

James Wilson, now in the portrait gallery in the State Historical building and that it was stolen from his rooms and finally found its way to Iowa.

O. W.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, Mystic Scientist

It is with some reluctance that I, with a considerable scientific background, as well as some religious experience, open up my heart and mind to the general public to bare the tender, intimate, secret impressions I have of George Washington Carver, through my very close association with him while we were obtaining our Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Agriculture in the same group at Iowa State College. This reluctance on my part springs from my fear that my scientific contemporaries, who may not also have been close students of the Bible, and who have not been deeply consecrated to the service of the church, and through the church to their fellow men, will secretly, if not openly, deny the existence of supernatural forces that I want to discuss. I want to present this very humbly, knowing that many outstanding people of the scientific world will brand me as an unorthodox scientist, and there will be not a few religionists who will also brand me as an unorthodox Christian. I refuse to allow myself to be bound by man-made creeds in either science or religion.

Few white men, I believe, knew George Washington Carver as well as I did. We were students together in classes that were small, where the individuality of each member of the class had opportunity to make full contact with the individualities of other members of the class; and outside the classroom we studied and played and prayed together. I ate with him and I slept in the same bed with him. We exchanged confidences as young men who are sincere friends often do. Until I saw him I had scarcely ever seen a colored man. I had no impressions, no prejudices, to overcome, and I simply accepted him as

he was. Whatever of higher spiritual things I have known and practiced I learned largely from Mr. Carver.

One of the things he taught me and burned into my being, was to live my own independent life and not to ape any one. The next most important step of training he gave me, but with only partial success, was to completely surrender my will to the Divine Creator and to trust implicitly in the guidance of his Holy Spirit. I mention this only because it is a necessary foundation for the reader to judge of the accuracy of my estimate of the things that made Mr. Carver achieve miracles.

Right before our eyes, for a generation, Mr. Carver performed these miracles. Things which average people cannot understand, they often call miracles. The reason why I refer to Mr. Carver's achievements as miracles is that I knew full well, as all of his classmates and scientific associates knew, that Mr. Carver in his collegiate work never attained the proficiency in higher mathematics, physics and abstract reasoning that other scientists find so necessary as a foundation for a career in research. I remember that he was far behind schedule with his mathematical and physical subjects, and barely got through them with passing grades, in a very irregular sort of fashion.

How then can we account for the hundreds of his useful discoveries in the laboratory and in the field, which will bless humanity for all time? A scientist might jump at the conclusion that he employed a trial and error method, which every scientist knows is expensive of time and materials, and often barren of results. As a rule, our best scientists eliminate most of the waste of time and material by sifting out and discarding the chaff of the trial and error method, and pursuing only the things that have possibilities that are within the limits of reasonable mathematical deduction. Though Mr. Carver's career of successful research was a rather long one, it was too short to account for his many achievements if the trial and error method had been wholly substituted for the mathematical method which he lacked.

There is only one way to account for this, and that is that day by day his mind was keenly sensitive to the guiding Holy Spirit of the Creator, and that wonderful discoveries were revealed to him through channels that are not open to the scientist, who is a physical scientist only. Mr. Carver was a faithful and consistent student of the Bible, and where he found promises of care and guidance he meditated upon these day and night. He cleared his heart of the frivolities of life and left it wide open for the entry of the Holy Spirit, and day by day that Spirit revealed to him the steps he must take, and he did not hesitate to take them. One day when Jesus was discussing his works with his disciples he said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." Mr. Carver's life was a living fulfillment of this prophecy. The scope of Jesus' benevolent works was limited by the circumstances to healing and care of relatively few individuals, while modern means of distribution and extension of beneficences made Mr. Carver a benefactor of the masses.

Many a scientist of great renown acquired that renown because of one single discovery. Perhaps it took a lifetime of labor to make that discovery. Every scientist feels that he is constantly on the threshold of great discoveries, and if he were only wise enough to turn his footsteps into brilliant, rich pathways, guarded by obscure entrances, he might have to his credit scores of discoveries instead of a single one. How necessary it is then, that the scientist should not close his mind to the great Divine source of supply and guidance available to one who can make his heart an abiding place for the subtle guidance of the Spirit. Mr. Carver was very sensitive to this superdelicate and physically undemonstrable Divine guidance.

