

TOPIC XXV.

THE NEGRO AS A BUSINESS MAN.

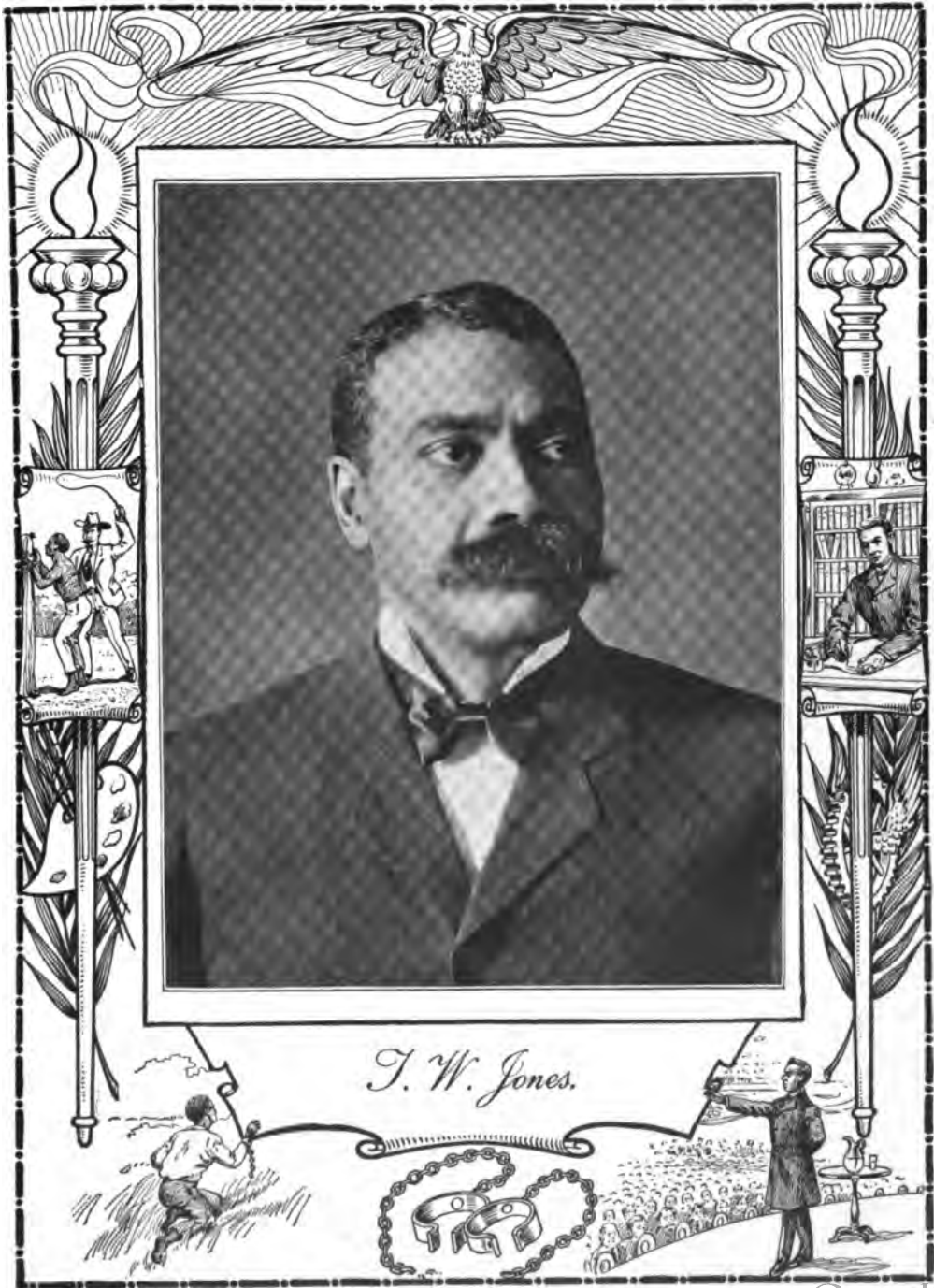
An Address Before the National Negro Business League.

BY T. W. JONES.

