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Subject: - BIOGRAPHY OF T. THOMAS FORTUNE.
By Arthur J. Gary

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Negroes of America are justly proud of the "Dean of Negro Newspaper Men,"^{1.} Timothy Thomas Fortune, who was destined to give a brilliant performance upon the stage of Afro-American journalism.

Timothy Thomas Fortune was born a slave, the son of humble slave parents,^{2.} in Marian Township, Jackson County, Florida,^{3.} on October 3, 1856.^{4.} His father, Emanuel, was of Indian stock and his mother, Sarah Jane, was a Negro woman.^{5.} His father, who had been elected delegate to the Constitutional Convention of Florida,^{6.} was conspicuously active in Florida politics during the Reconstruction period,^{7.} while young Fortune was busily fitting himself for a useful life, attending Staunton Institute and Howard University.^{8.}

In his early youth, he served as a page in the Florida Senate,^{9.} and as an office boy for the Daily Union, a Jacksonville publication. He was a mere boy of eighteen years when he was employed as railway postal clerk, later becoming mail route agent, between Jacksonville and Chattahoochee, Florida.^{10.} Two years later, in 1876, the Secretary of the Treasury appointed Fortune to the position of special inspector^{11.} of customs in the 1st District of Delaware. For two school years he was a student in the Normal Department of Howard University, leaving to become a compositor on the People's Advocate, and it was while he was employed by this paper that he married Miss Carrie C. Smiley of Jacksonville, Florida.^{12.} At this time he was twenty-one years of age.^{13.}

In 1878, Mr. Fortune arrived in New York City and entered the composing room of the New York Witness. A year later, 1879, he found-^{14.} ed Rumor's Weekly, an illustrated tabloid. His partners in this^{15.} venture were W.W. Sampson and George Parker. Rumor's Weekly was

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short-lived as a tabloid, the name being changed to the New York Globe^{16.} and the size and style changed to a regular weekly newspaper. Both Sampson and Fortune, continued their work on the Witness, setting type at night on the Globe. This procedure assured them a means of livelihood and increased their certainty of having the Globe out at the scheduled time.^{17.} They were soon rewarded for their efforts. The Globe became deservedly popular as it assumed leadership in all matters of local and national importance to the Negro.^{18.} The third partner, Mr. Parker, sold his interest to a Dr. Derrick who because of failure to meet his notes, caused foreclosure and public auction of the Globe's plant.^{19.} Undaunted, ~~Dr. Thomas~~^{Fortune} started anew, this time without any partners.^{20.} The name of the paper was changed to The Freeman, but the policy of militant race leadership and the popular demand for such a paper remained. While editing this paper, Mr. Fortune was the first to suggest, formulate and further the National League idea, with the purpose of preventing intimidation of the Southern Negro.^{21.} The new organization was named the Afro-American League and its founder ardently sponsored organized racial effort to combat all forms of intolerance and injustice to the members of his race.^{22.}

In 1887, The Freeman was given to his brother Emanuel and Jerome B. Peterson and the name of the publication was changed to The New York Age.^{23.} Fortune then joined the staff of the New York Evening Sun,^{24.} later becoming assistant to its editor, Amos J. Cummings. He continued in this capacity until the death of his brother in 1888, when he returned to the Age, remaining until 1907, when he suffered a breakdown and necessarily sold his interest to Fred R. Moore.^{25.} Speaking of his connection with the Age, Mr. Fortune said: "During the stormy career of the Age under the joint management of Hon. Jerome B. Peterson and myself from 1887 to 1907, it lead in the demand and secured the abolition of separate schools, first under Governor Grover Cleveland, and

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finally under Governor Theodore Roosevelt, and the adoption of a civil rights bill, which amended up to date, is by far the best we have secured in any other State. The Age also led in the agitation for an organization of the National Afro-American Press Association, which had its first meeting in Washington, in 1884, of the Afro-American League, at Chicago, in 1890, out of which most of our civic organizations have since grown, and of the National Business League, at Boston, in 1900. Hon. James H. Lewis of Boston having suggested the plan to me, and which I passed on to Dr. Booker T. Washington, as I had more organization work at the time than I could creditably handle.^{26.}

