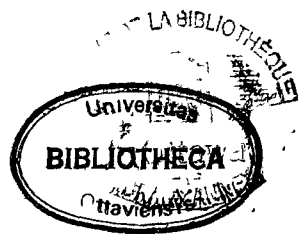


THE VOICES OF THE NEGRO
IN
AMERICAN LITERATURE.

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in the
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The Voice of the Negro in American Literature.

FORWARD.

This research is not intended to be a critical analysis of Negro literature. No attempt has been made to make it comprehensive, no effort to compare it, save occasionally in passing, with a white contemporary. It is merely the voice of the Negro presenting himself, his problems, his substance; the history of a race, struggling in slavery - fighting for freedom. It is the story of a growth in literature from the simple expression of an uneducated past to the high intellectual artistry of present achievement. There is no claim to completeness of any kind; its sole aim is to create a recognition of the Negro challenge; a realization that culturally, as in all else when given opportunity, he "crossed the line":¹

I, too, sing America
I am the darker brother
I, too, am America.²

1. Wright, Richard. 12 Million Black Voices. p. 147.

2. Hughes, Langston. "I, Too". Cullen, Countee, ed. Caroling Dusk. p. 146.

Preface.

As a subject for thesis writing, Negro literature presents perplexing problems. It has a twofold interest. Its importance lies, first, as an insight into the history, character, determination of its people; secondly, as the artistic, intellectual development of a new American. Of necessity, one thread has run throughout it all - the thread of race. The Negro American, denied the vote, has had but two possible mediums through which he might seek justice; through oratory and through the press. As a result he has been forced to forego a universality of subject and confine himself to the primary concern which dominates his life. In the analysis of his literary record he sought, first to disarm, secondly to lure, and lastly to reveal himself as he is, regardless of consequence.

With this in mind, I have proceeded. To understand the Negro, is to penetrate into his sociological background, his present situation. My sympathy compelled me to present for you the product of my 'plucking'; for this reason I inserted the "Introduction". The Spirituals followed; for no resumé of Negro literature would seem complete without them. Jupiter Hammon represents the initial writer. He is of interest, because even as a slave, he must have been superior in a life of slaves and masters. Phillis Wheatley is unique. She did not attempt to project her cause; she wove intellectual patterns into the poetry of her age and proved that given opportunity, the Negro could compare favorably with white contemporaries. Frederick Douglass is the torch which lit the race and started it toward freedom.

His biographies possess a vigour which incites belief, a lyricism which conveys a future promise. The persuasive quality of Douglass lies active in his prose. It is his Life and Times which swept me from a more formal analysis of his work to a biographical presentation.

For the transition period I selected Paul Dunbar because he was the first Negro poet to be nationally claimed by white America. Booker Washington moves in this group as one who, governed by the traditions of the South, accepted the immediate. During recent years his policy has been disparaged by most Negro thinkers; but at the turn of the century, his positive, even though conciliatory platform, wielded a tremendous influence throughout the North and South, upon both black and white. Culturally, W. E. B. Dubois stands supreme. His artistry of style may vie with any writer. As left wing, he too, turned the century - gathering followers from the "Talented Tenth" to storm the strength of Washington in his march toward industrial education.

The Renaissance was an outgrowth of the First Great War. It was the period of expansion and experiment. Into this era writers tumbled, spreading their racial muse without restraint into America's cracks and crevices. Bourgeoisie, passing, chauvinism, became the themes, and lyricism flavoured them. Though Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, were leading stars, the others contributed too greatly toward the mosaic to neglect them. Out of this pot-pourri of writing, there developed the New Negro. As representatives of this last, I have selected Arna Bontemps and Richard Wright because they form such contrasts. Bontemps is at heart a poet; but he has not emphasized his lyric muse. Of late,

he has identified himself as anthologist, a writer for youth, and a reviewer. Richard Wright exploded into 'the public eye'. With Native Son he hurled his violent style and made both Black and white unite in talking of it. Finally, I beheld these other men, each contributing vastly toward cultural development. I grouped them into a Conclusion; for in all fairness, I could not do otherwise.

The numerous excerpts perhaps need explanation. In Canada, even in the United States, there is a dearth in books written by the Negro. Public ignorance, indifference, prejudice toward him has not made it profitable for booksellers, publishers, to keep Negro work in stock. They rapidly go out of print. Therefore this research has been literally a 'squeezing' process; buying where possible, using both Canadian and American libraries, delving into excerpts, culling anthologies, analyzing reviews, haunting bookstands, and bookshops. For a white viewpoint, I have found support in Vernon Loggins, Instructor in English at Columbia University, through his book Negro Author. My Negro critical authorities have been mainly: Benjamin Brawley, Negro Genius; Sterling Brown, Arthur P. Davis, Ulysses Lee. Negro Caravan; Hugh Morris Gloster, Negro Voices in American Fiction; J. Saunders Redding, To Make a Poet Black; also critical studies in essay form, by Sterling Brown, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke. Accessible, and vastly interesting to me, have been the Negro anthologies: Negro Caravan, which touches every field of literature; Countee, Cullen, ed. Caroling Lusk, James Weldon Johnson, ed. The Book of American Negro Poetry, Sylvestre Atkins ed. An Anthology of American Negro Literature. My personal urge to

penetrate this subject was further stimulated by the white promulgator Edwin R. Embree, in 13 Against the Odds.

Menace of Colour, a dispassionate analysis of the sociological problem, by J. W. Gregory, English writer, influenced me greatly; the Myrdal research, An American Dilemma, proved a valuable aid. I am indebted to the George Peabody College at Nashville, Tennessee, for forwarding my letter of inquiry to Fisk University of the same city. In courtesy, Mr. Arns Montemps, Negro Librarian at Fisk, replied and gave me much constructive aid in study course. I acknowledge the assistance of the Boston Public Library, with whom I spent an Easter vacation; and the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library, situated at 235 th. Street, which introduced me to the Schomburg collection and supplied much information that I sought.

Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to the Ottawa Public Library for their untiring interest and assistance toward my research; to the Library of Parliament for allowing me access to their shelves; to the Library of the University of Ottawa, where the extensive bibliographic aids facilitated greatly; and to the Reverend Auguste Morisset, Librarian of the University, who despite his own paucity of leisure hours, has never failed to aid me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

B. R. D.	Book Review Digest.
Ed.	Editor.
Loc. cit.	Place located. This abbreviation was used sparingly and appears only when it lies within four citations.
(N)	Negro author.
op. cit.	work cited. Used sparingly as in case of Loc. cit.
S. R. L.	Saturday Review of Literature.
(W)	White author.

"The differences between black folk and white folk are not blood or colour, and the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us. The common road of hope which we all have travelled has brought us into a stronger kinship than any words, laws, or legal claims.

Look at us and know us and you will know yourselves, for we are you, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives!

What do we black folk want?

We want what others have, the right to share in the upward march of American life, the only life we remember or have ever known.

The Lords of the Land say: "We will not grant this!"

We answer: "We ask you to grant us nothing. We are winning our heritage, though our toll in suffering is great!"

The Bosses of the buildings say: "Your problem is beyond solution!"

We answer: "Our problem is being solved. We are crossing the line you dared us to cross, though we pay in the coin of death!"

The Seasons of the plantation no longer dictate the lives of many of us; hundreds of thousands of us are moving into the sphere of conscious history.

We are with the new tide. We stand at the crossroads. We watch each new procession. The hot wires carry urgent appeals. Print compels us. Voices are speaking. Men are moving! And we shall be with them..."³

Richard Wright.

CHAPTER I.INTRODUCTION

This study has not been happy reading. Penetrating the subject, in darkness and shadow, cognizant of the serious problem, seeking yet lacking a solution, the words of the Breton fishermen have come to my mind: "... The sea is so wide and my boat is so small".⁴

That the American Negro is a problem, we are fully aware. From the United States' "Declaration of Independence" came these words:

we hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Later the words of Abraham Lincoln rang out in deepening seriousness:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe that this government cannot exist permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect this Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.⁵

and now we face in almost ominous warning, the words of James Weldon Johnson, Negro writer:

If American wishes to make democratic institutions secure, she must deal with this question right and righteously. For it is in the nature of a truism to say that this country can have no more democracy than it ac-

4. Author not located.

5. From Abraham Lincoln's nomination speech, June 16, 1858.

cords and guaranteed to the humblest and weakest citizen... And it cannot be met and answered by the mere mouthings of the worn platitudes of humanitarianism, of formal religion, or of abstract democracy. For the Negroes directly concerned are not in far-off Africa; they are in and within our midst.⁶

Thus the fundamental problem of the United States is the future of its thirteen million Negroes.

