

Durham, North Carolina: A City of Negro Enterprises

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FOR a number of years I have made what I have called "Educational Pilgrimages" thru various Southern States, including Arkansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Delaware and North Carolina. These tours have been undertaken for the purpose of seeing for myself something of the progress being made by the Negro people of these various States, the actual relations existing between the races, and also for the purpose of saying whatever I can to help cement friendly relations between the races. Both races in the South suffer at the hands of public opinion, because the outside world hears of its disgrace, its crimes, its mobs and lynchings. But it does not hear very much about the many evidences of racial friendship and good will which exist in the majority of the communities of the South. I do not believe that one can find another section of the globe where two races which are dissimilar in many respects dwell in so large numbers where they get on better in all the affairs of life than they do in our Southern States.

The last of these trips was made thru the State of North Carolina during the fall of 1910. I was unusually impressed with the general prosperity of the colored people in the rural villages and smaller towns. Farms, truck farms, wellkept grocery stores, thriving drug stores, insurance houses, and beautiful tho modest homes greeted me continually. Again and again I exprest to the Negro business men in charge of my trip that here were in many ways the most encouraging signs of Negro development that I had seen. But again and again, as often as I said this there would come back from several members of the party the answer, "Wait till you get to Durham."

Now, Durham is one of the large cities of North Carolina, and knowing from my early experiences something of the superficial and hand-to-mouth living of the average city Negro, I became more and more curious to see what Durham had in store for me.

Arriving there about four o'clock on a bright afternoon in October, I found every preparation that was necessary to sweep me from my feet with the conviction that sure enough this was the city of cities to look for prosperity of the Negroes and the greatest amount of friendly feeling between the two races of the South. In one town on my way I had actual roses strewn in my path, but here, if all I saw and heard was genuine, were the real roses that I had been seeking now for more than thirty years. Well, and not foolishly, dressed colored people, colored people representing all manner of business, from the small store to the thriving, thoroing business enterprise, colored people seated in one and two horse carriages with rubber tires, stood eager to welcome me. Still I was not convinced. I had more than once seen members of my race who paid their last dollar for display, not having enough left to purchase a good meal or even to buy fuel to cook with. But I was assured that these people owned all they claimed to own and that I would be shorn of all my doubt before many hours had passed, and I confess that two hours of driving and visiting more than robbed me of all my skepticism.

In addition to many prosperous doctors, lawyers, preachers and men of other professions, I found some of the most flourishing drug stores, grocery and dry goods stores I had ever seen anywhere among Negroes. I found here the largest Negro insurance company in the world, with assets amounting to \$100,000, owning its building, a large three-story structure, and being operated with nothing but Negro clerks and agents. Here is located the Durham Textile and the Whitted Wood Working Company,

manufacturers of doors, window frames, mantels and all kinds of building materials. Here, too, is the Union Iron Works Company, a Negro company which manufactures general foundry products, turning out plows, plow castings, laundry heaters, grates and castings for domestic purposes, and it was refreshing to learn that in this enterprise as in others that I shall mention there was no evidence of the color line drawn on the part of the purchaser. Each groceryman, each textile manufacturer, each tailor, in fact, all the Negro tradesmen and business men numbered many white customers among their most substantial purchasers.

I began by this time to believe that Durham was a city of Negro enterprises, and, quite convinced now, I was ready to go home, but they wanted to show me one more successful Negro plant. This was the plant known as the Durham Textile Mill, the only hosiery mill in the world entirely owned and operated by Negroes. Regularly incorporated, they operate eighteen knitting machines of the latest pattern, working regularly twelve women and two men and turning out seventy-five dozen pairs of hose each day. The goods so far are standing the test in the market, being equal in every way to other hose of the same price. They are sold mainly by white salesmen, who travel mostly in North Carolina, New York, Indiana, Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama, and again, so far as I have heard, there has been no man to raise the color question when he put on a pair of these hose made by Negroes.

Aside from these flourishing enterprises Durham had many individuals, such as tradesmen and contractors, who were shining examples of what a colored man may become when he is proficient and industrious. I found that Payton A. Smith, a general contractor, had put up some of the largest buildings in the city, that P. W. Dawkins, Jr., who had learned the carpenter's trade at Hampton, and Norman C. Dadd were not only never out of work, but kept jobs always waiting for them.

