

# Jim Crow in Texas

By WILLIAM PICKENS

THE classics tell about the tortures invented by the Sicilian tyrants, but the Sicilian genius for cruelty was far inferior to that of the fellow who contrived the Jim Crow car system to harass the colored population of the South. There are tens of thousands of white people in this country who would be uncompromisingly opposed to this exquisite torture if they only understood it. But *they* are not "jim crowed," they have not the experience, and they do not and almost *cannot* understand what the colored brother finds to complain of. Have you noticed how difficult it is to explain a sensation or a pain to some one who never experienced it?

Fourteen States have Jim Crow car laws. Not one of them maintains "equal accommodations" for colored people, although the law generally calls for accommodations "equal in all points of service and convenience," so as to square with the Fifteenth Amendment. Nobody expects the railroads to go to the expense of duplicating their accommodations for the colored, non-voting, minority population. The result is that the colored traffic is usually attached to the general service with the least possible expense: a small waiting-room in one corner of the station, generally unswept and otherwise uncared-for; a compartment in one end of the white men's smoker for all the colored people—men, women, and children—to ride in; generally no wash basin and only one toilet for both sexes; with no privilege of taking meals in the diner or buying a berth in a sleeper. Colored passengers taking a journey of several days must either carry cold food enough to last or else buy the high-priced trash of the newsboy. A colored woman traveling three nights from El Paso, Texas, to Charleston, S. C., with a baby and small children, is compelled to carry cold food and to sit up on straight-backed seats for the whole trip. A colored woman of Portland, Oregon, editor of a paper there, bright, intelligent, and attractive, respected by the best-known white and colored people of the State, was visiting her parents in Texas, carrying her infant and a small child of three years. On their third night's ride, in Texas, she was compelled to get up, dress herself and babies, and vacate her berth because some short-distance white passengers objected to her presence in the car. A colored person who was hurrying from Florida to undergo an operation by an expert in Chicago had to risk death by a twenty-four-hour ride in a Jim Crow day coach. Sick colored people sometimes have to be carried on stretchers in the baggage car.

Let us look at an actual case of Jim Crow, which is typical of practically the whole South. This system is not designed to rid white people of the mere physical presence of the Negro, for a white man who objects to a colored person who rides in the other end of the car may have a colored servant with his family in his end of the car, and this colored servant may sleep in his house and be a wet-nurse for his baby. I shall use the first person singular and attempt to tell of Jim Crow experiences, without exaggeration and without abatement. I sit in a Jim Crow as I write, between El Paso and San Antonio, Texas. The Jim Crow car is not an institution merely to "separate the races"; it is a contrivance to humiliate and harass the colored people and to torture them with a finesse unequaled by the

cruelest genius of the heathen world. The cruder genius broke the bodies of individuals occasionally, but Jim Crow tortures the bodies and souls of tens of thousands hourly.

In the last two months I have ridden many thousands of miles in comfortable Pullman reservations out from New York to the great Northwest, with many stops and side trips; then down from Tacoma and past the Golden Gate to the City of the Angels, from the red apples of Spokane to the golden apples of the southwestern Hesperides; and then on by the petrified forest, the great canyon, and through the ancient cliff-dwellings of man to Albuquerque, New Mexico. In Albuquerque I had bought my reservation to El Paso, Texas. El Paso is where the train would enter Texas, and both my tickets terminated there. But so thoroughly is it understood that Jim Crowism is not designed merely to "separate," but also to humiliate, colored passengers that the thing is always in the consciousness of the railway employees, even those who operate in and out of Jim Crow territory, and they begin to "work on you" as soon as you buy a ticket that leads even to the limbo of this hell.

"Well, you can't ride in this car after you get into Texas. You'll have to get out of this car in Texas, and I suppose you know that?" This from the Pullman conductor, in a very gruff and loud voice, so that the whole car might hear him, while he and others stare and glare upon me. His speech is absolutely unnecessary since my tickets call only for El Paso, but the object is to "rub it in." I answered with not a word nor a look, save such mild and indifferent observation as I might bestow upon idiots who should spit at me or lick out their tongues as I passed by their cells of confinement.

In El Paso, because of the miscarriage of a telegram, my friends did not meet the train and I had to call them up and wait till they came down. I was meanwhile shown to the "Negro" waiting-room, a space of about twenty by twenty, away off in one corner of the station structure like a place of quarantine or a veritable hole in the wall. I had to traverse the entire length of the great main waiting-room in order to reach this hole. This main waiting-room has all the conveniences, 'phone booths, ticket offices, and what not. And whom do you suppose I saw in this main waiting-room as I passed through? Not only the "white people," but all the non-American "colored peoples," yellow Chinese, brown Japanese, and the many-colored Mexicans, some dirty with red handkerchiefs around their necks and carrying baskets and bundles with fruits, vegetables, and live chickens. These Mexicans are the people whom the colored soldiers of the Twenty-fourth Infantry held off those white people some years ago. And if we should go to war with Japan the colored American will again be expected to rush forth from that hole in the wall to the defense of his white compatriot. I say all this without the slightest feeling of animosity toward any race, and absolutely without scorn of any human misfortune. I am only stating the case plainly. And when I reached the little humiliating hole assigned to "Negroes," I found there only four or five colored people, all intelligent, not one of them conspicuously unkempt like some of the Mexicans in the main waiting-room. Those Mexicans were being treated

as human beings, as they should be treated. These colored people knew that this arrangement was not so much for their separation as for their humiliation and attempted degradation, and it formed the burden of their conversation.