There has been so much controversy concerning the Negro, so much said and written about his alleged inferiority, such an attempt made to establish relationship between him and the monkey, that even in this new century there exists, in some quarters, grave doubts as to his origin, and a general misapprehension as to his nature, capabilities and purposes. But research into the primeval history of man evinces the fact, beyond the possibility of skepticism, that mankind had only one common origin. We are taught that in the beginning God created man in His own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and that man became a living soul. The closest and most thorough analysis of the blood of different races fails to detect the slightest difference in the color, size, shape or quality of its corpuscles. The fact that one people are white, another yellow, another red, another brown, and yet another black has its cause in the working of a law of nature which we do not fully understand. Sacred history plainly teaches that the Negro is a man like other men and that of one blood God created all nations; hence there can be no racial barrier to a successful business career, in the general constitution of a black man.

What was the business of the Negro in the land of his nativity, or at the time of his emancipation in this country, does not so much interest us now, except as it may help us to appreciate his capacity for business at present.

Life for our forefathers in Africa was very plain and very simple. The multitude was engaged with problems little more difficult than the acquirement of food and drink and rest, raiment not being a necessity; hence their only business, aside from frequent wars with kindred tribes, was to explore a way to the fruit tree, the water brook and the shade, and so their years were principally filled up with the business of merely satisfying those three physical wants—hunger, thirst, and rest.



J. W. Jones.

HON. THEODORE W. JONES.

The Hon. Theodore W. Jones was born during the temporary residence of his parents in the beautiful city of Hamilton, Ontario, September 19, 1853. His parents soon returned to New York, their native State, and there remained until he was twelve years old. In 1865 this family decided to make Illinois their home and settled in Chicago.

Mr. Jones was one of a very large family; his parents were poor and unable to give him even a common school education. Compelled to support himself, at the age of fifteen years he was driving an express wagon. He was an industrious boy, full of pluck and energy. Without money and by his own unaided efforts, step by step, he pressed on and soon built up a most successful express and moving business.

Discouraged by no difficulty, the ambitious young expressman turned his attention toward acquiring an education. He was a diligent student. Through the aid of private tutors and the "midnight oil," he was able, when twenty-five years of age, to enter Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill., where he remained three years. Leaving college, he returned to his business in Chicago and has been exceedingly prosperous.

Mr. Jones is the owner of a large brick storage warehouse, Twenty-ninth Street and Shields Avenue, and other valuable property in this city. In his employ are three lady clerks and about fifty men, all colored.

In 1894, Theodore W. Jones was elected on the Republican ticket to the responsible position of County Commissioner of Cook County, Ill. He ably and well performed the duties of this office.

That he labored earnestly and unselfishly to advance the interests of the colored people we need relate only the following fact: During Mr. Jones' term of office the colored people of Cook County drew \$50,000 yearly salary. This was about seven times the amount paid into the county treasury by our race.

He is a valued member of the National Negro Business League. He was present in Boston at the organization and has organized a branch league in Chicago, known as the Business Men's League of Cook County. This league entertained the National League in Chicago, August 21, 22, 23, 1901.

When human slavery was established in the colonies, those of our race, either fortunate or unfortunate enough to be brought to these shores were instructed mainly in the care of cotton, tobacco and rice crops; and from these few Southern industries we could not turn aside. Slavery deprived the Negro of the little responsibility devolving upon him in his savage state—that of providing food and drink and finding rest. No responsibility was allowed to devolve upon him, other than to perform allotted work, not even the selection of his wife; and when children were born to him, he was not confronted with the problem of how he should provide food and shelter for them, nor wherewith they should be clothed. He and his issue being the property of his master, like swine or cattle, their issue were alike stalled and fed by the owner. With but few exceptions, this was the condition of the Negro when the Proclamation of Emancipation was issued, thirty-eight years ago.