It was exceedingly interesting, too, to





A Negro bank is no longer a novelty, there being more than fifty in America at the present time, but the one at Durham, in addition to carrying resources of \$400,000 and deposits of \$20,000, is an instance of what the white Southerner often does to help Negroes. When this bank was opened, the cashier and teller of the leading white bank came over and without charge, helped the colored bankers open and close their books.

With all this prosperity, with flourishing insurance companies, a bank, brickmasons and men in the professions, it was not remarkable that this class of persons should own beautiful homes. It was more of a question of overdoing than not doing enough in their furnishings. And so while I was now ready to believe anything about the prosperity of Durham

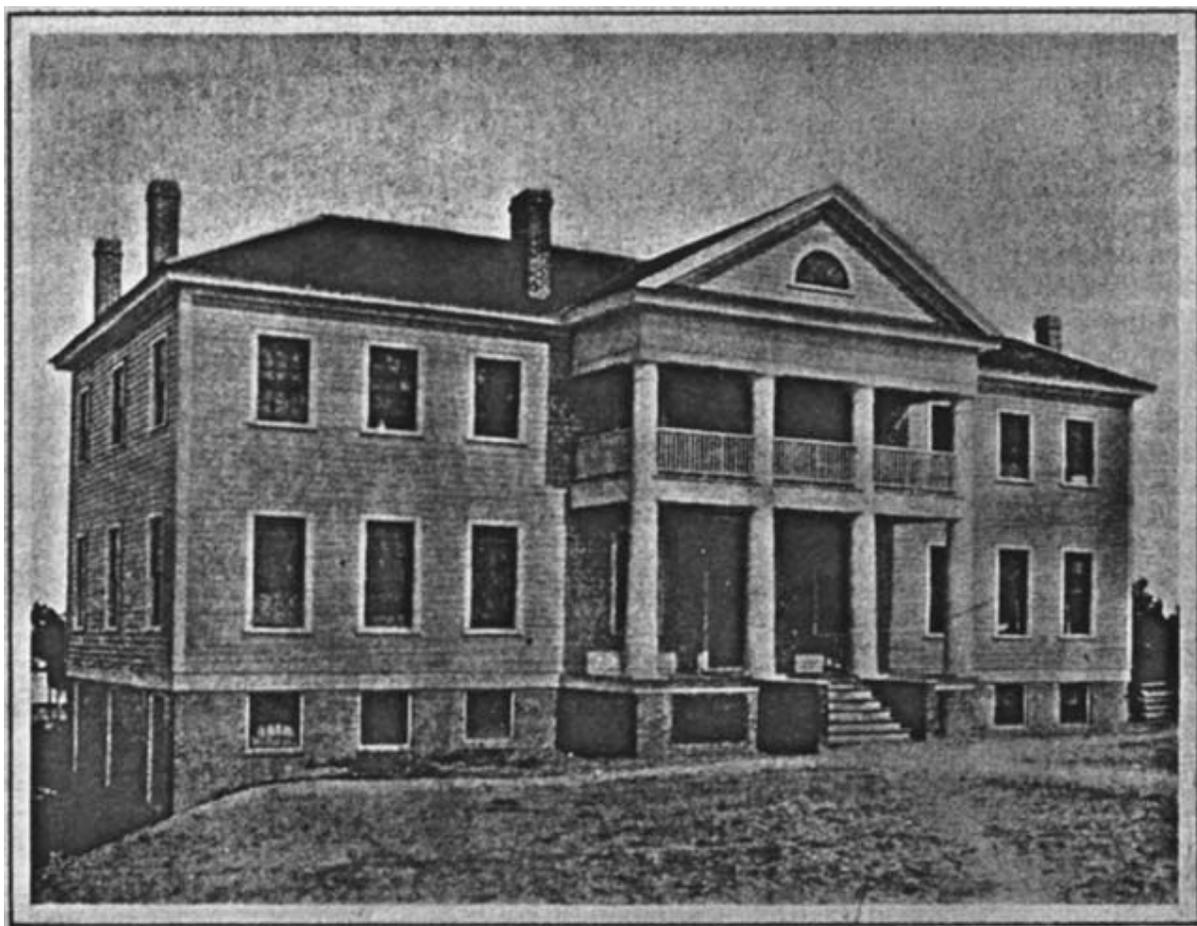
Negroes, I was curious to see if wealth had driven the people into extravagance. Far from it. With electric lights, steam heat and baths and all the modern equipments, these residences presented a modesty of taste that was more than gratifying. No baubles, no tinsel of furnishing that often represent the abuse of wealth, but conservative and tasteful furniture I found everywhere. Wealthy negroes like Dr. A. A. Moore, C. C. Spaulding and John Merrick could have fitted up their homes to dazzle the eye and evoke the envy of both white and black, but instead they have rather set a standard of good taste and good judgment to all who know them.