Considering the short time the race has been free, and the almost insuperable obstacles of racial prejudice, progress has been phenomenal. An illiteracy of ninety percent in 1863, fell to forty-four percent in 1900, to sixteen percent in 1930. By 1940, ninety percent of the American Negro population had become literate. Yet, despite this outstanding progress, the Negro's educational facilities have been deplorable. In seventeen states and the District of Columbia, the law requires Negro children to attend separate schools. These buildings are, for the most part rudely constructed, with an equipment which is out of date. The salaries are too low to attract able men and women; as a result many of the children are poorly trained. Regardless of the fact that advantages have improved during the last twenty or thirty years, the typical Negro's opportunities for education fall far below the level of his white contemporary. Few have sufficient money to attend college. Those who do, have difficulty in securing entrance. The South denies them admission to the state universities or private white colleges; the Northern state universities accept enrollment, but the so-

6. Johnson, James Weldon. Along This Way. p. 412.

cial attitude frequently results in unhappiness and acute despair. Many of the smaller Northern colleges deny entrance, or at least restrict admission; even throughout wartime Negroes encountered difficulty in securing vocational training for skilled work. With a need greater than that of any other group, they constituted less than five percent of the persons accepted in the pre-employment or 'refresher' courses by the United States Office of Education and Employment Service up to May, 1942. In some of the Southern states, their native ground, Negroes were excluded from the benefits of the entire war training programme.

According to the 1930 census, only 254,000 Negroes were listed as white collar employees, business or professional men. In comparison with a ratio of two out of five among whites, Negro figures levelled at one out of every fifteen workers. There was a decline in Negro figures between 1910 and 1930.

The chief Negro profession has been school teaching. But although the load has been usually heavy, with its struggles against ignorance, aggression and repression, the salaries have been inadequately low. During 1935-1936, the average Negro teacher in Southern elementary schools received 510 dollars as compared to 833 dollars amongst the Southern whites.

A large proportion of Negroes have entered the clergy, but the salaries in most cases have been so inadequate, as to necessitate an accompanying trade to supplement their living.

The medical profession has raised formidable bars. White medical schools have evinced reluctance in admitting Negroes and very few hospitals have admitted them on a basis of complete e-

quality with white. The opportunity to specialize, is a comparatively closed one. Because their clientele constitutes, in the main part, an impoverished group, their income is far below that of white physicians possessing similar training and ability.

Law, as a profession, offers even more restrictions. Theoretically, a good Negro lawyer should be the eligible spokesman to defend his race, but in practice a Negro has more chance at court with a capable white lawyer than with the best of Negro lawyers. Therefore, few Negroes are attracted to the law profession. In 1930 there were only 1200 lawyers in the entire country. In Alabama, only six out of six hundred were Negroes.⁷

Artists, actors, and musicians have realized an increment; but even in this field white superiority has aimed to control or to exploit achievement; to scintillate or dim the Negro glow according to the momentary whim. The finest Negro is open to the insult of an inferior white man. Marion Anderson, whose singing voice had charmed the world, met with humiliation when, in Washington, Easter, 1939, Constitutional Hall would not grant her a recital.

A grave obstruction to the betterment of the race lies in the housing conditions. white landlords have exploited Negroes, forcing them to pay high rents for foul and shocking habitations. Sometimes five or six people live in a one-room hitchenette, rat-infested and loathsome, paying almost twice the sum exacted from

7. Stewart, Maxwell. Negro in America. (Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 95) p. 12-18. This pamphlet is a study of the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy by Gunnar Myrdal (1944).

a white. The rooms are ghettos of desperate and unhappy people, living in an unbearable closeness with each other, producing a situation taut with crime. These situations blight the personalities of growing children, throw girls still in their teens, into rooms with restless men. The boys become the prey of restlessness and its resultant gangs. Pressure, tension, and incessant bedlam break up marriages, inject cruelty, fear, or shiftlessness into a race brought up in despair.⁸

At the root of economic and cultural limitation has lain denial of political rights, especially in the South, to vote. Following the Civil war, the Federal Parliament, by amendments to the American Constitution, conferred on the Negroes full citizenship of the United States and passed a measure to secure them the full enjoyment of their rights. Three amendments defined their legal status. The thirteenth amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude in 1865, which made the Negro legally free. In 1866, the fourteenth amendment granted full citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States. The fifteenth amendment, 1870, declared specifically that no citizens would be debarred the right to vote "on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude".⁹ In spite of this the Southern states proceeded to enact regulations to defeat the Negro. As a result, in 1867 the Northern states passed the "Reconstruction Act", which gave them direct control of

8. Wright. 12 Million Black Voices. p. 147. (Wright indicts landlords.)

9. Gregory, J.W. Menace of Colour. p. 44. Quotation from the 15th amendment.

the South. To accomplish their ends, they sent officials from the North, built up Negro majorities in the legislatures, and maintained garrisons of Federal troops. These Northern political adventurers, spoken of contemptuously by the South as carpet-baggers, behaved with such alarming greed that they incited even the North to disapproval. In 1876, the Southern whites were allowed to establish an effective organization and retain control of their country. 1877 brought removal of the federal troops. The Negroes had not been without guilt in the corruption and with the restricting barriers removed, the whites took rapid measures to dismiss them. From that time the numerical majority of Negroes disappeared by corrupt manipulation of elections. At first, the power and veto of the President of the Republic prevented any serious change in the law, but the election of a Democrat in 1884, removed it. When the Presidency returned to the Republicans again in 1890, a Federal Election Bill was introduced to suppress the most audacious electioneering frauds; but it was never passed. That year the South began the legal disfranchisement of the Negro. These acts were cleverly worded. Not mentioning colour, they were nominally consistent with the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments; at the same time they practically dismissed them. In 1890, the State of Mississippi passed the first disfranchisement act. It limited suffrage by demanding an education test, which excluded those who could not read various clauses of the Constitution. Officials in charge manipulated the tests in such manner that practically all white persons received the vote, while practically all Ne-

gro voters lost it. In 1898, Louisiana devised "the grandfather clause" which granted suffrage to anyone whose father or grandfather had been a voter previous to 1867; this conceded the whites the vote but struck out all the Negroes. South Carolina in 1895, North Carolina in 1900, Alabama and Virginia in 1901, Georgia in 1907, adopted similar restrictions. In 1910, Oklahoma recognized any male descendant of anyone who in 1866 had been eligible for franchise, or who then resided in another country. This admitted all white foreigners and their descendants, but debarred the Negro. Another restriction devised was the imposition of a poll tax. The receipt of this must be presented before voting and by not collecting the tax, the Negro was bribed to non-registration and ultimate disfranchisement. Thus in all the Southern states the Negroes became politically impotent...¹⁰

The "grandfather clause" has passed away; the poll tax has been repealed in North Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida; other states are following. One of the greatest obstacles has lain within the Democratic primary. In his essay "The Disfranchisement of the Negro", Ralph Bunche places 'Exclusion from the Democratic primary' as one of the most effective means to give Negro political power its 'black out'. He adds: This is in actuality a 'white' rather than a 'Democratic' primary, for all whites, whether Democratic or Republican, are frequently admitted to it, while all Negroes are barred".¹¹ The action has been

10. Ibid. 43-46. "Political Changes in the Status of the Negro".

11. Bunche, Ralph. "The Disfranchisement of the Negro". Brown, Sterling ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 925-927.

enforced on the theory that the Democratic party is a voluntary organization entitled to determine its own membership. As the Democratic party is the only party that counts in the South, its primary really determines who is to be elected. Although the Supreme Court has one by one outlawed the prohibiting clauses, has pronounced it illegal to deprive the Negro of his vote in the primary, several of the Southern states still continued to bar them in the 1944 primaries.¹²

The denial of the vote to the Negro has handicapped the even administration of justice and seriously impeded his progress. The defective administration of the law has been the chief cause and excuse for lynching, which has been one of the most haunting terrors in Negro life, the source of an insidious hatred.

