

THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICA.

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In speaking to members of my race in different parts of the country, I have sometimes tried to stimulate and encourage them by calling attention to what I sometime refer to as "the advantages of their disadvantages". I sometime tell them for instance, that as long as slavery was to exist in this country, I am glad that I was at one time a slave. As long as slavery has been the lot of so many members of our race, I am glad to have shared it and to have known what the experience was. It has enable me to perform a kind of service that I would not otherwise have been able to perform.

What has been true in my own case has been equally true of my race as a whole. The progress which the Negro has made in this country since President Lincoln's proclamation and the Civil War set him free, has been made as a result of his opportunities but it has also been made because he has had the courage, which other successful races have had, to convert obstacles into opportunities.

For instance, it has been a disadvantage to Negro boys and girls in some respects that, in the Southern States, they have not always had well trained teachers, such as are usually in the white schools; and that the Negro schools have frequently not had their fair share of the school funds.

On the other hand it has been a great advantage to the race as a whole that, in the South, it has had to furnish so large a share of its own teachers. Thousands of young Negro men and women have thus had an opportunity to perform for their race and for the country as a whole a much higher form of service than they would otherwise have had an opportunity to perform. It is absolutely necessary for the welfare of the South and of the whole country that the ten millions of Negroes should be educated and the Negro, because of the conditions that were forced upon him, has gained the opportunity to perform this important service.

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The same thing is true of the Negro banker, the Negro merchant, the Negro real estate dealer. In almost every instance, because of the separation of the races, in their churches, in their schools, and so many other departments of life; the white physician and the white banker have not been able to, or have not cared to perform for Negroes, the services that the Negro physician and banker have been able and willing to render. The result has been that the Negro physician and the Negro banker are now performing a kind of service for the white man and the black man that he would not, under other conditions, have had an opportunity to do. The Southern people are learning that the physicians who look after the health of the Negro, hold in their hands, so far as contagious diseases are concerned, the health of the whole South. In order that the population at large may be secure against their disease, it is absolutely indispensable that the masses of the Negro people should learn the ordinary measures of hygiene and they should be encouraged to properly care for their own health.

On the other hand, the Negro banker is making himself quite as indispensable in the South because of the fact that in encouraging thrift, industry, and saving among his people he is not only accumulating, for the use of bankers and business, capital from sources from which it would otherwise have gone to waste, but he is at the same time inspiring the Negro with motives and habits which will make him industrious, keep him from falling into the ranks of the idle, vicious, and criminal classes, and make him in every way a better citizen.

The Negro bankers in the South, in order to build up their business, have gone about to the churches and ^{homes of the} the people, urging them to save their money in order to educate their children and build homes of their own.

In doing this, they have ^{had} an opportunity to render the whole South a service which no white man, under the existing circumstances, would be able to do as well. The needs of the Negro race are the opportunities of individual Negroes. It is not only true that the Negro, like every other race must, to a very large extent, work out his own salvation, but it is equally true that he has an opportunity, in the direction I have indicated, while working out this individual salvation to perform a service for his race and his country which will

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country which will bring him not merely profit, but honor and respect as well.

As an evidence of this fact, allow me to quote from an article in a recent issue of the Durham Herald, of Durham, North Carolina. This paper in commenting upon what it calls "the marvelous growth of the colored colony" says:

Best of all is not what any^{one} man has done, but a certainty that in the long-repressed and enslaved race, there is a spirit of aggression, a triumphant and dominant commercialism that makes opportunity for honest labor and gives its race a chance to rise in earnest striving by the might of its merits. These people are heard no more to cry against their long time slavery, knowing that men no more invest in the sickly weakling race than they do in the tottering shaky banks. Behind these men is an unconquerable energy. And they have learned that even the Southern people do not care so much what race of men turns the crude product into account, as it does for the fellow who can perform some service better than the other fellow. Nobody ever drew the color line on Fitzgerald's bricks.

It's a good day to live and work in. It presents the pleasing spectacle of all men at labor in the monkish spirit of "work is worship". It shows the colored people striving and the white man willing. The African asking ~~for~~ only for hope, aspiration and room for effort; the Caucasian bidding him to his work and assuring him that if he fails it must be by the weight of his own demerits and not by the tyranny of the great white race.

I have quoted at some length from this paper because what is said there seems to ^{me} ~~be~~ the best evidence I can give that the patient and persistent effort of individual Negroes to improve their own condition and that of the members of their race in their ^{own} community, are bound to win ~~for~~ them the recognition from their white neighbors which they deserve.

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