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The other Woods

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.B.

Tiger isn't the only influential Woods with African-American heritage. Granville Woods was as key a figure in the field of invention as Tiger is to golf. One of the most prolific inventors of the 19th century, Mr. Woods was awarded over 50 patents for electric devices. He improved the telephone and steam boiler furnace. He patented an apparatus to send voice and telegraph messages over a single wire. And a series of devices resulting in the automatic air brake to slow trains. From egg incubators to safety circuits, Woods improved the quality of life.

Undaunted by racial prejudice, Woods started his own manufacturing company in Cincinnati, Ohio, and astutely marketed his products to major companies such as American Bell Telephone. Later when other inventors (including Thomas Edison) tried to usurp his ideas, Woods successfully defended his patents in court.

Woods (1856-1910) lived during the same period as the founder of this newspaper, Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910). While he struggled against racial prejudice, Mary Baker encountered gender bias.

Like Woods, Mrs. Eddy discovered she had to print and market her products herself. After numerous problems with other printers, she started a publishing house of her own.

Both of these individuals expanded the boundaries of conventional thinking. And their contributions continue to improve society and reach far beyond themselves. This inspires me to learn and strive to break through obstacles in my own life. Eddy once described the ultimate result of progressive thinking: "Academics of the right sort are requisite. Observation, invention, study, and original thought are expansive and should promote the growth of

mortal mind out of itself, out of all that is mortal" ("Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," pg. 195).

I can't invent more than a creative dish of leftovers. However, seeing how valuable one good idea can be, and how perseverance and inspiration can bless many people, buoys me to apply each element of the academics described in this statement in my own job:

* Observation. Observation includes identifying good ideas and successful methods. It can also involve asking, "What might be blocking the good ideas I have, or that others have?" Sometimes I've uncovered some ignorance or fear or prejudice, and correcting it has brought a good idea to light.

* Original thought. Instead of reiterating the complexity of a problem, original thought moves to solutions. When I've turned to God as the divine Mind, the origin of all good ideas, fresh and innovative solutions have appeared that are often beyond the box of conventional methods.

* Study. While flashes of inspiration ignite the fires of progress, study fuels them. The willingness to devote considerable thought to a worthy purpose, the steady perseverance that learns from failures as well as successes, lead to higher levels of ability and performance. For me, gaining spiritual inspiration is a crucial part of study, and the Bible and Science and Health have proved to be very helpful in this practical as well as spiritual growth.

* Invention. Discovery of a solution is invention. Invention doesn't have to be a physical object. It can be an idea. So, through prayer and creative thinking one may discover how to write concisely. Or memorize lines in a play. Or deliver an unforgettable presentation.

Once I was assigned the task of getting two engineering departments to bring a product into production. They had stopped communicating. I'm not an engineer and didn't understand any of the technical issues. So I prayed for guidance to express "academics of the right sort." I also listened carefully and observed every complaint, concern, and contribution. I asked each engineer for his creative solution to the impasse. I studied the Bible and Science and Health daily. I was convinced that the same Mind that produced amazing solutions in the Bible was at work in our lives. Within a short time, invention appeared. The two departments began communicating

and worked out acceptable technical solutions. The product rapidly moved into production and was successfully marketed.

The example of individuals like Granville Woods continues to encourage me. Knowing that others have overcome obstacles greater than those I face inspires me to persevere. What a legacy such great thinkers leave for us.