Still existing, as a degrading injustice, is the social restriction placed upon the Negro. He is not allowed the restaurants, hotels, theatres, churches, public libraries, and the schools frequented by the whites.

William Edward Burghardt Dubois, whose private library was one of the gems of Atlanta, Georgia, could not enter the public library nor steep his spirit with drama or music, save under the most humiliating terms. Washington Carver, invited to address the United Peanut Associations, was sent around to the back door, lugging his bag of specimens, and hustled up the freight elevator to the assembly room.¹³ Ralph Bunche, top ranking director

12. Stewart. Negro in America. p. 19.

13. Kambree, Edwin R. 13 Against the Odds. p. 100.

of the United Nations department of trusteeship affairs, refused in part, at least the invitation to return to the state department in Washington, because of his unwillingness to re-expose his family to anti-Negro conditions there.

These men, or others like them, are the subject of this thesis. It is to give them the opportunity to speak for themselves, that they are here. Some come as orators, virile and strong in race consciousness, others come disillusioned, or in loneliness, singing in lyric form their song of desolation, even death.

It is not my purpose to assume that Negroes are worthier than they are. While an increasing number are excellent and deserving citizens, the Negro masses are still far below the average American standard in learning, in economic and in social status - in almost every vital phase of life. But in the words of Edwin M. Embree, modern white promulgator of Negro betterment:

It is not surprising that this race, only three generations out of slavery and still discriminated against at every turn, has not yet come to full development. The surprising thing is that in so short a time and against such heavy odds so many have risen to the very top in achievement and in fame.¹⁴

14. Ibid. p. 7.

"I lie in de grave and stretch out my arms".

Never, it seems to me, since man first
lived and suffered, was his infinite
longing for peace uttered more plaint-
ively than in that line.

T.W. Higginson.

"Atlantic Monthly", June, 1867.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOLK TALES.

THE SPIRITUALS.

The Negro's beginning in America and the circumstances under which he lived shed a psychological significance upon his literary temperament. His entrance into the country had but one purpose - labour. Following the arrival of twenty Africans, on a Dutch man of war in 1619 at Jamestown, shipments continued over a period of two centuries. They were not a single people but came from tribes as different as the several nations of Europe. Contrary to popular belief, many of these tribes were not the crude savages we tend to picture, but were far removed from barbarism. Groups which would not have met for centuries were thrown together as fellow slaves; thus, even had there been no white or Indian blood, the mingling of these people would have produced a new race different from any single tribe in Africa. Added to this, there was the rapid fusion of a white and Indian blood. This unusual blending is the heritage of the Negro American.

The adjustment to this new life must have brought shock, intensive suffering. Torn from their own social settings, Negroes found themselves mixed with other blacks whose customs and

language differed widely. It was necessary to drop the native tongues and establish a medium of conversation not only between their masters and themselves but between slave and slave. A dialect developed, in which the harsh and difficult sounds were elided, with secondary moods and tenses eliminated; so the original African languages became absolutely lost.

Accustomed to the colourful life of African plains and jungles, the Negroes were now thrust into the degradation, the drudgery of slave life. They had to adjust themselves to a new continent, a new climate. On the high seas the African captives had already endured agony, torture. without room enough to stand, they had lain for weeks in filthy holds, deprived of sunlight and sanitation. Through lack of decent food, shortage of water, little or no exercise, they became infected with disease. From the first shipment, twenty out of one hundred survived. The survivors, therefore, from these slave ships, became the background of a rugged race. This strength which gave him the will to live is a dominant note throughout the Negro's literature.

Although harsh treatment forced the Negroes to forget their native traditions, or to remember them but subconsciously, it intensified emotional traits, developed characteristics. To endure, they had to seek an outlet; through this outlet came their culture. As the primitive inhabitants had gathered round the campfire in the African jungles to tell stories, so the Negroes gathered round the cabin to tell tales of the earth, imaginative and superstitious fancies. It has been a controversial dis-

discussion as to whether African culture patterns can be found in America. Professor Newbell N. Puckett¹⁵ who has done considerable investigation on the subject, traces certain words which are common in the South, to their African origin; even though the wide scattering of the enslaved tribes meant that native languages must be abandoned. Willis D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson¹⁶ in their book Race Relations speak of the similarity between the groups of African folk tales given by Robert H. Nassau, John H. Weeks and Richard F. Burton, and those Negro folk tales of the old South. Although they recognize that similarity does not necessarily indicate common origin, research students have traced many of the stories of Uncle Remus. Weatherford and Johnson reveal the marked resemblance between Joel Chandler Harris' tar baby and an African folk story given by Weeks in his Congo Life and Jungle Stories.¹⁷

Folk stories were the first form of literary expression which the Negro contributed to America. They contained elements of philosophy, tinctures of symbolism, and revealed along with sturdy stoicism, a pithy wisdom which foretold an inherent ability to survive. Some of their compressed but compact proverbs were: "Nigger dot gets hurt wukkin oughter show de shyars".¹⁸ "Rails split-fo breakfus'll season de dinner": "Hits a mighty deaf nigger dat don't hear de dinner-ho'n". These simple exam-

15. Weatherford, Willis, Johnson, Charles. Race Relations. p. 459.

16. Ibid. p. 459.

17. Ibid. p. 460.

18. Ibid. p. 461.

ples were but the embryo of a culture but they contained a tart pungency which is tickling to the palate, and an astuteness which brought colour into writing.

The best known examples of the folk tales of slavery are those written by Noel Chandler Harris. The editors of Negro Caravan commend this white man's stories as "friendly to plantation Negroes and artistically sensitive".¹⁹ They consider his handling of southern Negro speech, superior to that of any writer preceding him. They grant him great credit for recognizing the worth of the Negro fables about Brer Rabbit, Brer Terapin, ... but they agree with Alain Locke, Negro critic, who calls him, "a kindly amanuensis for the illiterate Negro peasant".²⁰ They also quote Arthur Huff Fauset, Negro writer and collector of folklore both in Nova Scotia and the Mississippi Delta:

"In true folk tales, the story teller himself was inconsequential... The Uncle Remus stories break this tradition, however: Instead the story teller plays an important, a too important role. By this very fact, this type of story ceases to be a folk tale and becomes in reality a product of the imagination of the author... These stories cannot present Negro folk and feeling seen and felt on its own level. Enough has been said, perhaps, to show, without in any way detracting from the true service and real charm of the Harris stories, that there are enough incongruous elements insinuated into the situation to make it impossible to accept them as a final rendering of American Negro folklore".²¹

Negro critics claim that Harris lost the traditional folk

19. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 430.

20. Ibid. p. 430.

21. Ibid. p. 431.

tale origin by assuming to interpret Negro character instead of confining himself to the mere telling of the stories. Uncle Remus in telling the stories for the entertainment of his little white master, cast a winning vote for the contented slave and made the picture of plantation life seem warm and mellow.

As a result of Uncle Remus, there arose a whole school of "faithful aunts and uncles"²² relating stories to their masters' children.