I stayed in El Paso two nights and three days. Its colored people are alert to the situation. By means of their automobiles they protected me against the "rear-seat" treatment of the electric street cars. They took me across the shallow Rio Grande into Mexico, just a few hundred yards from Jim Crowism. And over there, bless you, white and black people come out of Texas and gamble at the same table, drink at the same bar, and eat in the same restaurant, while the dark and almost black Mexican stands around as the policeman and the law.

Then I went to buy a ticket for San Antonio. I did not expect to buy a Pullman ticket, but I did expect to buy a day coach ticket on any train. But I found that colored passengers are allowed to go to San Antonio on but one train a day, the one that leaves at night. The morning train carried only Pullmans, and colored folk are made to wait twelve hours longer for the train that carries a Jim Crow compartment. A colored man's mother may be dying in San Antonio, but he must wait. Any Mexican, however, whom the colored infantry fought on the border and did not happen to kill, can ride on any train. Any foreigner, or any foreign spy who happens to be loose in the land, can travel freely, but not the mothers or wives or sisters of the black Americans who fought, bled, and died in France. All the rest of the world, be he an unlettered Mexican peon, an untrammelled Indian, or a representative of the uncivilized "white trash" of the South, can get either train; but the Negro, be he graduate of Harvard or bishop of the church, can go only once daily. Now if the Negro can be limited to once a day while others ride on any train, the Negro can be limited to one day a week while others ride seven, or even to one day a month while others ride thirty.

I took the train that leaves at night. It is a ride of about twenty-four hours. Through friends it had been arranged that I be given a berth, late at night, after all the white people had gone to sleep and could not see me, and perhaps be called early before any of the whites were up. The money was accepted from my friends, even tips, but only the porter was sent to bring me a pillow into the Jim Crow car, and they still have the money. In the morning I went back to see if I could get some breakfast in the dining car, before 7 o'clock, before the whites got hungry. And what did I find as I passed through the whole string of Pullman cars in the rear? All the races of the world, as usual, save only the most loyal of all Americans.

In the Jim Crow car there was but one toilet and wash-room, for use of colored women and men. And the Jim Crow car is not a car, mind you, but only the end of a car, part of the white men's smoker, separated from the white smokers only by a partition that rises part of the way from the floor toward the ceiling, so that all the sickening smoke can drift over all night and all day. And yet what do you suppose the colored porter said as he swept out the Jim Crow end this morning? Nobody asked him, he volunteered as he swept: "Well, this is the cleanest floor I have to sweep every morning. Them white folks and Mexicans and things back yonder sho' do mess up the floors!"

When I reached the dining-car there was not another person there. I was asked did I "want anything." I re-

plied briefly, breakfast. Then there was confusion and much conferring between the steward and several colored waiters at the other end of the car. The steward kept glancing at me meanwhile, as if endeavoring to "size me." Finally I was given a seat at the end of the car where the porters eat. Oatmeal, eggs, and postum were brought, and then a green curtain was drawn between me and the rest of the vacant dining-car! Remember, this did not all happen in some insane asylum, but in Texas. The check on which I was to order my food was a green check, a "porter's check," so that I should not need to be treated to such little formalities as an extra plate or a finger bowl. I deliberately wrote my name down in the blank for "porter," but I was charged a passenger's fare. It all meant that I would not eat any more that day, although I was not to reach San Antonio till eight or nine at night.

One must be an idiot not to comprehend the meaning and the aim of these arrangements. There is no such thing as a fair and just Jim Crow system with "equal accommodations," and in very human nature there will never be. The inspiration of Jim Crow is a feeling of caste and a desire to "keep in its place," that is, to degrade, the weaker group. For there is no more reason for a Jim Crow car in public travel than there would be for a Jim Crow path in the public streets. Those honest-souled, innocent-minded people who do not know, but who think that the Jim Crow system of the South is a bona-fide effort to preserve mere racial integrity on a plane of justice are grievously misled. Any man should be permitted to shut out whom he desires from his private preserves, but justice and Jim Crowism in public places and institutions are as far apart and as impossible of union as God and Mammon.

## "It Returns Him to You a Better Man"

By ALAN RALPH

TUCKED away among a lot of army odds and ends gathered together directly after receiving my discharge I recently ran across a typewritten letter on "flimsy" from the headquarters of the fort where I had been on duty. During the first hurried reading I smiled, then carefully rereading it laid it aside and thought—and thought. Legions of personal incidents, facts, bits of information, sights came crowding into my mind. Here's the letter in full:

My dear—(next of kin):

In a few days your soldier will receive his honorable discharge and return home.

He is bringing back many fine qualities of body and mind that he has acquired or developed in the military service. The Army has done everything it could to make him fine, strong, self-reliant, yet self-controlled. It returns him to you a better man.

You have been an important member of that Great Army of Encouragement and Enthusiasm which has helped him and us all to be better soldiers. You can now be a great help in keeping alive those good qualities he is bringing back, in making him as good a citizen as he has been a good soldier.

His fare and necessary expenses to his home will be paid by the Government. He will receive all pay due him. He may, if he wishes, wear his uniform for four months from the date of his discharge. The Government will allow him, for the benefit of his family, to keep up his insurance at the very low rate he is now paying.

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