In staunch support of his intimate friend Booker T. Washington, Mr. Fortune aided in the formation of the National Negro Business League and earnestly sponsored Dr. Washington's economic and educational principles.^{27.} In his eagerness to promote the interests of his race, Fortune authored several pamphlets on the subject of politics and education, viz., "The Kind of Education the Afro-American most Needs,"^{28.} "The Negro in Politics," and many others. One of his best known works was published in 1884, and was written at the time that he was editing the New York Globe. The book, "American Questions - Black and White", deals with the political independence of the Southern Negro and discusses the problems of land, labor, and politics, in the South.^{29.}

Whenever opportunity offered, this fearless and outspoken editor, who was also a worthy orator, urged his people to defend the "under-dog", the Southern members of the race, and to demand tolerance and justice for all. On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the death of John Brown, his militant and vitriolic speech advised Negroes to retaliate against the South for its attacks upon blacks. He was goaded into an outburst by the voiding of the Fifteenth Amendment, disfranchising the Negro in the South. He advocated: "...keep your powder dry and be ready to demand an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth ..."

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His audience, colored citizens of Brooklyn and New York, received his remarks with demonstrative approval, but many of the New York dailies issued editorials of bitter protest.³⁰ In true Fortune fashion they were defiantly answered with the question, "What would you do if you were a Negro?"

In 1908, T. Thomas Fortune established, for a short time, the New York Freeman,³¹ a magazine, and in 1911, he returned to the New York Age as Associate Editor and continued to give his message to his race through the editorial columns of that paper until 1914,³² when he edited, managed and published the Washington Sun, leaving that post to edit and publish the Negro Outlook, at Memphis, Tennessee in 1921.³³ For the two years succeeding this period he served as correspondent on the Washington Eagle and the New York Amsterdam News.³⁴ Failing health led him to settle in the home he had purchased at Red Bank, New Jersey - commuting between that point and New York City, where he edited the Negro World, an organ of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.³⁵

Despite Mr. Fortune's newspaper activities, he, in some manner, found the time to devote himself to many worthy organizations, serving as president of the Afro-American League; as president and chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Afro-American Council, and as organizer of the Afro-American Press Association.³⁶ He was also an astute politician, never an adherent to one party or faction, but always a partisan to the man or the policy that best served the interests of his race. He hated tyranny and persecution and devoted his energy and intellect to violent denunciations of biased and prejudiced actions against the Negro. Early in his career he was advised: "...you are wrong; the people are against you; facts are against you, ... and you are too young in years and in the affairs of men to place yourself in opposition to the acknowledged leaders and thinkers of the race."³⁷

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At the time, Fortune said nothing, but a few weeks later, he wrote the "Negro in Politics", which clearly defined the political position of the Negro and then he said: "... In the midst of my newspaper work... I here find time to combat error, to assail perfidy, and to justify my position of 'Race first, then party.' "^{38.}

During his journalistic career, Mr. Fortune enjoyed "such friendships with persons as the late Frank Munsey, Jason Rogers, James Bennett, Jr and Joseph Pulitzer, all outstanding newspaper men of America, and with ... Sidney Wicks of the London, England. He also corresponded with some of the greatest statesmen of Europe, who he had met and interviewed here in the United States."^{39.} His proudest boast was of his intimate acquaintance with Frederick Douglass, whom he greatly admired.^{40.}

After a period of serious illness and just at the time that he seemed to be regaining his grip on life, Timothy Thomas Fortune died, at the residence of his son, Dr. Frederick W. Fortune, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on June 2, 1928.^{41.} He had fathered five children, but was survived by only two, his son, Dr. Frederick Fortune and a daughter, Mrs. Jessie Fortune Bowser, and his wife Carrie Smiley Fortune.^{42.}^{43.}

At the time of his death, he was editor of the Negro World and a contributor to the Birmingham Reporter and to the Norfolk Journal and Guide.^{44.}

Just three months before his death, in one of his last editorials published March 17, 1928 - Mr. Fortune wrote this bit of philosophic admonition to the Negro: "... No one can get far in any direction without knowing in advance where he is going and what he is going after. It is the drifting person, the happy-go-lucky creature, who is always a drag on the industrious and thrifty who have an objective and work towards it. ... It is easy in any community to single out the persons who amount to something and to separate them from the persons who do not amount to anything."^{45.}

Timothy Thomas Fortune won the reputation of "editor, author,

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 pamphleteer and agitator" and was recognized as a most fearless, outspoken and brilliant orator. He was truly the "Dean" in his chosen work and will always be remembered as one of the most effective and keenest writers that the Negro race has ever produced.