William Wells Brown was the first Negro to publish folk anecdotes. He published them under My Southern Home (1880). In writing of experiences close to him, he blended humour, pathos, sense and nonsense, in a manner that made "the warmth and sunshine of the South glow over his pages".²³ In 1899, Charles W. Chesnutt gained distinction with his folk tale stories. Four of the seven stories in The Conjure woman appeared in "The Atlantic Monthly". It was the first contribution by a Negro to be accepted by this periodical. The plan of the book was similar to that of Uncle Remus. Reviewers compared it favourably with Harris and Walter Page. Uncle Julius tells the seven folk tales to a prosperous white couple who have hired him after settling in North Carolina to engage in grape culture. This Negro, a mulatto, is not the virtuous, humble uncle of Walter Page of Harris; he is an individual, with an adroit sense of self-protection. Uncle Remus is a product of what the white man had

22. Ibid. p. 431.

23. Ibid. p. 431.

trained himself to look for; Uncle Julius exposes the sordid side of the plantation tradition but he himself is never tragic. His shrewdness, kindness and sly cunning, his ability to look out for himself, give him a realistic flavour and his folk tales a meaning. Redding, Negro critic, describes it as "the fundamental stuff of life translated into the folk terms of a people who knew true tragedy".²⁴

Chesnutt admitted the similarity to the Harris tales, but he insisted upon his own originality. He claimed that although the name of the story-teller, the locale, as well as the cover design, were suggestive of Uncle Remus, the tales were entirely different. It was some time before the public was aware that the stories had been written by a Negro.

Negroes, for some reason, have been slow in the gathering of their folk tales. Even Chesnutt's were for the most part, tales of the imagination rather than stories collected from the past. It is easy to conclude that in the early struggle for recognition they did not think of them as worthy of recognition, of literary effort. They saw in them, perhaps, illiteracy and not a treasure in American folklore. There is now a slight move in that direction. Zora Neale Hurston, Negro anthropologist, has contributed to the field. Negra Caravan describes her volume Mules and Men (1935) as the first substantial collection of folk tales by a Negro scholar.²⁵ Clever in mind and indefatigable in effort, she has done much research in Negro folk-

24. Redding, J. Saunders. To Make a Poet Black. p. 69.

25. Brown... eds. Negra Caravan. p. 433.

lore. She possesses a naive attraction which enables her to go about measuring Negro heads and listening to side-splitting anecdotes. All critics share the opinion that she writes with great charm and that her forte is the recording of folk-speech. "Nation" in appraising her work speaks of it as "chock full of earthy and touching poetry".²⁶ Her terse beginning is inclined to detract from the book, but its pages shine with humour which is mellow and delightful.

"During slavery time two ole niggers wuz talkin' an' one said tuh de other one, "Ole Massa made me so mad yistiddy till Ah give 'im uh good cussin' out. Man, Ah called 'im everything wid uh handle on it".

De other one says, "You didn't cuss Ole Massa, didja? Good God! what did he do tuh you?"

"He didn't do nothin', an' man, Ah laid one cussin' on 'im! Ah'm uh man lak dis, Ah won't stan' no hunchin'. Ah betcha he won't bother me no mo'".

"Well, if you cussed 'im and he didn't do nothin' tuh you, de nex' time he make me mad Ah'm goin' tuh lay uh hearin' on him".

Nex' day de nigger did somthin'. Ole Massa got in behind 'im and he turnt 'round an' give Ole Massa one good cussin' an' Ole Massa had 'im took down and whipped nearly tuh death. Nex' time he saw dat other nigger he says tuh him. "Thought you tole me, you cussed Ole Massa out and he never opened his mouf".

"Ah did".

"Well, how come he never did nothin' tuh yuh? Ah did it an' he come nigh uh killin' me".

"Man, you didn't go cuss 'im tuh his face, didja?"

"Sho' Ah did. Aint' dat whut you tole me you done?"

"Haw, Ah didn't say Ah cussed 'im tuh his face. You sho is crazy. Ah thought you had mo' sense than dat. When Ah cussed Ole Massa he wuz settin' on de front porch an' Ah wuz down at de big gate".

Mules and Men.²⁷

But coming back to the new race and the old plantation - they did not always spend their evenings spinning yarns. They

26. "Nation". Oct. 16, 1937. Book Review Digest, 1937. p.510.

27. Hurston, Zora. Mules and Men. p. 107-108.

danced, they sang, and from plantation cabins the singing floated through the summer night enchanting all its listeners. The rhythm they had brought with them from Africa; the melody and harmony was their own. The rhythm was the tom tom of the Negro's memory; the melody, his receptiveness to what he heard and felt in the new land. His harmony was and is, his victory. This endowment is the great gift which the intellectual American Negro is turning into poetry, the music of the literary world.

One element of survival in the Negro was his emotional receptivity to gaiety. Even in the midst of suffering and hardship there was leisure and the more optimistic Negro found his outlet in dancing and ingenious subtle song. Into this he put the strong syncopated beat of the African jungle, based on the patting of the hands and feet. Pleasure, humour, hilarity, love, all echoed in this syncopation. The strong accent or down beat was never lost; one foot maintained the evenness while the hands clapped out intricate and varying rhythmic patterns.²⁸ The rhythms were the keynote of the secular songs; the basic patterns of the cakewalk, ragtime, blues, out of which jazz grew as progeny.

James Weldon Johnson, in his preface to The Book of American Negro Poetry²⁹ gives a detailed account of the growth of

28. Johnson, James Weldon. "The History of the Spiritual". Watkins, Sylvestre, ed. Anthology of American Negro Literature. p. 135.

29. Johnson, James Weldon, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. Preface to 1st. edition. p. 10.

ragtime, with its chief charm not in melody but in rhythm. These songs began in Negro dialect and were about Negroes in the cabin, the cotton field, the levee, or in a jubilee or ball sometimes upon Sixth Avenue. To what extent the Negro may claim ownership to jazz has been a controversial question. Alain Locke, Negro critic, describes it as

"not a pure Negro folk thing, but a hybrid product of the elements of Negro folk song and dance upon popular and general elements of contemporary American life. Jazz is one-third Negro folk idiom, one-third ordinary middle-class American idea and sentiment, and one third spirit of the 'machine-age' which, more and more, becomes not American but occidental. Because the basic colour of the mixture is Negro, we attribute jazz, more largely than we should, to Negro life. Rather we should think of it this way - jazz represents Negro life in its technical elements, American life in general in its intellectual content".³⁰

At the close of the nineteenth century a controversy arose as to whether the American Negro's music was African or European, whether they were original or imitations of another culture. In 1893, a German musicologist Richard Wallaschek, criticized the songs as being "overrated", "mere imitations of European compositions", "ignorantly borrowed". A wave of jealousy sprang up against them. In 1915, Henry C. Krehbiel, a valued music critic of the New York Herald Tribune, answered Wallaschek's charges and "set out to prove, in a discriminating analysis, that the Negro songs were the only indigenous body of folk songs in America, and that these songs were the Negro's own".³¹

30. Locke, Alain. "The Negro in American Culture". Watkins, Sylvestre, ed. Anthology of American Negro Literature. p. 155.

31. Brown, ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 414-415.

James Weldon Johnson, Negro interpreter of artistic achievement, who with his brother Rosamund, did much research in this field, believed it was inconceivable that the great mass of five or six hundred songs could have sprung from imitation.³²

Close study of American-Negro literature substantiates this statement and leads one to believe the folk songs and spirituals were the American Negro's.

In time a number of Negroes began to transcribe the old songs and write original ones. J. Rosamund Johnson, in collaboration with his brother, James Weldon Johnson and a fellow worker Bob Cole, did a great deal toward a beginning in this field. Of later years there have developed the "Blues". These had their origin in Memphis, and the towns along the Mississippi. Many of them are now adulterated. J. Weldon Johnson writes: "The original 'Memphis Blues' so far as can be credited to a composer, must be credited to Mr. W. C. Handy, a coloured musician of Memphis".³³ He further quotes a verse of a genuine Ragtime song which, although the lines are crude, contain an element of poetry.

Mah mummy's lyin' in her grave,
 Mah daddy run away.
 Mah sister's married a gamblin' man,
 An' I've done gone astray.
 Yes, I've done gone astray, po' boy,
 An' I've done gone astray,
 Mah sister's married a gamblin' man,
 An' I've done gone astray, po' boy.³⁴

32. Johnson. "The History of the Spiritual". loc. cit. p.121.

33. Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. Preface to 1st. edition. p. 14.

34. Ibid. p. 14.

This song became very popular during the First Great War among the coloured soldiers in France.