None of us in our student days understood Carver. He would burst out with some bold and undemonstrable statement not found in any textbook or taught in any classroom. Student minds do not accept such statements

without searching questions and the answers must show ample and adequate premises and logic before the conclusions are accepted. When pressed for premises and logic Carver would relapse into unfathomable and mysterious silence, but never retract the bold conclusion first stated. We naturally distrusted such unsupported statements. Now, after observing the fruits of his life of labor, I think I understand that the reason he did not give us a logical train of thought leading to his conclusions, was because he himself was largely devoid of such thinking. Divine intelligence had spoken through him and he could not explain it. It was much like remarks I have heard from children three to five years old that were simply uncanny in their wisdom — remarks that could not possibly be born of logic or experience or repeated parrot fashion from something overheard from an older person. Mathematical scientists in themselves have been a sort of revelation, but how much greater and more wonderful that revelation is or can be if actuated by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Can we not say that Mr. Carver might have been even more successful if he could have combined his wonderful spiritual power with the purely mental power of mathematical science? He believed that God helps him who helps himself, (this is not a Bible quotation), and he was therefore a tireless worker, habitually arising at 4 a. m. and going to the fields and “unto the hills from whence cometh my strength.” It was a principle of his life to start with the simple things around him however inadequate and poorly adapted they seemed to be, and then mould and develop them into products for every human need. Also, with whatever success he achieved, he made it a rule to never be satisfied, but to go on and on improving, evolving, and shall we say creating. Once in a long while God finds a human tool that he can use in extending creation for the good of mankind. Carver was such a tool.

It is recalled that one day in a senior laboratory class in agricultural chemistry, we observed that Carver's

test tube rack was filled with tubes of the most beautiful colors wholly unrelated to the subject in hand—colors translucent, iridescent or opaque. When asked what they were he said, "Oh, certain silicates of aluminum." We tried to find out what reagents and processes he had used to produce them, but he was mysteriously uninformative. We "kidded" him about reverting to the primitive, referring to his works in oil and water color done before coming to Ames which excited widespread favorable comment when exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Then we all forgot about the colors till German dyes were no longer available during World War I and we had to wear mongrel looking shirts. Then Carver brought out some remarkably fine fast colors made from Alabama clays which he selected from excavations made by workmen at his own doorstep. For twenty-five years this "hunch" about dyes from clays had been smoldering or perhaps a better work is incubating. It seems likely that as the years passed he had hundreds of such inspirations which were incubating simultaneously and producing a continuing brood of blessings. After all, this incubation must have been to some extent a process of weighty and unexplainable reasoning. What a wonderful thing it would have been if Carver's mental processes could have been recorded and blueprinted for the use of such minds as are capable of following them. He was not a "psychic" in the common and somewhat uncomplimentary use of this term. He was always intensely practical and concrete, with both feet on the ground.

Carver's life was almost one continuous prayer. His public prayers made one feel that here is a man who actually walks with God. Perhaps a good many students at Ames in the early 1890's were unaware that there were eight or ten quiet prayer circles that met two or three times a week at secluded places in the dormitories or about the campus. Each circle was composed of about ten hand-picked Christian young men, Protestant and Catholic. The only requirement was that each man offer a prayer, however brief, confused, halting and per-

haps painful it might be. Many men learned to pray that way. For two years I carried a key to the private office of James Wilson, Dean of Agriculture, and later for sixteen years in the President's Cabinet as Secretary of Agriculture. His office was the meeting place for one of the prayer groups of which Carver was a member. When the bell sounded at 9:45 p. m. for lights out in the dormitories, the prayer groups scampered to their meeting places. For a year previous, I was a member of another group on the other side of the campus, which met in an attic room in the old Physics and Chemistry Building, which long since disappeared. This group was made up mostly of engineers. Many men learned from Carver to pray "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man," which James says, "availeth much."

Soon after we received our Master's Degrees, Carver was called by Booker T. Washington to a place on the staff of Tuskegee Institute. When the day came for his departure, the most available means of conveying Carver and his personal belongings to the railway station in Ames, was a farm wagon and a team of horses. As I then had charge of the 800-acre college model farm, I had the honor and privilege to personally harness and hitch a team to a farm wagon and help Carver load, transport and unload his trunks and other property. Among these things was a large guitar in a carrying case. In parting, Carver gave me the instrument as a keepsake, with the remark that he did not want to take it with him for people might say, "Just another nigger with a banjo." It is my belief that Carver never spent more than \$100 in ten years on his clothing, from his student days to his death. Though scrupulously clean, his brown suit was often threadbare. He mended his own clothes, including his shoes. But strangely, he was a severe critic of the clothes of his associates, and often lectured me about my poor taste, particularly in neckties.

*Reminiscences by his classmate,
Charles D. Reed, Senior Meteorologist,
U. S. Weather Bureau, Des Moines, Iowa.*

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