

THE NEGRO IN OUR HISTORY

By CARTER G. WOODSON

(Continued from last week)

The good work of these institutions has been effective in putting the Negro on his feet, so to speak, enabling the Negro to do for himself what the thousands of sympathetic and benevolent whites of the missionary spirit had to do for the Negroes in leaving their homes in the North. Out of these schools have come thousands of Negroes of scholarly tendencies who have, in devoting their time and means to the study of educational problems and school administration, equipped themselves for leadership in education in the South. It has for some time been a matter of much regret that white persons in charge of schools maintained by philanthropy in the South have failed to recognize this ability of the Negro and still adhere to the policy of restricting them to subordinate positions. Negroes have borne it grievously that they have had to contend with white persons who feel that whenever a Negro is given a position of responsibility he needs careful watching or supervision by some white man that it may be done in keeping with some established policy.

The Negroes have not only learned lessons in religion, education and health, but have shown unusual progress in the business world. They have accumulated so much property in the rural districts that they constitute a desirable class of small farmers. In the cities in which recently there has been taken place the concentration of large numbers of Negroes, enterprising ones of color are gradually taking over business formerly monopolized by whites. Near a Negro church you will find an undertaker of color, in almost any Negro urban community there is a successful real estate dealer, a reliable contractor, an insurance office, and sometimes a bank. So popular has it become for Negroes to deal with their own people that white men owning business in Negro sections have learned to employ considerable Negro help.

The Negro in business, however, is not a new thing. The point to be noted here is the unusual progress of the race in this field during recent years. It is more than encouraging, moreover, to observe how easily the Negroes have learned the lesson of pooling their efforts in larger enterprises. To promote the economic progress of the race, Negroes have been wise enough to organize several efficient agencies. The first of these to attain importance was the National Business League founded by Dr. Booker T. Washington. There are also the National Negro Bankers association, the National Association of Funeral Directors and the National Negro Retail Merchants association. Negro fraternal organizations, although established for social purposes, have in recent years taken on a business aspect in providing for the purchase of property and the insurance of the lives of their members. In some parts of the South the Negroes use no other insurance, and the managers of this work constitute in reality an industrial insurance company. The Negroes have about 50 banks and 10 insurance companies, three of which are regular old-line life insurance companies. In 19103,205 Negroes were employed in banking and brokerage, 2,604 in insurance, and 1,035 in real estate.

Among these captains of industry thus pressing forward should be mentioned John W. Lewis, president of the Industrial Savings bank and the Whitelaw Apartment House corporation of Washington; Samuel W. Rutherford, secretary of the National Benefit association of the same city; Isiah T. Montgomery, the capitalist of Mound Bayou, Miss.; John Merrick, founder of the North Carolina Mutual and Provident association; R. L. Smith, the organizer of the Farmers' Improvement society of Texas; Herman E. Perry, president of the Standard Life Insurance company of Atlanta, and the late Madam C. J. Walker, the manufacturer of toilet articles, out of which she accumulated more than a million dollars worth of property. The Negroes in the United States now own property worth more than a billion dollars.

In the midst of the busy bustle and the economic development of the United States since the Civil war the Negro has not only demonstrated his ability to accumulate a portion of the world's goods, but has by his inventive genius contributed much toward the economic progress of the country. As to exactly how many Negroes have appeared in the field of invention we are still in doubt. The United States patent office has not in all cases kept a record as to the race applicants. While in many instances the racial connection has been easily determined, an investigation has shown that many inventors of color have not disclosed facts to this effect because the value of the invention might thereby be depreciated. By correspondence with patent attorneys and the inventors themselves it has been established as a fact that there are in the United States patent office a record of 1,500 inventions made by Negroes. This number, no doubt, is only a fraction of those which have been actually assigned to persons of color.