The mood of the blues is generally a sorrowful one, of unhappy love or melancholy. Most of them follow a fairly strict form. They use a leading line and repeat it, quite often with slight variations. Sometimes they repeat the first line twice; the third line generally rhymes, although in the less developed blues, it does not. This type of poetry goes far back to the early days of slavery - to what is called "the hollers", when a man or woman bending over his work emitted his soul longing in mournful and haunting repetition, or gave outlet to his pent emotion by the sometimes weird repetition of:

Oh I ain't gonna stay here no mo!

Many of the so called "Blues" coming from Broadway scarcely warrant the term. The editors of Negro Caravan give an adequate summing up when they say:

"... in the blues by Tin Pan Alley composers the grief is feigned, but in genuine Negro blues the gaiety is feigned. The musical influence upon jazz of the genuine blues is great; the 'blue note' is one of the most significant developments in jazz, and it is entering 'serious' American music... But they are still, almost entirely, of Negro origin, and at their best are close to folk sources".⁵⁵

Again quoting Negro Caravan:

"Honest, elemental, sometimes to the point of starkness, the blues are welcome to many because of their contrast to the saccharine and insincere lyrics too often produced in Tin Pan Alley. The blues are va-

55. Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 428.

luable, also, as shedding a great deal of light on the social experiences of the Negro masses".³⁶

The poetic imagery of the blues, as

Greyhound, Greyhound, I heard you when you blowed
yo' horn,
Well, I knew it was yo' warning that my baby was
long gone.³⁷

has been developed to a marked degree by Langston Hughes, considered the American Negro's most provocative poet.

The Lomaxes, Lawrence Gellert, and Joshua White have done work on collecting songs of strong social protest. They have been difficult songs to collect as they have been found in prison construction camps and on chain gangs; they have been discovered only by collectors who have won the confidence of the singers. The songs contain a bitterness, which, though not new to the Negro, are fairly new in song collections. Lawrence Gellert has assembled the richest yield of this type of song in Negro Songs of Protest and Me and My Captain.

Standin' on de Corner.

Standin' on de corner, weren't doin' no harm,
Up come a 'liceman an' he grab me by de arm.
Blow a little whistle an' ring a little bell
Heah come patrol wagon ruanin' like hell.

Judge he calls me up an' ast mah name,
Ah tole him fo' sho' Ah weren't to blame.
He wink at 'liceman, 'liceman wink too;
Judge say, "Nigger, you get some work to do".

36. Ibid. p. 430.

37. Ibid. p. 430.

workin' on ol' road bank, shackle boun'.
 Long, long time 'fo' six months roll aroun'.
 Miserin' fo' my honey, she miserin' fo' me,
 But, Lawd, white folks won't let go holdin' me.³⁸

Standin' on de Corner belongs to Gellert's collection. The words do not burn with resentment, nor personify pathos, rather they are adroitly meaningful.

The earliest collectors of Negro folk songs were New Englanders, of abolitionist ancestry. Their primary interest was for the purpose of developing race pride; they therefore, introduced few secular slave songs. Although J. A. Mason and Joel Chandler Harris made collections, they standardized the verse and consequently lost some of the true Negro flavour.

Negro folk rhymes (1932) by Thomas W. Talley was the first collection of secular songs of the Negro. John and Alan Lomax, Newman White, Carl Sandburg (white benefactor), and Zora Hurston are recent collectors. Many of them, however, have been lost beyond recovery. The following one is contained in My Bondage and My Freedom (1853) by Frederick Douglass.

we raise de wheat,	We sift de meal,
Dey gib us de corn;	Dey gib us de huss;
we bake de bread,	We peel de meat,
Dey gib us de crust;	Dey gib us de skin;

And dat's de way
 Dey take us in;
 we skim de pot,
 Dey gib us de liquor
 And say dat's good enough for nigger.³⁹

In connection with the songs great use was made of the

38. Ibid. p. 430.

39. Ibid. p. 446.

"Juba" beater. The performer improvised as he beat, making the words fall pat with the movement of his hands.

Much work has been done by the Lomaxes in uncovering the Negro folk ballads. They follow the pattern of most folk ballads, celebrating outlaws, fugitives, strong heroes, in such ballads as "Poor Lazarus", "Railroad Bill" and "John Henry".

In the modern Negro school, Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes have done much to recapture the folk ballad. James Weldon Johnson wrote of Brown:

"More than any other American poet he has made thematic use of the Negro folk epics and ballads, and because he has done this so sincerely, a false note is rarely heard in his work".⁴⁰

Listen to the tale
Of Ole Slim Greer,
Saitlines' devil
waitin' here.⁴¹

But the most loved of Negro folk literature are the religious songs. These, more than any of the traditional folklore, reflect the spiritual achievement of the Negro people. They are a legacy from the souls of those who perhaps suffered most - the very sensitive, the lyrically imaginative. With Christianity came the hope of better life to come and out of this hope came song, in poignancy of beauty, practically unequalled.

During the Civil war, Thomas Wentworth Higginson was so moved by the Hack soldiers of his regiment as they sang about

40. Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. p. 247.

41. *Ibid.* p. 256.

the camp-fire in the evening, that he recorded several of the simple slave songs and published them in the "Atlantic Monthly", 1867. In 1871, a group of Fisk University students under the leadership of George White, set out on what became a triumphal tour. When they left Fisk the school was in need of funds; upon their return there was sufficient money to plan a new building, Jubilee Hall. The Jubilee singers had moved the world so greatly by the beauty of harmony in their slave songs that they never could be wholly forgotten.

It has been a matter of discussion as to whether the spirituals are of individual or group authorship. Willis D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson, refer to them as "the spontaneous creation of groups"⁴² but James Weldon Johnson believed that though "some of them may be the spontaneous creation of the group, that the far greater part of them is the work of talented individuals influenced by the pressure and reaction of the group".⁴³ He thinks however, that the responses may be more largely the work of the group in action; "it is likely that they simply burst forth".⁴⁴

The editors of Negro Caravan support Johnson's opinion.

It is unlikely that any group of worshippers and singers, as a group, composed spirituals. Single individuals with poetic ingenuity, a rhyming gift, or a good memory 'composed' or 'remembered' lines, couplets, or even quatrains out of a common storehouse. The group would join in with the refrain or the longer chorus.

42. Weatherford, ... Race Relations. p. 462.

43. Johnson. "History of the Spiritual". loc. cit. p. 126.

44. Ibid. p. 126.

When one leader's ingenuity or memory was exhausted, another might take up the 'composition'. About two matters of origin, however, there is more certainty than about method of composition. The first is that stories purporting to tell the circumstances and dates of individual spirituals are more fanciful than accurate. This is true of all folk song... The second is that the spirituals are genuinely folk products, regardless of the fact gifted individuals may have played leading roles in their composition. From the folk storehouse came the ideas, the vocabulary, the idioms, the images. The folk approved the song or rejected it, as it squared with folk knowledge, memory, and vision. The folk changed lines that were not easily understood, inserted new stanzas, sometimes bringing the songs up to date, and transmitted them orally to the next generation. In the long journey, stanzas were lost or imperfectly remembered: and new and often incoherent interpolations took their places. But the folk kept a very large number of the songs alive and in a rather sound condition".⁴⁵

White hymns and Negro spirituals show an occasional resemblance between words and ideas. It is a natural outgrowth; the slaves in accepting Christianity, accepted the vocabulary and subject of Christianity. Negro Caravan cites the following lines:

At his table we'll sit down,
Christ will gird himself and serve us with sweet
manna all around. (white)

as parallel with

Gwine to sit down at the welcome table,
Gwine to feast off milk and honey. (Negro).⁴⁶

Many of the religious songs have a significance quite beyond the Biblical text. The Negroes saw in the stories of the

45. Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 414.

46. Ibid. p. 417.

Jewish tribes a parallel with their own trials. It fired the imagination and they sang into their songs a new comfort and a faith in their ultimate deliverance.