I must here call especial attention to Mr. John Merrick, recognized as the leading Negro of Durham, Mr. Merrick began as a poor man, borrowing money from General Julian S. Carr, a leading white man, to begin his first business. During all the years he has lived in Durham, he has continually expended time and money to promote the interests of colored people, aiding them in securing homes and in establishing organizations of protection. In 1883 he founded the Royal Knights of King David and in 1898 he founded the North Carolina Mutual and Provident Association. He aided in

establishing a hospital here for Negroes, is a trustee of the bank, a steward in the St. Joseph A. M. E. Church and president of the Christian Endeavor League. In addition to this he is the largest Negro owner of residence property in the city, collecting per month rents amounting to \$550. That all this draws no envy from the white people is illustrated by the fact that a few months ago at the marriage of his daughter more than three hundred of the best white people were present, bringing with them costly presents for the bride.

But with all this prosperity, some doubt still assailed me. The exceptional man is everywhere and among all races. He has always been in evidence among the people of my race. In slavery days one Negro could gain his freedom and himself become a slave owner while his own brethren remained in bondage. These Durham men of whom I am talking had had their opportunities. They had been to college, to medical schools, to dental schools, to schools in the North, enjoying





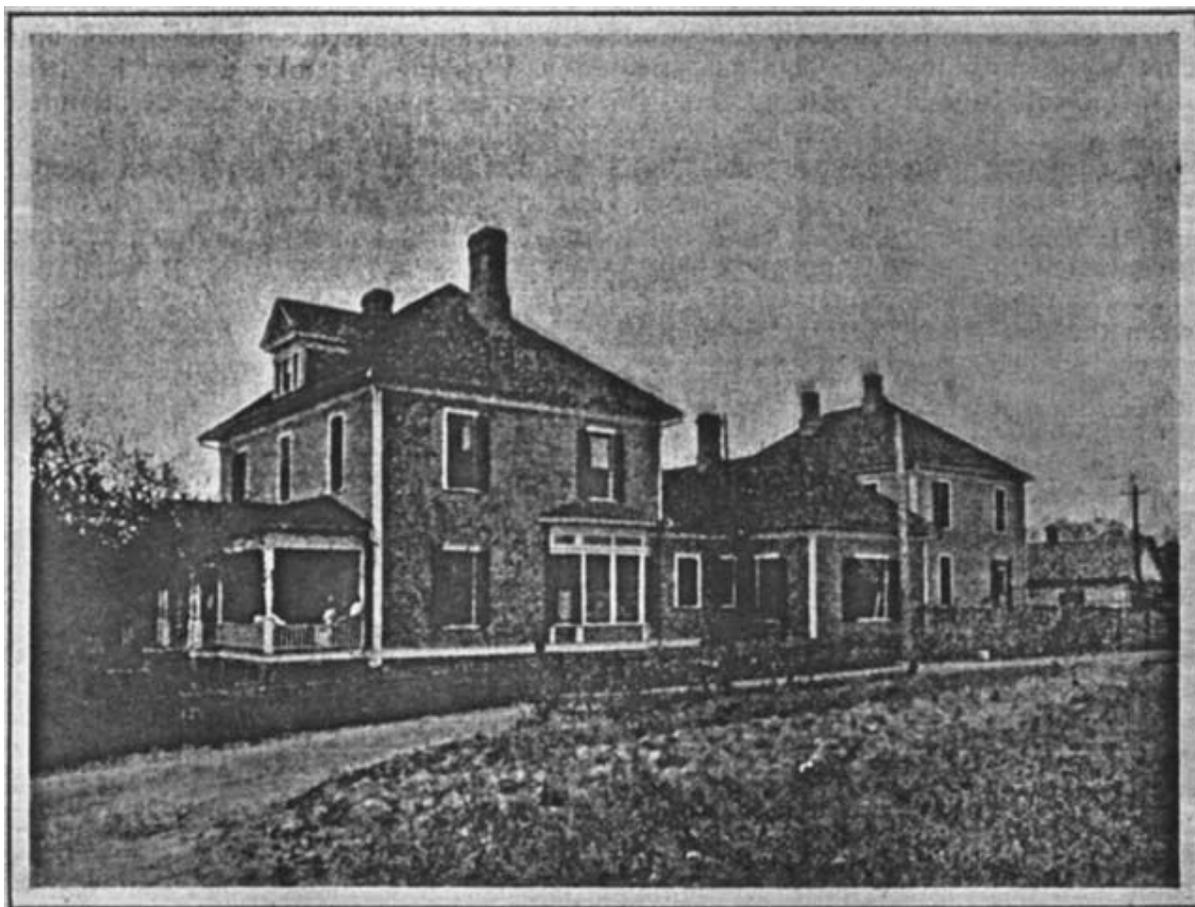
But what of the poor man, the unlettered man, the man against whom because of age or adverse circumstances, the door of training had been tightly closed? What was he doing and how was he living? This was my last question put to the city of Durham. If it could answer me this satisfactorily I would yield; because I knew that in this query lay the crux of the whole race situation in the South; for it is with this class that the white people of the South have to deal, and upon the conduct of this class that the real estimate of my race is generally formed.

