all blacks. The Governor alone is a white, elected by black votes. As to the manner in which business is conducted in this black Parliament, we give Mr. Pike’s own words:

“They are quick as lightning” at detecting points of order, and they certainly make incessant and extraordinary use of their knowledge. No one is allowed to talk five minutes without interruption, and one interruption is the signal for another and another, until the original speaker is smothered under an avalanche of them. Forty questions of privilege will be raised in a day. At times, nothing goes on but manufacture of questions of order and privilege. The inefficient colored friend who sits in the Speaker’s chair cannot suppress this extraordinary element of the debate. Some of the blacks may not notice the pertinacity in raising points of order and questions of privilege that few white men can equal. Their struggles to get the floor, their hollowness and physical contortions, best describe the Speaker’s play. The talkers as the interruptions from all quarters go on with the unceasing licence. Every one ostensible himself as good as his neighbor, and puts in his ear, apparently as often for love of riot and confusion as for anything else. It is easy to imagine what are his ideas of propriety and dignity among a crowd of his own color, and these are illustrated without reserve. The Speaker orders a member whom he has discovered to be particularly unruly to take his seat. The Speaker, however, and with the same motion that he sits down draws up his feet on to his desk, hiding himself from the Speaker by the solas of his boots. In an instant he appears again on the floor. After a few experiences of this sort, the speaker threatens in a laugh, to call the gentleman to order. This is considered a capital joke, and a jeer follows. The laugh goes round, and then the peanuts are cracked and manhandled faster than ever; one hand being employed in fortifying the inner man with this nutriment of universal use, while the other enforces the views of the orator.”

The helpless condition of the judiciary may be inferred from this account of the legislature: Last year a judge was threatened with
impeachment, and was telegraphed to appear before the legislature at Columbia, because it was alleged that in a case tried in Charleston, involving a claim for damages against a railroad, he "had made improper reflections on a colored woman of doubtful character." Two or three months since, in a trial for larceny, a colored man had been proved guilty of larceny by three respectable witnesses of his own color. The jury (black) acquitted him, but as none of them could write, and, after the verdict had been rendered, several of them declared it was not their decision, the judge came to the conclusion that they were incompetent and discharged them. A resolution was immediately introduced into the legislature for impeaching the judge, on the ground that he had denied to blacks the right to sit on juries. The judge was R. B. Carpenter, not a suspected character, but a Republican, who cast his vote for Grant in 1872.

The finances of the State are involved in hopeless confusion. D. T. Corbin, United States District-Attorney, a leading Republican senator, was obliged to admit in 1872, and in a speech in favor of the re-election of General Grant, that under Governor Orr, the first reconstruction governor, the bonded debt amounted to $5,500,000, with a floating debt of $1,500,000 more, while at the time of his speech the State was saddled with a bonded debt of $16,000,000 and a floating debt of two or three millions more. The money was obtained in New York by a man named Kimpton, who acted as financial agent of the State, who had been required by the Governor to give good bonds for the faithful performance of his duties, and who had accomplished this end, it was understood, by getting as sureties Henry Clews & Co. of this city. Henry Clews & Co., however, in reality only signed as witnesses to Kimpton's signature. Kimpton managed his business so well that in 1871 the interest, commissions, and stamps paid on short loans made in New York amounted to nearly as much as the entire interest on the State debt, with a large commission account in favor of Kimpton still unsettled. There is no use, however, in going into details. It is enough that the taxable property in the State before the war was $40,000,000, and is now assessed at $150,000,000, while good judges are of opinion that it is not worth $100,000,000; that the taxes levied before the war were not over $500,000, and are now $2,700,000, while the legislative expenses have crept up from $40,000 a year to $291,000, and the public printing, for a government which can neither read nor write, from $5,000 to $450,000; that land assessed at $15,000 is offered in the market for $5,000. The sum and substance of it all is confiscation. Property is no longer owned in South Carolina under the protection of the laws or Constitution; it is held until it is taken away by Beverly Nash, or Moses, or any one of the gang who govern the State by means of the votes of the colored race. Farms are sold to pay taxes; the old, rich plantations are broken up; the whites are driven out of the State or disfranchised, and a queer aristocracy of color is set up, with the rich Congo thief on top and the degraded Anglo-Saxon at the bottom.

This is what socialism has done for South Carolina. It is not a question any longer about the more or less good government of the State, or the rights of minorities, but whether the whites can stay in the State at all. The taxpayers have appealed to Washington for moral support, and they have been dismissed by the President with surly anger and contempt, and are now actually engaged in begging General Butler, the greatest socialistic demagogue of our day, to have a little mercy on them. It is not a mistaken instinct which leads them to him, for they know very well that the South Carolinian imitators derive their power from the steady-moving and merciless machinery which fills the custom-houses and post-offices with their tools; and it is this machinery which makes socialism in America the dangerous, deadly poison it is. Left to themselves, the whites of South Carolina would find some means to govern the State. But they are not left to themselves. They are gradually being driven out of the State, and the only question remaining to be settled is how long it will take to make the once "sovereign State" of South Carolina a truly loyal, truly Republican, truly African San Domingo.