From that eventful day onward, the mighty aspiration of the ex-slave for education and material development has written a new page in the history of the world's progress. Let us now examine the record made, and call to our assistance the statistics of the Government that we may truthfully answer the question, can the Negro succeed as a business man? We are indebted to ex-Congressman George H. White for the information that since the dawn of our freedom the race has reduced its illiteracy at least 45 per cent; that we have written and published nearly 500 books; have edited fully 300 newspapers; have 2,000 lawyers at the bar, a corresponding number of practicing physicians, and 32,000 school teachers. We own 140,000 homes and have real and personal property valued at \$920,000,000. The census of 1890 shows that 20,020 persons of African descent were engaged in business, and there were more than 17,000 barbers not included in those figures; and be it remembered that this showing was made more than ten years ago.

It is true that we have produced no skilled master mechanics or great speculators; no commercial princes or merchant kings. These are beyond our immediate reach and reserved for later growth. But we have today, on the floor of this convention, colored men who represent nearly every business enumerated in the census reports—wagon-makers, watch-makers, grocers, druggists, bankers, brokers, bakers, barbers, hotel keepers, caterers, undertakers, builders, contractors, printers, publishers, decorators, manufacturers, tailors, insurance agents, coal dealers, real estate agents, collectors, the proprietor of a brick yard, the owners of a cotton

factory, and the president of a coal mine. The number engaged, and the capital invested, may not reach very pretentious figures, but the beginning has been made. Aside from the above, we have produced soldiers whose valor has reached world-wide reputation, poets, artists, teachers and professional men and women of recognized ability. There are hordes of others pursuing the humbler walks of life eager to acquire by education a higher ideal of manliness and womanliness, and to learn the ways of advanced civilization and approved citizenship. These achievements have been wrought by us under the most adverse conditions. We have wearily toiled by day and by night; have made bricks without straw; helped ourselves and taken advantage of small opportunities; though these are days of increasing combinations of capital, growing corporations and gigantic trusts, which greatly lessen the possibilities of individual success. Surely there is in the black man the same capacity for business, the self-same spirit, purpose and aspiration that there is to be found in the white man, and he is as much entitled to the blessings of life, and to share its honors and rewards, as the descendants of other races, notwithstanding Senator Tillman's recent plea for lynching Negroes, and the plaudits and acclaim of a Wisconsin audience.

Despite the fact that the door of nearly every large factory, shop and department store is closed against us, despite the fact that prejudice stalks our business streets with unblushing tread and dominates in all the commercial centers of our common country—yet we are not here today pleading for special legislation in our behalf; we are not here whining to be given a chance; we are not here, even to complain of our hard lot, or to find fault with conditions which we cannot change. This, we conceive, would be a very poor programme to attract the attention of the business world, but we are here, representing hundreds of thousands of dollars, thus demonstrating that we have achieved, at least in a small measure, one of the things which, by common consent, is taken as evidence of progress, ability and worth. We have made money, have saved money, and are succeeding in many profitable business enterprises which require the possession of skill and executive ability to direct and control.

The Jew traces the industrial strides of his people from the first foot-sore peddler to their present position of affluence in the financial world, and so without reciting further the early struggles and hindrances experienced by our pioneers in business, sufficient is it to say that we have

men who should be placed in the class with Nelson Morris, A. M. Rothschild and Mandel Bros. Not that they can compare with these men in the sum total of their wealth; no one expects this. But that they began life without a dollar, have accumulated property and acquired influence, and are today men of public affairs, able to stand, persevere and prevail in the fierce struggles and competitions of business life. These mercantile strides the members of our race are taking in the face of proscription and oppression, in the face of the administration of unjust laws and in the face of disfranchisement and barbarous lynchings, such as no other men ever had to face. In fact we are prospering under conditions which would not only fill other business men with hopelessness and despair, but would surely drive them into bankruptcy.

It is not true that the business patronage of the Negro is confined to his own race, nor is it true that he is a cringer, and solicits patronage among the whites because of the fact that he is a colored man. We have long since learned that we are entitled to no more consideration because we are black than other men are who chance to have red hair, big mouths, or mis-shapen feet. If you will pardon personal mention, I would say that in my business as a furniture mover, few customers, indeed, have I among my own people; nor do I ask to remove any man's goods because of the color of my complexion or the texture of my hair; but because I have put brains into my humble calling and made the business of moving furniture a science. What is true in this instance is true in all others, where progress is made. We are grasping opportunities and compelling adverse circumstances and forces to work together for our profit. Under the wise leadership of Booker T. Washington, we are finding our bearings and casting anchor in the dark and muddy waters of industrial conditions in which we were sent adrift without rudder, compass or means of existence less than thirty-eight years ago.