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By Wesley Curtwright

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LIFE AND WORK OF TIMOTHY THOMAS FORTUNE,
JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

Timothy Thomas Fortune, outstanding journalist and Negro leader, was born Oct. 3, 1856, at Marianna in Jackson County, Florida. A thunderstorm was raging at the time of his birth, and concurrently the whole country was in a turmoil over the slavery question. In after years he used to remark that he was a storm child, and had to fight.

His parents, Emmanuel Fortune and Jane Bush Fortune, were both slaves. Their racial stock was a mixture of Indian, Scotch, Jewish and Negro. Emmanuel Fortune later became town marshal of Jacksonville, and was at times acting mayor of that city. He was also a member of the Florida Constitutional Convention called right after the Civil War, and served several terms in the Florida legislature.

These political activities brought upon the Fortunes the hostile attentions of the Ku Klux Klan, so that the family, composed of father, mother, 3 daughters and 2 sons found it convenient to remove from Marianna to Jacksonville. Here young Timothy soon found his calling.

At the age of 12, in 1868, he obtained a job as page in the Florida Senate, and remained there until

1872. But meanwhile he was also working as a "printer's devil" in the plants successively of the Tallahassee Sentinel, the Marianna Courier, and the Jacksonville Times-Union, all white papers. Here he learned to set type, and became an avid reader of all the printed matter he could lay his hands on.

Then he was employed by the local postmaster as office boy, and later as newspaper clerk. Finally, at the age of 16, he was made mail route agent between Jacksonville and Chatahoochee on the J.P. and M. Railroad. He was the road's youngest agent, and secured this post by virtue of his father's political connection with Congressman William J. Purnam.

After Fortune had served nearly 2 years on his railroad job, Congressman Purnam wrote him, requesting that he resign and come to Washington, where he could secure a better job. He complied, and was made a special agent of the Treasury Department. He was sent to Wilmington, Delaware, but his headquarters were at Philadelphia. He also served for awhile as private secretary to General Josiah T. Walls, congressman from Florida.

After one summer of this he resigned, and came back to Washington, thinking seriously of his education. In 1877 he entered Howard University, at just the time that General Howard was giving up its presidency. The acting president of the institution was John M. Langston. Among the then students were such outstanding figures

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as former Congressman George H. White, Wiley Lane, George W. Cook, Colonel Matthew N. Lewis, (later editor of the Newport News Star), Dr. F.J. Grimke of Washington, D.C.; and James C. Napier.

Fortune was able to stay at Howard University only one year. Then the Germania Bank, in which he had placed his savings, failed. So he was compelled to leave school.

Congressman Purnam, to whom he turned, now got him a job in the Revenue Marine Division of the Treasury Department. He had hoped to earn enough money from this to return to college, but did not do so. So he returned to printing, and got a job as compositor on the People's Advocate, a weekly owned by John W. Cromwell, a government clerk. He also contributed to the Advocate. But in spite of all their efforts the Advocate failed that same year.

During that winter, the winter of 1877-78, Fortune married Miss Charlotte Caroline Smiley of Jacksonville. He later referred to his marriage as the first big event of his life. He was then 21 years old. After the Advocate went under he returned to Florida and taught school for four years.

Then he moved to New York City. Through the influence of Walter Sampson, with whom he had worked on a Jacksonville paper, he secured a job as compositor for the Daily Witness. At the same time he was a re-

porter for other New York dailies.

Among the papers which he then served was the New York Sun, edited by Charles A. Dana. Dana was so well pleased by Fortune's contributions, (which dealt chiefly with the race question), that he established the Evening Sun especially for him, and gave him an editorial post on it. As special writer for the Sun, Fortune traveled widely.

Fortune made his debut as a strictly Negro journalist in the year 1880. Then he, in co-partnership with Jerome B. Peterson, founded The Rumor, later the New York Globe, then the New York Freeman, and finally the New York Age. Also associated with him in this venture were George Parke and William Walter Sampson.

Fortune and Peterson headed the firm, with Fortune as editor and Peterson as business manager. Under their joint management the New York Age became a powerful, famous newspaper. Its editorials were copied and commented on by dailies and weeklies all over the country.

In this position Fortune fought for and won many battles, both for the Negro as a race and for personal acquaintances. He was always an independent in politics, but co-operated usually with the Republican Party. He secured many political jobs for others, but refused any for himself because he wanted to be free to say what he pleased.