Some of these inventions have been remarkable. Probably the most significant one of them is that of a machine for lashing shoes invented by Jan E. Matzelter, a Negro born in Dutch Guiana in 1852. Early in his youth Matzelter came to this country and served as an apprentice at the cobblers' trade in Philadelphia and in Iowa. After undergoing unusual hardships which undermined his health, Matzelter applied his brain to working out a labor-saving device by which his trade might be relieved from drudgery. He invented, therefore, a lashing machine which adjusted the shoe, arranged the leather over the sole and drove in the nails. Matzelter died in 1888, in his 37th year, before he could realize the value of his invention. The patent was bought by Sydney W. Winslow, who, upon the advantages derived from this machine, established the

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[Editor's Note.—A Chicago school teacher was instructing a class of foreign children in the history of the Civil war. One Italian youngster asked her: "What did the Negro do in that war? Didn't he fight for himself?" The teacher was abashed, scarcely able to do that which she had discovered. Carter G. Woodson, one of the scholars of the race, has devoted his life to disclosing to the world the proper place of the race, particularly in America, in the history of world and national development. He is a historian of the first rank. The book which the Defender offers its readers is Mr. Woodson's latest. It is the answer to the Italian boy's question. Mr. Woodson is now editor of the Journal of Negro History, a magazine which he founded, and is the author of "A History of the Negro Church," "Negro Education Prior to 1861" and "Negro Migration."]

well-known United Shoe Machinery company, which absorbed over 40 smaller corporations. This company is operated now with a capital stock of more than \$20,000,000, employing 5,000 operators in factories covering more than 20 acres of ground. Within the 20 years from the time of its incorporation its product increased from \$224,000 to \$242,531,000, and the shoes exported increased from 1,000,000 to 11,000,000. As a result the cost of shoes decreased 50 per cent the wages of the operators decidedly increased, the working hours diminished and laboring conditions improved.

Some other inventions of Negroes of less consequence were of much value and deserve mention. J. H. Dickinson and S. L. Dickinson, both of New Jersey, have been granted a dozen patents for mechanical appliances used in player piano machinery. W. B. Purvis of Philadelphia has accumulated much wealth by his invention of machinery for making paper bags, most of these having been sold to the Union Paper Bag company of New York. A. B. Albert, a native of Louisiana, invented a few years ago a cotton picking machine. Charles V. Richey of Washington, D. C., invented and patented several devices for registering calls and detecting the unauthorized use of the telephone. Shelby J. Davidson invented a mechanical tabulator or adding machine; Robert A. Pelham, a pasting machine, and Andrew F. Hilmyer, two hot-air register attachments. Benjamin F. Jackson of Massachusetts invented a heat apparatus, a gas burner, an electrolytic furnace, a steam boiler, a trolley wheel controller, a tank signal and a hydrocarbon burner system. Frank J. Ferrell of New York obtained about a dozen patents for improvements in valves for steam engines. George W. Murray, a former member of Congress from South Carolina, patented eight inventions of agricultural implements. Henry Kreamer of New York made seven different inventions in steam traps. William Douglass of Arkansas secured six patents for inventions on harvesting machines. James Doyle of Pittsburgh devised the automatic system, so as to dispense with the use of waiters in cafes.

Fred J. Lowden, known to fame as one of the Flisk Jubilee singers, patented in 1893 a fastener for the meeting rails of sashes and a key fastener the following year. J. L. Pickering of Haiti, James Smith of California, W. G. Madison of Iowa and H. E. Hooter of Missouri have been granted patents for improvements in airships. No less significant, moreover, was the patent of 1897, of Andrew J. Beard of Alabama, for an automatic car-coupling device, sold to a New York car company for more than \$50,000. William H. Johnson of Texas invented a successful device for overcoming dead center in motion, one for a compound engine and another for a water boiler. While keeping a hotel in Boston, Joseph Lee patented three inventions for kneading dough. Brinay Smart of Tennessee invented a number of reverse valve gears. J. W. Benton of Kentucky invented a derrick for hoisting heavy weights. John T. Parkin with which he established a thriving business as the Ripley Foundry and Machine company of Ripley, Ohio.