It is written that we have the poor always with us and it was this poor that I wished to see. I drove through their section of the city, observing closely their homes inside and out, their yards, their fences, their window curtains, their furniture, and I own that in many cases I almost doubted my eyes. The one time hovel and the shack with rags sticking in the windows and fences rotting away, with little gulleys washed in the yards and half clad children standing in front of the door were all gone. I saw no dead dogs or cats or dead fowl in the streets as I sometimes see in our larger Southern cities and I sniffed no feverish odors from dens and dives. Neat cottages stood where in many cities still stands the tubercular shack, and well cared for children in clean yards, many of which were adorned with flower beds, everywhere greeted me. There were windows with clean curtains and clean shades and substantial furniture devoid of the cheap shimmer of the installment house, Surely I felt there must be something at the bottom of all this and I set myself to inquire what was the secret of this general healthy appearance. Of course, the wealthy doctors, the prosperous school teachers and well-to-do ministers were no longer a mystery or a surprise. If the so-called poor were thus situated the professional man, I well know, was bound to flourish like the proverbial bay tree.

As this was the class that came most in contact with the white people I asked what was the general spirit existing between the two races. Of all the Southern cities I had visited, I found here the sanest attitude of the white people toward the black. Disabused long ago of the "social equality" bugbear, the white people, and the best ones too, never feared to go among the Negroes at their gatherings and never feared to aid them in securing an education or any kind of improvement. I have already stated that the wealthiest and best thought of Negro in Durham began his business career upon a loan of money from General Julian S. Carr. Perhaps a still stronger instance is that of the Duke family, the famous tobacco manufacturers. The members of this family have always given generously to support the colored schools and churches of the town, and Mr. Washington Duke during his lifetime took such interest in and attended so regularly the African Methodist Episcopal Church, that the colored people counted him as one of their own members. This is a glowing example of what I mean by a sane attitude toward the colored people. If the white people thruout the South, indeed if the employers everywhere, would encourage the Negroes by their presence and personal interest in their undertakings, there would be day by day fewer complaints of the dissolute Negro laborer and the trifling Negro servant. Nobody, white or black, has ever argued that Mr. Washington Duke was in any way contaminated by his contact with the African Methodist Episcopal Church; rather the Negroes are inclined to vie with the whites in doing his memory honor and reverence.

Another example of the substantial encouragement the white people of Durham give the Negroes is found in the attempt last summer to found in the city a Negro Chautauqua. When the colored





The white people here further show their fine spirit by holding open everywhere the door of opportunity to the Negro. Ignoring color or race, they demand only efficiency. I never saw in a city of this size so many prosperous carpenters, brick masons, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, cotton mill operators and tobacco factory workers among Negroes.

