Running back a few years, we soon fall upon the time when the colored man enjoyed all that he did merely as a privilege. The entire aim of those who forced him into the country was to tax the muscle and sinew to their utmost capacity—to subject him to a state assimilating closely to that of the brute—so as best to fit him for their uses—to brutalize him into subservience and cattle ignorance.

This passed on for years, with no thought otherwise. This has been most depressing to his intellect and aspirations. But brighter times are upon us. We have sympathizers and friends. Our rights are being acknowledged. We have no longer to contend that we are men and citizens, and enjoy alike, with other citizens, the rights and immunities as such. We need now to engage in matters practicable and leading. We are becoming more and more enlightened. Our progress, in this respect, has been truly astonishing—in fact, has increased so rapidly as to have produced a kind of deformity. We have not kept pace, caught hold, or sought to lead and direct in the business pursuits commensurate with our intelligence—pursuits which tend to wealth, respectability and importance. We need combinations. We need confidence. We need to be known and referred to as business men. All of these are the immediate heirs of commerce.

The places filled in this community by our people have not involved responsibility and respect. We have been machines impelled; consequently there has not been a development of intellect in business pursuits. We have not been calculators. We have not seemed to have had any fixed end tending to our upbuilding and elevation. We have had money. We cannot be called other than industrious; but this industry, to be profitable, to serve the ends for which it is designed, must be made subservient to mind. We must husband aright our resources. What are our resources? The question is answered. The resources common to other men are energy and perseverance. Have we capital? It is at our command. We have individuals possessed of the means, with combination and certainty. Where are our ships, our counting-houses, our business connection with the world? They are wanting; and only because we have never fixedly resolved to have them.

It might be expected that your Committee, in reporting upon the subject of commerce, would have given some statistics bearing thereupon; but they have not deemed it necessary. The statistics of the world might be given to establish that commerce and business enterprises tend to the greatness and consideration of nations. But in the present case, the question is, how far the engagement, on the part of our people, in business pursuits, as leaders and contractors in commercial enterprises, will tend to their upbuilding and elevation—being the prescribed portion of a nation. This point your committee have endeavored to make plain in the brief manner given above, which they most respectfully submit.

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