The most useful inventor with a career extending into the 20th century, however, was Granville T. Woods, who doubtless surpassed most men in his field in the number and variety of his devices. He began in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1884, where he obtained his first patent on a steam boiler furnace. Then patent on an amusement machine apparatus in 1889, an incubator in 1890, and electrical air brakes in 1892, 1893 and 1895. He then directed his attention to telegraphy, producing several patents for transmitting messages between moving trains, and also a number of transmitters. He thereafter invented 15 appliances having to do with electrical railways and a number of others for electrical control and distribution. To further his interests he organized the Woods Electrical company, which took over by assignment all of his early patents. As in the course of time, however, he found a larger market for his devices with the more prosperous corporations in the United States, the records of the patent office show the assignment of the large number of his inventions to the General Electric company of New York, the Westinghouse Air Brake company of Pennsylvania, the American Bell Telephone company of Boston and the American Engineering company of New York. During this period of his larger usefulness he had the co-operation of his brother, Lyates Woods, who himself invented a number of such appliances of considerable commercial value.

Another inventor of consequence was Elijah J. McCoy. He was unique in that he was the first man to direct attention to the need for facilitating the lubrication of machinery. His first lubricating cup was patented in 1872 as a lubricating cup. From that day his fame as an inventor of this useful appliance went throughout this country and abroad. In responding to the need for still further improvements in this work, he patented about 50 different inventions having to do with the lubricating of machinery. His lubricating cup became of general use on the leading railroads in the United States and abroad and on the vessels on the high seas. In his work, however, Mr. McCoy was not restricted to lubricating machinery. He patented a variety of devices for other purposes, and he was long active in the production of other mechanical appliances in demand in the industrial world.

The achievements of the Negroes in this field become much worthier of mention when one takes into consideration the hard problems of the inventor of color. In this country it has not been a very easy matter for white men with ample protection of the law to secure themselves by patents the full enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor. The achievements of Eli Whitney and Robert Fulton are cases of evidence. Henry A. Bowman, a Negro inventor of Worcester, Mass., therefore, found himself facing the same difficulty. After he established a thriving business on the basis of his invention of a new method of making flaps, he discovered that a New York firm was outstripping him by using his invention. As he was unable to hire competent attorneys to protect his interests, he was soon compelled to abandon his business. The experience of E. A. Robinson of Chicago is another

illustrated in 1894. The following year he completed "The Young Sabot Maker," but it was not until 1896 that with the encouragement given him by the great artist, Gerome, Mr. Tanner won recognition as a painter. In 1897, however, his "Raising of Lazarus" attracted so much attention far and wide that thereafter there was little doubt in the circles of art as to the greatness of this man. This picture was awarded the gold medal by the French government and placed in the Louvre. In 1899 he presented to the public "The Annunciation" at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, eliciting unusually favorable comment. His "Judas," presented to the public in 1899, was bought by the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh. That same year "Nicomachus" awarded the Walter Lippincott prize of \$300, was purchased by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. For his "Daniel in the Lion's Den" he was awarded second class medals at the Universal exposition in Paris in 1901, and at the Pan-American exposition in 1904, and at the St. Louis exposition in 1904. In 1906 his "The Disciples at Emmaus" was awarded the second gold medal and purchased by the French government. That same year his "The Disciples at the Tomb" was declared the best painting at the annual exhibition of art in Chicago and was awarded the N. W. Harris prize of \$300. In 1908 appeared "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," which was characterized as a masterpiece of a sincere artist.

As a painter, Mr. Tanner has directed his attention largely to religious, and lowly life, as evidenced by the names of his paintings. He no doubt owes this attitude to the fact that he is the son of a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church, and early in life was encouraged to apply himself to theology. As an artist his productions have a reverent atmosphere, and his pictures are clean-cut and luminous. In his paintings there are subtle power, purity of line, and thorough charm, with sentiment prevailing over technique. While the shades are luminous, the coloring is neither heavy nor muddy. "He always brings out of all his work," says one, "an admirable dramatic sentiment given full value and fully expressed."

