

THE NEGROES AT ATLANTA

What You Will Find in Their Exposition Building.

(Letter to Chicago Inter-Ocean.)

Commissioner Garland Penn, who has charge of the negro building, says that it was not because the race desired to draw the line that they demanded separate representation at the World's Fair, but because in the mass the colored people can in no wise equal the dominant race, but they do measure up very well when their past and present environments are considered. They presented their request for separate exhibit to the directors of the Cotton States Exposition and it was granted. The colored people offered to erect their own Exposition building, but the Exposition company would not allow them to do what was not asked of others. It paid for this building as for others, but it let the contract for the building to negroes and they employed negro workmen, so that the negro building stands as an example of negro skill and work.

The building is in the southeastern corner of the park at the main entrance from the railway terminal station. It covers 25,000 square feet. It is 276 feet long by 112 feet wide. It has a central tower and four corner pavilions, and the pediment over the main entrance is decorated with relief work representing the past and the present conditions of the negro. The one side of the pediment represents the slave mammy, with the one-room log cabin, the rake and the basket in 1865. On the other side is the face of Frederick Douglass, a true representative of the growth and intelligence of the colored man. Near the relief of Douglass are the comfortable residence, the stone church and symbols of the race's progress in science, art and literature, all representative of the new negro in 1895. The well-fed mule and the plow occupy the center of the grouping, representing the negro's property and industry. There is no building at the fair which attracts more attention than this one built by negroes and for the exhibition of the products of negro labor.

The largest exhibits in the building are from schools and colleges, but there are many individual exhibits and one of them is a painting marked "30 equals 433." It was painted by a negro, Mr. Freeman of Washington, and it represents two boys at work at a blackboard. One is a white boy and the other is a colored boy. They both have the same figures before them and are subtracting 30 from 433. The colored boy has put down the result and has a look of triumph on his face. The white boy has a puzzled expression as he looks at the result and still sees the statement that "30 equals 433." But the result is the colored boy by his side, who represents thirty years of emancipation for his race, while the white boy represents 433 years of emancipation for his race. The two races stand equal before the law and in their work here at the exposition, as the two boys stand equal in their work at the blackboard. It is not a striking picture, except in the story it tells, but it is well executed and attracts much attention from whites and blacks for the conception and the story told. In the central square under the dome of the building there is quite a large collection of pictures and several pieces of statuary. Most of the work is from the Amateur Art Club of Washington. Mr. Freeman has portraits of Douglass, Bruce and Langston, and several other figure pieces which are very creditable. Mr. W. C. Hill of Washington has several pieces of statuary that are very good, one of them called "The Stubborn Shoe" representing a little girl trying to put on her shoe with the toes stuck into the heel of the shoe and puzzling her brain how to get it on. Another represents the negro with chains broken but not free. The same society has a large collection of crayons, photographs of colored churches and schools and hospitals in Washington and some exquisite art needlework.

In the art collection there are also three pictures by Mr. H. O. Tanner, the son of Bishop Tanner, of the African M. E. Church. Mr. Tanner is a talented and finely educated young negro, and is now studying art in Paris. One of his pictures in the Salon received honorable mention this year. There is also a marble bust of Charles Sumner, by Edmona Lewis, the colored sculptor, who has her studio now in Italy.

Two of the largest and best exhibits of industrial work are from the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute and Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. Tuskegee is known as the child of Hampton, because Booker T. Washington had his training at Hampton and was recommended as president of the Tuskegee Institute by General Samuel C. Armstrong, the founder of Hampton. But Tuskegee's exhibit in the negro building is almost, if not quite, equal to that from Hampton, and both show what industrial training has done for the negro.

In the Tuskegee exhibit there are large cases containing the work of the sewing, dressmaking and millinery departments, the tailor shop, the harness and shoe shops, desks, chairs and tables from the furniture shop, a handsome carriage, a light buggy, a phaeton, and a farm wagon from the carriage shop, a steam engine built by the boys in the iron working department, tools made in the same shops, a dairy exhibit, farm products, fruits and vegetables of every variety, and in fact, some example of work in every department of industry known in the South, showing that the colored boys and girls who take the courses at Tuskegee are fitted for some trade before they are allowed to graduate. The work is not unattractive, but equal in finish to that put upon the market by manufacturers of these products.

In the Hampton Institute exhibit there are similar examples of students' work, some of it of a more pretentious character than that from Tuskegee. There is a handsome revolving bookcase, a richly carved sideboard, a mantel, and a hall tree of exceptionally fine workmanship, and any of these pieces will compare favorably with any furniture exhibit to be found in the exposition. There are carriages, buggies, phaetons and wagons from the Hampton shops, a large drill press and a half power engine to run it. These were both made for use in the shops by the students who work there. Hampton also shows some fine ornamental iron work in banquet and large standard lamps, to show that there are artists in iron as well as artists in bronze, marble and clay, some fine samples of book printing and binding from the printing department, and a large exhibit of various kinds of work to show how complete is the great industrial school established by General Armstrong, who had charge of the freedmen at that point at the close of the war, and started a school to teach colored youths how to earn their own living by systematic work from trained hands and developed intellects.