Go down, Moses,
 way down in Egypt land:
 Tell old Pharaoh
 Let my people go.⁴⁷

The Negro never intended the spirituals to appear humorous. With his language difficulty, he captured from phrases his own interpretation and he styled them as best he could to reproduce the thoughts and meaning which they had for him.

went down to the rocks to hide my face,
 The rocks cried out no hiding place,

was not meant to be capricious; it was merely his childish translation of

To hide yourself in the mountaintop
 To hide yourself from God.⁴⁸

There was much of which the Negro could not sing. He could not speak too freely of his earthly bondage; he could not speak of deadly fear. He conveyed much longing in few words:

Bye and bye, I'm gonna lay down dis heavy load.⁴⁹

His omissions carried poignancy. He seldom spoke of 'father' or of 'home'. His emotion released itself in mystic thoughts:

There's a little wheel a-turnin' in-a-my heart.

William Edward Burghardt DuBois, in his essay "Of the Sor-

47. Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. Preface to 1st. ed. p. 18.

48. Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan.

49. *Ibid.* p. 419.

row Songs" draws attention to the slave's deep sensibility to Nature.

Life was 'a rough and rolling sea' like the brown Atlantic of the Sea Islands; the 'wilderness' was the home of God, and the 'lonesome valley' led to the way of life. 'winter'll soon be over', was the picture of life and death to a tropical imagination. The sudden wild thunder-storm of the South awed and impressed the Negroes, - at times the rumbling seemed to them 'mournful', at times imperious:

My Lord calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds it in my soul.⁵⁰

Those who have given study to the Spirituals believe that the earlier ones were built upon the form so common to African songs - the leading lines and response.

Leader: Swing low, sweet chariot,
Congregation: Comin' for to carry me home.

James Weldon Johnson, in The History of the Spiritual, compares the response to the solitary voice of the leader to a sound like a rolling sea, with an effect, strangely moving. He further writes:

But as the American Negro went a step beyond his original African music in the development of melody and harmony, he also went a step beyond in the development of form. The lead and response are still retained, but the response is developed into a true chorus. In a number of the songs there are leads, a response and a chorus. In this class of songs the chorus becomes the most important part, dominating the whole song and coming first. Such a song is the well known 'Steal Away to Jesus'...

..The 'swing' of the spirituals is an altogether subtle and elusive thing. It is subtle and elusive because it is in perfect union with the re-

50. DuBois, W. E. B. Souls of Black Folk. p. 257-258.

religious ecstasy that manifests itself in the swaying bodies of a whole congregation, swaying as if responding to the baton of some extremely sensitive conductor.⁵¹

There is deep beauty and artistry in the Negro's emotion for a 'land hereafter'. There are few folk songs which carry more appeal or move an audience to a more gentle rapture than:

Swing low, sweet cheriot,
Coming for to carry me home.

and

steal away, steal away,
Steal away to Jesus.

The words are very simple, and when read aloud, the constant repetition may appear trite, even tiresome. With the deep richness of the melody and harmony as an accompaniment, the very simplicity of the words bring lyricism. They produce a mystic beauty, a naive and gentle charm, with a poetic cadence haunting to the hearer.

All the Spirituals possessed a dignity. Wistful, plaintive, they bore the resignation of the wayfarer who, toilworn and filled with ineffable longing, beholds the sweet vision of a Promised Land.

I know moon-rise, I know star-rise,
I lay dis body down.
I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight,
To lay dis body down.
I lie in de grave an' stretch out my arms,
I lay dis body down.
I go to de jedgment in de evenin' of de day
when I lay dis body down,
An' my soul an' your soul will meet in de day
when I lay dis body down.⁵²

51. Johnson. "The History of the Spiritual". loc. cit. p.131.

52. Higginson, F. W. From "Negro Spirituals". Atlantic Monthly, June, 1867. May be found in Johnson. "History of the Spiritual". loc. cit. p. 146.

These are the negro American's legacy, to his whiter brothers.

Now I acknowledge that liberty is a great
thing, and worth seeking for, if we can
get it honestly.

Jupiter Hammon.

Thus from the splendours of the morning light
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.

Phillis Wheatley.

CHAPTER III.

THE DARK.

Jupiter Hammon. (1720 ? - 1800) - Phillis Wheatley. (1753 ? - 1784).

In view of the adverse circumstances which surrounded the American Negro, it is interesting to note that his first recorded writing dates back to 1760. This appeared as a broadside in 1761 which read: An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries: Composed by Jupiter Hammon, a Negro belonging to Mr. Lloyd, of Queen's Village, on Long Island, the 25th. of December, 1760. Little is known of Hammon save that he lived between the years of 1720 - 1826 and was much influenced by the evangelical movement of the Calvinist Methodists. His trustworthy character and his skill with tools brought him many privileges; it was his good fortune to have masters who were sympathetic to his writing. Although receiving advantages through the Lloyds, there is no reason to believe that his education extended beyond the most elementary training in reading and in writing. His owners appear to have allowed him to go to church regularly and to devote his spare hours to preaching. Stimulated by the Christianity which Whitefield and his predecessors had spread, Hammon absorbed their doctrines. All his writing reveals his deep love of the Bible, and of hymns;

his receptivity to emotional expression.

The editors of Negro Caravan describe Hammon's first published poem An Evening Thought, as "something of a shout-hymn, obviously influenced by the methodist-dissenters, of the Great Awakening". It consists of twenty-two four line stanzas, the alternate lines rhyming.

Dear Jesus, unto thee we cry,
Give us the Preparation;
Turn not away Thy tender Eye;
We seek Thy true Salvation,⁵³

This verse form was used quite frequently in the early Methodist hymns and Hammon followed it in all his poems, though using it with many irregularities. The method of rhyming alternate lines lent itself quite readily to religious chanting. Like the spirituals, his poems were composed to be sung, and when he discovered a pleasurable word he used it from verse to verse with haunting frequency.

In 1778, Hammon published an "Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley"; in 1779, "An Essay on the Ten Virgins"; in 1782, "A winter piece", a prose sermon which concludes with "Poem for Children with Thoughts on Death". An undated work entitled "An Evening's Improvement" is a poetical dialogue between "the Kind master and the Lutful servant". The last of his printed work, "An address to Negroes in the State of New York" was issued in 1787 and received sufficient popularity to gain three editions.

Hammon's writing reveals no unusual talent, no mark of special genius. His lines are merely prose rhymes abounding in

53. Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 274.

in pious platitudes and superstitions. There is an occasional suggestion of lyricism, as in "The Address to Phillis Wheatley":

God's tender mercy brought thee here;
Tost o'er the raging main;
In Christian faith thou hast a share,
Worth all the gold of Spain.⁵⁴

Sometimes there is a mystic quality which suggests a latent gift, but for the most part, his song is a childlike acceptance of condition.

Hammon's song was not unique. The new evangelical doctrine had great emotional appeal for those who knew enduring hardship. The years from 1760 to the remainder of the century were vibrant with passions of religious feeling. There is a marked resemblance in the verse of Henry Alline, a white contemporary, referred to in the early records as the "Whitefield of Nova Scotia".

Amazing sight! the saviour stands
And knocks at every door.⁵⁵

More significant than his verse, was his single prose piece, "An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York". This was presented to the members of the African Society in the city of New York, September 24, 1786, and printed in New York early in the next year. The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery responded to it warmly and ordered a reprint immediately. A third edition even, appeared after the author's death.

Though his verse may be described as doggerel, with strained metrical effects and faulty syntax, his address displays

54. Loggins, Vernon. The Negro Author. p. 13.

55. Baker, May Palmer. A History of English - Canadian Literature to the Confederation. p. 15.

firm handling. He accepts slavery for himself as a personal duty but states aloud his opposition to the practice and believes that young Negroes should be given their freedom. Benjamin Brawley, Negro critic, suggests that the Address may have influenced John Lloyd, Junior, who, in his will of 1795, ordered that certain of his slaves be manumitted at the age of twenty-eight.⁵⁶

The conciliatory attitude which Hammon directed toward slavery met with much opposition among Negro leaders. Most slaves were bitterly reproachful of bondage and they burned with resentment toward his lack of fire.

Respecting obedience to masters. Now whether it is right and lawful in the sight of God, for them to make slaves of us or not, I am certain that while we are slaves, it is our duty to obey our masters in all their lawful commands, and mind them As we depend upon our masters for what we eat and drink and wear, we cannot be happy unless we obey them.⁵⁷

Saunders Hedding, Negro critic, suggests:

Hammon's life was motivated by the compulsion of obedience to his earthly and his heavenly master. Perhaps the inevitability of his position tended to wilt his moral fibre. Perhaps the beneficence of his masters lightened the burden of his bondage.⁵⁸

That Hammon recognized this in himself is evident in his writing.