In the field of literature the Negroes are sometimes considered as beginners, but much progress in this field is evident. Kelly Miller, W. E. B. DuBois and William Pickens have done well in controversial literature. George W. Williams, John W. Cromwell and Booker T. Washington have made contributions to history. Following in the wake of Jupiter Hammon, Phyllis Wheatley and Frances E. W. Harper, writers of interesting verse, Paul Laurence Dunbar came before the public in the early '90s as a man endowed with the unusual gift of interpreting the lowly life of the Negro. As an elevator boy in a hotel, writing a few lines in dialect, he himself did not realize his poetic genius. Succeeding, however, in having a few of these published in daily newspapers and magazines, he attracted attention. It was not long before William Dean Howells, a contemporary, became interested in his works and proclaimed him to be the world as a poet worthy of the consideration given Whitely, Lowell and Longfellow. Dunbar had fortunately reached that unusual stage in the development of a belated people of having his education react upon his environment. He saw the Negro as he is, saw something beneath the surface of his mere brogue. In fact, saw a philosophy for which the world wanted an interpretation. This interpretation came in his first book, "Oak and Ivy," and still better exhibited in his second work, "Majors and Minors," appearing in 1895. Very soon then we heard of him such comment as that coming from Richard Watson Gilder, saying that Dunbar is the first black man to feel the life of the Negro esthetically and to express it lyrically.

Dunbar made an attempt at novel writing, as appears in his "The Unlabeled." This was a character study upon which fortunately his reputation as a literary man does not rest, for it does not come up to the standard of his verse. Unlimited praise awaited him upon his publication of "Lyrics of Lowly Life," "Folks From Dixie," "Lyrics of the Hearthside," "Poems of Cabin and Field," "The Strength of Gideon," "The Love of Laundry," "The Fanatics," "The Sport of the Gods," "Lyrics of Love and Laughter" and "Candle Lighting Time." Some of the popular poems in this collection which are worthy of special mention are "When Madam's Sing," "When the Gun Pone's Hot," "The Party" and "The Pone and His Song."

His success as a literary man was due to his originality. While there had appeared from time to time scores of whites and blacks who had undertaken to write verse in Negro dialect, Dunbar was the first one to put into it such thought and make of it such a portrayal of the feeling and the aspirations of the Negroes as to give his work the stamp of originality. While he was always humorous, his poetry showed deep pathos and sympathy. With no problems to solve and no peculiar type of character to represent, he went into the Negro life, saw it as it was, and emerged portraying it with living characters exhibiting the elasticity, spirit, tone and naturalness in the life about him.

In life he was respected and known throughout this country and abroad. In 1897 he visited England, where because of his fame as a poet he was received with marked honor. Upon returning to this country his literary encagements became such that he could devote himself entirely to work in his field. His health early began to decline, however, and he died at the age of 34 at his home in Dayton, Ohio, which, thanks to the interest of sympathetic persons of both races, is now maintained as a monument to remain as a museum in honor of the poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Since the days of Dunbar a number of other Negro writers of prominence have considerably interested the public. Among these should be mentioned Angelina W. Grimké, a woman of poetic insight; Benjamin Brawley, an author of many interests; Jessie R. Fauset, a writer of varying purpose; Gertrude Douglas Johnson, whose interesting poems have recently appeared as "The Heart of a Woman"; Leslie Pinkney Hill, distinguished by his "Wings of Oppression"; Joseph Seaman Cotter, known to the public through his poems contributed to va-

upheld Austria feeling that if such a pact passed without punishment it would soon be impossible for the victorious heads of Europe to maintain their empires. England, France and Italy recommended that the matter be adjusted by arbitration but Germany, contending that mobilization of the Russian army was in reality a declaration of war against her, declared war on Russia the first of August and on France two days later. England sympathized with France, to which she was attached by various ties, and accordingly entered the war against Germany. When Germany showed such disregard for her treaty obligations as to invade Belgium, a neutral country, she lost the sympathy of most European and American countries, many of which finally joined the allies to curb the power of the Hohenzollerns.