In the larger white mills and the like the Negroes in several instances are the only ones employed. The hook and ladder company of the fire department is manned entirely by black men, showing not only a liberality of spirit, but a recognition that courage can lodge in the breast of a black man as well as in that of a white man. I have referred to the hosiery mill owned and operated solely by Negroes; there is one here also owned by a white man, but operated exclusively by colored men. The proprietor is Gen. Julian S. Carr, to whom I have already referred. General Carr employs 150 women and a few men, and it argues the generous spirit typical here that he was willing to admit a rival Negro mill right here in his neighborhood; many of whose workmen had received their training from him.

But the company that has done most for the Negro, both in employment and in general help, is the W. Duke, Sons & Company, branch of the American Tobacco Company. This company employs more colored laborers than any other firm in the city, keeping steadily at work 1,548 negro men and women, at an average of 93 cents per day, or paying out \$1,400 per day or \$440,000 a year to colored people. And it is highly to the credit of the colored people that thru all the changes in the system and in the introduction of new and complex machinery

they have been able to hold their positions and give increasing satisfaction to their employers.

Indeed this satisfaction has been so genuine that the American Tobacco Company has for some time been pursuing the policy for its colored employees, which, if adopted by many of our large corporations thruout the country would spare the nation many strikes, lockouts, bloodshed and the suppression of general prosperity. This company has established an employees' bounty, which upon the death of the employee, is paid to the latter's family. The company donates in cash to the person who has been before designated by the employee a sum of money equal to the wages paid to the deceased during the last year of his life; not exceeding, however, in any case, the sum of \$500. Tho recently inaugurated this scheme has already allowed to be paid out more than \$3,000 to the beneficiaries of the colored employees. In addition to this the company takes cognizance of its employees' health, seeing, no doubt, that better health conditions insure a constantly higher grade of service. The Lincoln Hospital here, a place for the sick colored people and for the training of colored nurses, received its grounds and building, valued all told at \$75,000, from Mr. Washington Duke, the founder of the Duke Tobacco Company, and it is in co-operation with this hospital that the firm is now taking active interest in the improvement of the home life of its employees by securing a visiting nurse to work in the Negro section of the city. That thruout all the Negro efforts in Durham these companies have been willing to entrust their money and donations of buildings and grounds to the hands of colored men shows how thoroly established is the confidence of the white men in the honor and efficiency of the Negro doctor, the Negro school teacher and the Negro minister.

Nothing in all this appealed to me more than the information that the white people everywhere encouraged the Negroes to buy and own property. Surely nothing binds a man to the general welfare of a community more than to tie up his interest there in a piece of property, no matter what kind it may be. That so large a proportion own their homes, that the most of those renting rented from Negro landlords, that the southern part of Durham was inhabited almost entirely by colored people, and that Negro possessions in the city amounted to one million dollars, was the key that unlocked for me much of the mystery of prosperity and good feeling between the two races. Two or three far-sighted white men had encouraged some few struggling Negroes to invest in a piece of property. The influence spread itself until out of men whose spirit was comparatively indifferent to their surroundings have been molded loyal, patriotic, law-abiding black citizens.

I found as a result of an interview with several of the white men of the town that the good opinion of the colored men was growing more and more general. Mr. W. T. Bost, the city editor of the *Durham Herald*, spoke in the highest terms of the general thriftiness of the colored people. Mr. Bost, as it happened, had lived in a number of other cities in the State and it was his experience that the Negroes at Durham were more law-abiding than in any other city in which he had lived. There was also less vagrancy here than in any other city. And indeed this might well be, for at the very moment of this interview, Mr. J. F. Freeland, chief of police, was making an active canvass among the colored ministers and others of influence to assist him in a movement to improve further the condition of the lower class of colored people. But to continue with Mr. Bost, the city editor said that it made no difference in Durham when it came to business. "Fitzgerald," he continued, "makes better brick than any other man in town; therefore the people buy Fitzgerald's brick. The Whitted Graded School makes the best furniture in town and so it is always in demand at a good price."

Major W. A. Guthrie, one of the leading lawyers of the city, stated that there was a better feeling between the races than in any other city in the State. "Conditions here," he declared, "are pleasing to both races. The whites have learned that it pays the town to have educated

Tuskegee, Ala.