I have good reason to be thankful that my lot is so much better than most slaves have had. I suppose I have more advantages than most of you who are slaves have ever known, and I believe more than many

56. Brawley, Benjamin. Negro Genius. p. 19.

57. Hammon, Jupiter. From "An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York, 1787". Saunders. To Make a Free Black. p. 7.

58. Ibid. p. 7.

white people have enjoyed.⁵⁹

Despite his denunciation of slavery, Hammon's opinion loses vigour by the appeasement insertion "though for my own part I do not wish to be free". Doubtlessly an eager abolitionist must have experienced disappointment toward this hint of pacifism; yet the modern thinker must concede its thread of wisdom and like Hedding realize "Perhaps it was the very weakness of the statement that recommended it for publication".⁶⁰ The thought merits quoting Hammon.

Now I acknowledge that liberty is a great thing, and worth seeking for, if we can get it honestly; and by our good conduct prevail upon our masters to set us free; though for my own part I do not wish to be free; yet I should be glad if others, especially the young negroes, were to be free; for many of us who are grown up slaves, and have always had masters to take care of us, should hardly know how to take care of themselves..... that liberty is a great thing we may know from our own feelings, and we may likewise judge so from the conduct of the white people in the late war. How much money has been spent and how many lives have been lost to defend their liberty! I must say that I have hoped that God would open their eyes, when they were so much engaged for liberty, to think of the state of the poor blacks, and to pity us.⁶¹

Perhaps the statement is pregnant with patience but it is doubtful that in 1787 a slave could have dared to handle a thesis differently. Hammon's masters were humane, his life contented. He did not feel the whip which presses recklessness, his personal experience was tuned to peaceful living.

59. Hammon. From "An Address to the Negroes ...". Loggins. Negro Author. p. 10.

60. Hedding. op. cit. p. 7.

61. Hammon. From "An Address to the Negroes ...". Ibid. p. 7.

His literary merit is of little consequence; his value lies in the historical significance. The first slave in America whose work appeared in print -

It is a quaint prelude to the rich and varied songs which were to burst spontaneously from the Negro folk a little later, songs which make up the great gift from Africa to the art of America.⁶²

Phillis Wheatley.

One of the most interesting portraits in the story of slave life belongs to Phillis Wheatley. A little Negro girl of seven, she was brought across from Senegal to Boston in 1761, and purchased by Mr. Wheatley, a Boston tailor. His wife, a devout and cultured woman, perceived the brightness, the innate refinement of the child and, dropping the restrictions associated with slavery, gave her every encouragement toward learning. Mrs. Wheatley's daughter Mary began teaching Phillis the Bible and within sixteen months she could read the most difficult passages from it with the utmost ease; ere long she showed skill in both English and Latin literature. Pope was the poetical fashion of that era and his translation of Homer so completely charmed her that she began to attempt verse herself, to imitate heroic couplets. The Wheatleys nurtured her in gentle ways; she became companion, rather than a servant. From the Wheatley

62. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 16.

library she had found inspiration in the Bible; classical mythology had interested her much. With this background and the influence of Pope, her thoughts took shape - she began to write. Perhaps it was a racial heritage which endowed her with a sensitivity to words; but her keen ear caught their music. Out of her admiration for Pope came a proficient, an accomplished imitation: she became "a kind of poet laureate in the domestic circles of Boston".⁶³

The greater part of Phillis Wheatley's poetry is what we term occasional: poems produced by commemorable events - elegies written as consolatory themes at requests of friends, or in honour of people whom she revered. Her first publication, "A Poem, by Phillis, a Negro Girl in Boston, on the death of the Reverend George Whitefield" occupied four pages of large print. It appeared in 1770 and was dedicated to Selina Shirley, Countess of Huntingdon, Whitefield's patroness. This poem no doubt influenced the public for we read that in the following year she became a member of the Old South Meeting House in Boston. This was an unusual privilege for it was not customary to allow slaves to be baptized into the church. Shortly after this her health began to fail and her doctors advised her to take a sea voyage. Mrs. Wheatley esteemed the girl's cultural refinement to such an extent that she manumitted her before she sailed. The poem on Whitefield had interested the Countess of Huntingdon and when she learned that Phillis was in England she re-

63. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 283.

ceived her as a guest. Her acceptance by this influential woman, coupled with her own vivacity and modesty, made her a favourite in London; she became the recipient of many gifts. In the Harry Elkins Widener Library at Harvard there is a copy of the 1770 Glasgow folio edition of "Paradise Lost"; on one of the opening pages the recipient had inscribed: "Mr. Brook Watson to Phillis Wheatley, London, July, 1775". At the foot of the same page, the donor to the University has written: "This book was given by Brook Watson formerly Lord Mayor of London, to Phillis Wheatley and after her death was sold in payment of her husband's debts. It is now presented to the Library of Harvard University at Cambridge, by Dudley L. Pickman of Salem, March, 1824."⁶⁴

The Countess had planned to present the young Negro at the court of George III, but Mrs. Wheatley took ill and Phillis hastened back to Boston. Before leaving London she succeeded in making arrangements for the publication of her volume of collected verses: "Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral".

This visit to England marked the apogee in the career of the author; for while other single pieces have been preserved, her book is the only collection of poems by Phillis Wheatley ever published. She contemplated another collection, even announced it in the Boston "Evening Post and the General Advertiser" for October 30, 1779, but the Revolutionary War was on, subscriptions were low and it was never published.

64. Brawley. Negro Genius. p. 22.

As though her cup had been too full, disaster now befell her. Her patrons died; she made an unsuccessful marriage; her three children passed away in infancy. She died a servant, working for her board in a cheap lodging house.

One could wish, with a life so full of contrasts, that Phillis Wheatley had been less restrained, had expressed some inner feeling. A product of her era, she seldom referred in any way to personal experience; she wrote but little which could identify her as a Negro. Eighteen of her known forty-six poems, are elegiac. The most momentous is the one on the death of the Reverend George Whitefield. Five of her elegies are on ministers, two on the wives of a lieutenant-governor and a celebrated physician; the rest on unknown persons, including a number of children who died in infancy. To our modern public these have little interest; they are formal, conventional. Vernon Loggins, white critic, adds this consiliatory statement:

... in each case they were true to the tradition of the clergy, in an elegy making age - especially in Boston, where epitaphs and poems of condolence had been in high vogue since the days of Anne Bradstreet and Urian Cakes. The treatment is in accord with neo-classical standards. Whatever feeling there is, is impersonal and artificial, the method for achieving effect is mainly that of hyperbole; the ornamentation is elaborate and sumptuous, with frequent invocations of the Muses, allusions to pagan gods, and Biblical heroes, overuse of personification and pomposness of diction.⁶⁵

Loggins cites the following elegy as representative of the general mood:

65. Loggins. op. cit. p. 22.

where Contemplation finds her sacred Spring;
 where heav'nly music makes the Centre ring;
 where Virtue reigns unsullied and divine,
 where wisdom thron'd, and all the Graces shine;
 There sit thy Spouse, amid the glitt'ring Throng;
 There central Beauty feasts the ravish'd Tongue;
 With recent Powers, with recent Glories crown'd,
 The choirs angelic shout her welcome round.⁶⁶

Six of her poems concern themselves with public events.

The best known of these is a complimentary work which she sent to George Washington upon his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental army. Sadness had just made its second entrance to her life and Washington's reply must have brought to her an infinite joy and pleasure:

If you should ever come to Cambridge or near headquarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favoured by the muses, and to whom Nature has been so liberal and so beneficent in her dispensations.⁶⁷

It is recorded that he later received her with marked courtesy at Cambridge. The poem appeared in the Pennsylvania magazine for April, 1776, while Thomas Paine was editor.

