

Observations

The Trend of Current Thought and Discussion

Robert S. Abbott

By R. R. WRIGHT
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Robert Sengstacke Abbott, editor of The Chicago Defender, has done for Negro journalism a work which it is impossible at this time to properly appraise. It was nearly 20 years ago that we knew young Abbott. The editor of The Christian Recorder was then a student at the University of Chicago, and Mr. Abbott was a student in a law school in Chicago. We both came from the same city in Georgia, and formed an early acquaintance. We remember when Abbott, who had learned the printing trade at Hampton, got a job on a Chicago daily paper. He used to tell the boys that one of these days he was going to be the editor of the world's greatest Negro newspaper. Without a doubt he has achieved that ambition.

We remember when 25 years ago his insignificant sheet first appeared. As he had done considerable talking about what he intended to do, quite a number of people thought that experience would change the young man's ideas. But Abbott never changed. He worked constantly and hard. He has been the generator of new ideas and had the courage to put them into execution.

In a few short years his paper grew by leaps and bounds. It took the lead of Negro journalism in Chicago, in the North, then in the Middle West, and finally took a jump ahead of all secular weekly papers in the country. So rapidly did Abbott advance, and so substantially, that it was whispered around that his paper was owned by white people. It was so modern, so successful, that it was hard for the average Colored man to believe that one of his own race could do what Abbott was doing. Men who had been thirty and forty years in the newspaper business shook their heads in doubt and said that it could not be done. Men went by scores to Chicago to quietly investigate what was the secret of Abbott's success. They heard this same round-faced, cheerful, confident, black man tell of his plans and saw him reach forward for greater achievement. Finally some of the publishers ceased to criticize Mr. Abbott and sought to learn from him.

The result is that the most progressive business run by Negroes in the country is the newspaper business, and the great inspiration back of all of this is Robert Sengstacke Abbott. At one time he published nearly a quarter of a million papers every week. We have seen the paper in California, down in the canebrakes of Louisiana, and in the swamps of Georgia; and they tell me it goes in large numbers to Africa and South America. Nothing the Negro has ever printed has been called for as much as The Chicago Defender. Tens and tens of thousands of Negroes everywhere wait for this paper.

The Chicago Defender was Abbott all over. There is very little difference in the paper and the boy we knew in school, except that the paper is the expression of the boy. He is 100 per cent for his race. If he errs, it is a matter of judgment and not of the heart. Nowhere in the United States can you make Negroes believe that Robert S. Abbott has any policy that is not for the good of his people. He is a fighter for the race, and outside of the church there has been no greater influence than that represented by Mr. Abbott for racial solidarity and development. We congratulate Mr. Abbott; we congratulate The Chicago Defender; we congratulate Chicago, and we congratulate the Negro race. It is interesting that in the anniversary issue Mr. Abbott gives full credit to his mother and father, as the inspiration for his success. His father was a Congregational pioneer preacher in the suburbs of Savannah, Ga.

What Abbott has done, other ambitious Negroes may do in any of the hundreds of fields open to them.