Fortune was instrumental in helping to break up

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the practice then current in New York saloons of refusing to serve colored people. He was opposed to separate public schools for Negroes, and brought about the first mixed school court ruling during the term in office of Governor Grover Cleveland. Separate schools in New York were finally abolished during the administration of Governor Theodore Roosevelt.

Fortune was a close friend of Booker T. Washington, whose theory of education he supported. He also helped Mr. Washington organize the National Negro Business League, and aided him in writing "My Life And Work" and "Up From Slavery." Among his friends were Frank Munsey, Jason Rogers, James Bennett, Jr., and Joseph Pulitzer. He was acquainted with Sidney Wicks, editor of the Manchester Guardian, London, England, and corresponded with the greatest statesmen of Europe, having met many of them in the United States. He was also very proud of a friendship with Frederick Douglas.

Fortune's only political job was an appointment by President Theodore Roosevelt as Special Commissioner to the Phillipines. Among other things, he inspired the short-lived Afro-American League, and originated the term Afro-American, as a substitute for the word "Negro," which he objected to because of its association with the epithet "nigger."

Fortune was militant and fiery, feeling race prejudice keenly. He was at all times a punctual and in-

dustrious writer. Kelly Miller says that between ~~the time of~~ the decline of Frederick Douglass and the rise of Booker Washington, ~~Fortune was~~ the most influential Negro in the United States.

A nervous breakdown in 1907, coupled with financial embarrassments, finally terminated the most notable and conspicuous period of Fortune's life. That year he sold his interest in the New York Age to Fred R. Moore, the paper's present editor. He never fully recovered from that illness.

During his later years as a New York editor, Fortune commuted daily from his home which he had bought in Red Bank, New Jersey. He wrote for many papers, including the Philadelphia Tribune, in whose development he aided. In 1914 he established the Washington Sun, which has since gone out of business.

In his declining years Mr. Fortune inclined toward the Back-to-Africa movement of Marcus Garvey, perhaps because he had seen so many other plans fail. In 1923 he became editor of the Negro World, organ of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, composed of Garvey's followers.

Fortune was still editor of the Negro World when he died June 2, 1928, at the age of 72, of a complication of diseases, of which he had been ill for some time. He died at the home of his son, Dr. Frederick Fortune, in Philadelphia. In addition to his ^{son} ~~son~~, he was survived

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by his widow and a daughter, Mrs. Jessæ F. Bowser, who is a New York public school teacher.

Timothy Thomas Fortune was the author of a number of books, among them the following: "Dreams of Life," a book of poems, "The Negro In Politics," and "Black and White." Among the papers he served were the New York Age, Amsterdam News, Philadelphia Tribune, Washington Eagle, Norfolk Journal and Guide, and the Birmingham Reporter.

In Fortune's day personal journalism flourished. He considered the editorial page supreme, and had scant patience with modern newspapers.

A trace of sadness in Fortune's philosophy of life is observed in the following quotation from "Dreams of Life": "The successes we achieve in life, .. usually cost us so much... that very little ^{a city} ~~cap~~ ~~ity~~ for the enjoyment of the fruits of our labors is left us. Very few men go to sleep unknown, and wake up famous, as Byron did, while they are yet young." Fortune always maintained that Marcus Garvey was never proved guilty of the charge on which he was jailed, and called him "strictly honest," and his efforts worthwhile.

Tall, slender and stately, Timothy Thomas Fortune was a picturesque newspaper figure, and was known generally as the dean of Negro editors, a title which he greatly enjoyed. Kelly Miller sums him up thus: "He represents the best developed journalist that the Negro race has produced in the Western World."

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B I B L I O G R A P H Y

DREAMS OF LIFE, by Timothy Thomas Fortune

THE NEGRO IN POLITICS, by Timothy Thomas Fortune

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Later he was a contributor to the New York Sun under Charles A. Dana. Fortune was by far one of the most powerful and influential Negro editors of his time; his editorials in the New York Age drew repeated comments from the white dailies. Theodore Roosevelt, when Police commissioner, was quoted as saying, "Tom Fortune, for God's sake, keep that dirty pen of yours off me." When Roosevelt became President, it was Fortune whom he sent to investigate conditions in the Hawaiian Islands and the Philippines. As friend and advisor to Booker T. Washington, he assisted the educator in the preparation of his autobiographies. Because of the disagreeable connotation of the word "nigger", he excluded "Negro" from his vocabulary and is credited with being the originator of the term "Afro-American." He was also editor of Marcus Garvey's Negro Times, before his death in 1923.