As the United States, although deeply sympathizing with the struggle against autocracy, did not deem the interference with our commerce and even the sinking of our neutral ships sufficient cause for intervention, this country entered at once upon an unprecedented period of commercial prosperity in becoming the source of supply for almost everything needed by the numerous nations involved in the war. Industries, formerly in a struggling state, received an unusual impetus; new enterprises sprang up in a day, and persons formerly living merely above want multiplied their wealth by fortunate investments. The aggressions of Germany upon our commerce resulting in the death of our citizens upon ships destroyed on the high seas became so numerous, however, that thousands of Americans, led by Theodore Roosevelt, insisted upon a declaration of war against Germany. But our trade with the world was so lucrative that it was difficult to convert a majority of the people of the country to the belief that it would be better for us to disturb the era of commercial prosperity to go to war for the mere principle that Germany wronged us in trying to break up our lawful commerce with the belligerents in Europe.

This continued prosperity brought on a new day for the laboring man and consequently a period of economic advancement for the Negro. The million of immigrants annually reaching our shores were cut off from this country by the war. Labor in the United States then soon proved to be inadequate to supply the demand. Wages in the industrial centers of the North and West were increased to attract white men, but a sufficient number of them could not be found in this country, so great was the demand in the industrial centers, the plants and cantonments, making preparations for war. Departing then from the time-honored custom in the North, the needy employers began to bid for Negro labor of the South. All Negroes who came seeking unskilled labor were hired, and occasionally skilled workmen of color found employment. But the Negroes of the South were not merely invited, they were sent for. Those who first ventured North to find employment wrote back for their friends, and when this method failed to supply the demand, labor agents were sent for the purpose wherever they could find men; but the Mississippi valley, for several reasons, proved to be the most favorable section. Through this valley conditions had at times become unsettled on account of the periodical inundations of the Mississippi, and the Negroes in these lowlands, usually the greatest sufferers, welcomed the opportunity to go to a safer and more congenial part. Throughout the Gulf states, however, where the boll weevil had for years made depredations on the cotton crop, Negroes were also inclined to move out to a section in which their economic progress might be assured. In short, the call from the North came at the time the Negroes were ready and willing to go.

It may seem a little strange that Negroes who had for years complained of intolerable persecution in the South never made any strenuous efforts to leave until offered economic advantages in the North. Such a course was inevitable, however, for, intolerable as conditions were in the South, the Negro had to live somewhere and he could not do so in the North because of the monopoly of labor maintained there by the hostile trades unions. In this more recent movement, instead of making his way to the North, where among unfriendly people he would have to seek out assistance as a mendicant, he was invited to come to these industrial centers where friends and employment awaited him. History, moreover, does not show that large numbers of persons have migrated because of persecution. If not assured of an equally good economic foundation elsewhere, the majority of those persecuted have decided in the final analysis to bear the ill they have rather than fly to those they know not of.

The oppression of the Negroes in the South, however, was also a cause of the exodus, though not the dominant one. When men from afar came to tell the Negroes of a way of escape to a peaceful and law-abiding land, they were received as spies returning from the inspection of a promised land. While the many were moved by the chance to amass fabulous sums, they all sighed with relief at the thought that they could at last go to a country where they could educate their children, protect their families from insult, and enjoy the fruits of their labor. They had pleasant recollections of the days when Negroes wielded political power, and the dream of again coming into their own was a strong motive impelling many to leave the South. Negro leaders primarily interested in securing to the race the full enjoyment of its rights, rejoiced that they were going North, while the conservative, sympathetic, timid classes advised them to remain in the service of their employers in the South.

In the North, however, although the Negroes readily entered upon the enjoyment of many privileges denied them in the South, they have here and there been brought into competition with the radical white laboring element which at Chester, Youngstown and East St. Louis precipitated riots in trying to get rid of Negro labor. At East St. Louis in July, 1917, Negroes long harassed by this element finally became the object of onslaughts by the whites. They were overcome by the mob, which was supported by the silence of the militia sent to maintain order and even outwardly by certain of its members, who permitted individuals to take their guns to drive the Negroes into their congested quarters, where they massacred and burned 125. The administration of justice in this northern state seemed no better than that in the South, for although the whites were the aggressors in the riot, the court inflicted more punishment on the Negroes than on the whites. One Negro was sentenced to life imprisonment, but later acquitted. Ten other Negroes were to serve 14 years, whereas four white men were imprisoned for from 14 to 15 years, five for five years, 11 for less than one year, 18 were fined and 17 acquitted.