It is not strange that, as business men, we have made some failures. It is a long way from the depth of the valley to the summit of the mountain; from a barbarian to a master mechanic; from the jungles of Africa to a successful business career, and from the slave cabin to the professor's chair. We have not all outgrown the feeling of dependence instilled in us by more than 250 years of chattel bondage; many of us yet shrink from responsibility, and lack the requisite amount of ambition. We recognize our shortcomings, our peculiar environments and the limitations of our experience and powers. We are beginning to learn that if the

Negro is to become more and more a factor in the business world he must take a more active part in all of the trades, competitions, industries and occupations of life. Again, he is learning, slowly perhaps, but surely, that he must outgrow the weakness and confusion resulting from distracted purposes; that he must have one aim, and be one thing all the time. He must stop doing things in a slipshod and half-way manner and become more thorough. He must put the force of a strong character and a determined will power into whatever he undertakes, and he must stop stumbling and falling over impediments, especially of his own placing.

The Negro is, however, affected by nothing now which education and personal endeavor will not in time remove. For example, we take the liberty to refer to our honored President, Booker T. Washington, who about forty-two years ago was born a slave in Virginia. At an early age he began the battle for himself untutored and untrained in all the ways of life. What he has since accomplished is a sufficient answer to those who claim that the Negro is void of any capacity for doing business, and that his offspring has no chance to rise in the world. For twenty years Booker T. Washington has not only been president of a great industrial institution, but has had very largely the acquisition, management, investment and expenditure of its finances. In recent years there has scarcely been a month in which he has not been offered positions in important and influential business enterprises, as well as in the affairs of government. His career is evidence that there is plenty of room at the top for Negro boys who have sense enough to rise to the level of their opportunities. The lack is not so much of opportunities as of men. It is a fact which cannot be gainsaid that success still is, and most likely always will be, a question determined very largely by the individual. For the man or woman who has made thorough preparation and is willing to do hard work a place will always be waiting, irrespective of race or color.

The tone of this convention clearly indicates that the Negro will succeed as a business man in proportion as he learns that manhood and womanhood are qualities of his own making, and that no external force can either give or take them away. It demonstrates that intelligence, punctuality, industry and integrity are the conquering forces in the business and commercial world, as well as in all the affairs of human life. Permit me, in closing, to quote the language of President McKinley addressed to the students at the Tuskegee Institute. "Integrity and

industry," he said, "are the best possessions which any man can have, and every man can have them. No man who has them ever gets into the police court or before the grand jury or in the work-house or the chain gang. They are indispensable to success. The merchant requires the clerk whom he employs to have them; the railroad corporation inquires whether the man seeking employment possesses them. Every avenue of human endeavor welcomes them. They are the only keys to open with certainty the door of opportunity to struggling manhood. If you do not already have them, get them."

For our encouragement, reference has been made to a portion of the history of the distinguished President of this convention, and also, for the same purpose, quotation has been made from a speech of the honored President of his country. We thus have before us the example of the former and the precept of the latter—each a leader in his own sphere, the one black and the other white. By following the example of the one and the advice of the other, the Negro will not only succeed as a business man, but the early dawn of the present century will yet witness the best achievements and the loftiest conceptions of a once enslaved race.

SECOND PAPER.

THE NEGRO AS A BUSINESS MAN.

BY ANDREW F. HILYER.

The resistance of the white people to the progress of the colored people is least along the line of business. The colored people themselves have only to develop a larger spirit of race help in business and a magnificent future is just ahead for them.

In addition to little capital and much inexperience the colored merchant has to contend against a hostile public opinion, which seems to resent his efforts to improve his own condition and that of his own race, when he assumes to tear himself away from the mass of his fellow laborers and attempts to keep store like a white man.

Strange enough this hostile feeling is shared in, more by the colored than by the white people, especially along certain lines of business not of a semi-social nature. It is a matter of common complaint by colored business men in those classes of business in which they must compete