There are many other school exhibits from the Knoxville College, Clark Uni-

versity, at Atlanta; the Georgia State Industrial College, at Savannah; the State Normal College, at Montgomery, Ala.; the State Normal and Industrial School, Normal, Ala.; the Gammon Theological Seminary, at Atlanta; the Atlanta Baptist Seminary; the Central Tennessee College, at Nashville; the Fisk University, at Nashville; the Atlanta University; the Spellman Female Seminary, at Atlanta; the Schellied Normal and Industrial Institute, at Aiken, S. C., and a number of other educational and industrial institutions for negroes. The colored people of Chicago have an exhibit of various kinds of work, and there are many individual exhibits of art, mechanical, and agricultural work. There are a number of paintings by colored men, some on the mantle from a colored manufacturer at Atlanta; a large drug exhibit from the pioneer negro druggists in the South; fancy needle work; collections of fine fruits and grains, and enough excellent work of great variety to demonstrate the capabilities and development of the negro in every department of labor. The negro building has in its exhibits more variety than any other building at the exposition, because it shows the work of the race in all departments.

There is one small corner of the negro building which represents the other extreme of the race. It is marked "Uncivilized Africa," and is an exhibit of some of the natural resources and some of the crude manufactures of the west coast of Africa. Bishop Turner, who has been for years urging the negroes to emigrate to Liberia, brought this exhibit home with him when he returned from Africa, a few weeks ago. He says that it does not represent civilized Africa, but the uncivilized natives, the heathen of that country. He has a collection of their swords, knives, and spears, which, he says, were hammered out of iron ore found there so rich that the natives use it without any knowledge of smelting; samples of the woods that grow on the west coast of the Dark Continent; palm and coconut oils, made by the natives; samples of leather and cloth, made by the heathen; and many other curious specimens of African products. Over this exhibit the bishop has strung a line of delicately woven birds' nests, which are shaped like the long-handled gourd. They are the nests of the weaver bird, and they are as carefully woven as a bit of wicker work. The long arm is attached to the limb of a tree, and through it the bird passes to the large and bulb-like nest in the bottom. There is one article in the bishop's collection which is not heathen. It is a beautiful silk quilt of the same pattern as that made by a Liberian woman and presented to Queen Victoria. She duplicated the work for Bishop Turner. It is a delicate and intricate piece of patch work, and represents the African coffee tree in bloom.

Bishop Turner has little patience with those who talk about the new negro. He strolled through the negro building with me, but saw little that was new in the workmanship that was evidenced by the exhibits.

"There is nothing new in all this fine work," said he. "The negroes always did the finest kind of work in the South. The slaves were skilled carpenters and wheelwrights and blacksmiths. They did all the work in the old days of slavery. They were not mere drudges without skill. They built the grand old mansions of the planters. They made the carriages and wagons and buggies used by their masters; they did the iron work, as well as the woodwork. They made much of the furniture, and were skilled cabinet-makers. In fact, the slaves did all of the work in the South then; and there were skilled mechanics and carpenters among them—more than we now have, perhaps. In that respect, we have a very old-fashioned negro exhibit here. The men who owned slaves gave the best testimony to their skill and intelligence as workmen when they had their own carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights and cabinet-makers among themselves, and trusted them to build all the houses, manufacture most of the comforts which surrounded the southern home. The women could do as fine sewing then as now, and they were the skilled cooks, famous for their dishes. No, this work is not the evidence of a new negro. It is the skill of the same old negro who was in slavery. The only thing new about it is the freedom of the negro to learn what trade he pleases and work out his own salvation in his own way. I am as proud of this exhibit as any one, but I have no patience with the talk about the new negro as a workman. Why, that was the reason he was kept in slavery so long. He was too valuable to be set free."

"Do you still think the negroes should emigrate to Africa?"

"Yes, several million of them. They can be spared from this country, and they can do much better in Africa. They will become the leaders and the civilizers of that continent."

The stalwart old negro bishop strolled out of the negro building with me, and we turned our steps to the Midway. In front of the Dahomey Village there was a big-nosed white man urging the visitors to not miss seeing the wild cannibals from the west coast of Africa. The old bishop stopped and heard the stereotyped speech, and remarked that here must be the "new negro." Then he walked up to the showman and said:—

"Why do you white men pursue the negro to Africa with your lying? You have for years lied about the negro in this country, and now, when you are being found out, you are lying about the negro at home on his native heath."

The showman stopped, startled for a moment, while the crowd gathered about. Then he asked, "What do you know about it?" and began again on his speech. But the bishop was not to be ignored.

"I know all about it, sir," he replied. "I am a negro, and I live in Africa a good part of the time. There are not, and never have been, any cannibals on the west coast of Africa. You are simply repeating some of the lies told to white men who went to Africa and had to lie about the country to magnify their own efforts and pose as heroes of great courage and endurance. The natives of the west coast of Africa may be heathens and uncivilized, but they are more peaceable and gentle than many of you civilized and enlightened white men here in America; and these wild negro cannibals you have here, cavorting around like apes and baboons, never saw Africa. They are lazy, good-for-nothing negroes from New York, or some other town, where they have been taught to jump about like monkeys and yell like hyenas, while you tell these people that they are talking in their native tongue. Stop your lying about the negro!"

The crowd shouted, and the showman looked stupefied, and the bishop walked on down the Midway, telling me that there was no new negro. He was simply the same old negro, showing his capacity as he was given opportunity by the new white man; and I am not sure that he is wrong.

Booker T. Washington and Bishop Turner are not so far apart, except on the question as to where the negro is to work out his own salvation. Washington insists that by applying the industry and capacity that made the negro valuable in slavery to the new condition of freedom, the negro can do the work and become independent here in America. Bishop Turner wants the negro to go to Africa and apply these new conditions in a new country. General Armstrong said to me just before he died:

"This man Washington is worthy the name he bears. He will live to be known as the Washington of his race." The speech of Washington has awak-

ened the white men of the South to the realization that there has been a change. The negro building, with its exhibits of the work of negroes, offers its testimony to the truth of Booker T. Washington's teachings.