All her poems are not occasional. Two poems are paraphrases from the Bible. She worked out paraphrases of eight verses from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and of the passages in the first book of Samuel which describes David's flight with Goliath. Loggins writes:

It is unnecessary to say that her neoclassical couplets deafen entirely the fire of Isaiah's rhapsody. Her "Goliath of Gath" is more successful. In hearing the following lines one might feel that he is listening to the steady music of the opening of Pope's version of the Iliad:

66. Quoted from the 1772 broadside. Ibid. p. 22.

67. Brawley. Negro Genius. p. 23.

Ye martial pow'rs, and all ye tuneful nine,
 Inspire my song and aid my high design.
 The dreadful scenes and toils of war I write,
 The ardent warriors, and the fields of fight;
 You best remember, and you best can sing
 The acts of heroes to the vocal string;
 Resume the lays with which your sacred lyre,
 Did then the poet and the sage inspire.⁶⁸

She steeped her mind in the classics; filled her verses with classical and mythological allusions. She knew Ovid thoroughly and was familiar with other Latin authors. The splendours of Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" excited her; she attempted to imitate them. At all times she borrowed freely; making use of clichés - 'vaulted skies', 'roving fancy', 'smiling fields'. She frequently addressed her verse to persons of distinction - King George III, on his repeal of the Stamp Act; the Earl of Dartmouth, whom she knew; her ode to Washington and her poem on Major General Lee.

The only personal feeling she revealed was her capacity for intense religious faith. Every theme linked itself with piety, but even there she was restrained. "On Being Brought From Africa" has been described as her 'one wholly subjective poem' and yet it leaves the reader still remote, detached.

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
 Taught my benighted soul to understand,
 That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too,
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.

Some view our sables with scornful eye,
 "Their colour is a diabolic die"
 Remember, Christians, Negro black as Cain,
 May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.⁶⁹

68. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 23.

69. Wheatley, Phillis. "On Being Brought From Africa". Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. Preface to 1st. edition. p. 29.

In only one instance did she express emotion toward the wrongs of the Negro in America. This is in a poem addressed to the Earl of Dartmouth. Even it contains no passionate resentment.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
 Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
 whence flow these wishes for the common good,
 By feeling hearts alone best understood;
 I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
 was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat;
 what pangs excruciating must molest,
 what sorrows labor in my parents' breast?
 Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
 That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd;
 Such, such was my case. And can I then but pray
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway?⁷⁰

She never mentioned Pope in any of her poems; only rarely did she touch on any of the themes he treated. But like her white contemporaries, she knew the neoclassical rules and it pleased her to follow them.

There are those who would discount Phillis Wheatley's contribution to American literature but her part in it has historical significance. Her vogue was sufficiently far reaching to find ready sale for editions of her poems in 1793, 1802, 1816. Some of her verses found a place in school readers. She received a special publicity during the anti-slavery agitation. In 1834, Margaretta Matilda Odell, a relative of the Wheatleys, republished the poems with a memoir. This became so popular that two more editions went into the press within four years. Whatever our judgment, we must remember that her poetry is the poetry of the Eighteenth Century. She shared its preference

70. Ibid. p. 29.

for the elegant, the ornate; she shared its dislike for self-revelation; and she published the first book brought out by an American Negro. Had she lived longer, the later sorrows of her life might have intensified her passions; she might have uttered inner thoughts.

But her opportunities for outspoken words were slender. With all the adulation she received from her white patrons, she was still a Negro; she knew the delicate thread on which hung a Negro's life.

The life of Frederick Douglass
is the history of American sla-
very epitomized in a single ex-
perience. He saw it all, lived
it all, and overcame it all.

Booker T. Washington.⁷¹

71. Washington, Booker T. Frederick Douglass.

CHAPTER IV.THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM.Frederick Douglass. (1817-1895).

The literature of the nineteenth century brought a breadth and a complexity which was lacking in the eighteenth. Social changes gave to writing a purpose which produced power and realism. Into this era stepped the force of Frederick Douglass. That this man should have been a leader was important in itself; but that he should have been a Negro and a slave, self-taught, poor and thwarted - that he should have step by step triumphed over every obstacle - therein lies his supreme importance. Unlike Phillis Wheatley he was born a slave and grew to manhood in an atmosphere of cruelty, starvation. Her protected childhood, her exceptional opportunities in education, the gentility of her environment, produced in her a submissiveness toward life. On the other hand, injustice, unrelenting toil and hunger bred in Douglass an inexorable hatred of human slavery and made of him a force, a herald of the abolition. Phillis Wheatley merits mention through her innate refinement, her delicacy of thought; but she remains an intellectual curiosity of her century. Frederick Douglass is a living Negro challenge: his speaking eloquence no longer heard, his written words still ring with messa-

ge and conviction. In living a life marked with the most phenomenal evolution, he disproved the white man's accusation that coloured men could not ascend; the story of his life is one of intellectual achievement, "a graduate from the peculiar institution with his diploma written on his back".⁷²

Frederick Douglass was a mulatto; his mother, Negro; his father, white. Of his father he knew nothing, for in his own words: "Slavery had no recognition of fathers". His mother appears to have been a woman of unusual intelligence, "tall and finely proportioned" and amongst the slaves "sedate and dignified". Somehow she had learned to read, "The only one of all the coloured people of Tuckahoe" to acquire this art. Knowing the stern measures which were taken to prevent a slave from education "This achievement of his mother considering the place and circumstances was very extraordinary".

Another powerful influence for young Douglass was his grandmother Bailey with whom he spent his early years. A "good nurse", a "famous fisherwoman", and a "gardiner", she "easily got the reputation of being born to 'good luck' and was consequently held in high esteem, far higher than the lot of most coloured persons in that region". His mother was hired out, so his only recollections of her were "a few hasty visits made in the night on foot": but living under the warm protection of his grandmother, "it was sometime before he knew himself to be a

72. The descriptive words and phrases quoted in this biographical presentation are those of Frederick Douglass, which appear in Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1892). Only the lengthier passages are cited in the footnotes.

slave". In his Life and Times he describes with tenderness the little cabin - its "clay floor", its "ladder stairway", and "the hole so strangely dug in front of the fire-place, beneath which grandmamma placed her sweet potatoes to keep them from the frost". Here his child-free mind delighted in the squirrels as they "skipped the fences, climbed the trees, or gathered their nuts". But the joy of childhood was short-lived for at the age of seven he was taken to his master, Captain Anthony, where his apprenticeship to slavery began. He never felt the comfort of his own again, save for a memorable evening when his mother, shortly before her death, journeyed twelve miles to see him, returning the same distance again "before the morning sunrise". Not yet schooled to the cruel discipline of slavery he treasured this last visit - he was "not only a child, but somebody's child", "grander upon my mother's knee than a king upon his throne".

Pensively, poignantly as Douglass portrays sketches of his early life, it is his story of slavery, his battle against bondage which grips, compels our interest. His remarkable delineation of slavery, its effect upon both master and slave, is richly historical. Circumstance brought him while yet a child, into the home of Hugh Auld, Baltimore; through the innocent goodness of Mrs. Auld he acquired his alphabet, learned to spell words of three or four letters. That Mr. Auld forbade it when his wife exultingly told him of her teaching, gave to Frederick the first actual challenge to fight this defeating despotism. The "iron sentences" sunk like "heavy weights deep into my heart" and

stirred within him a "rebellion not soon to be allayed". The penetrating thought engulfed him: "Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave". This was "the direct pathway from slavery to freedom". From children whom he met upon the street he learned to read. "with playmates for my teachers, fences and pavements for my copybooks, and chalk for my pen and ink, I learned to write". He carried Webster's spelling book within his pocket; at thirteen years of age, from a little money he had earned by blacking shoes, he bought a popular school book, "The Columbian Orator". The eloquent speeches of Pitt, Fox and Chatham, their appeal for liberty and their denunciation of oppression, challenged his dread "I am a slave for life". He "had now penetrated their true foundation to be in the pride, the power and the avarice of man". This revelation haunted, tormented him; he "heard liberty in every sound, saw it in every object". He describes with poetic, lyrical expression his desolation, his passionate yearning to escape:

You are loosed from your moorings, and free. I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip. You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly around the world; I am confined in bonds of iron. O, that I were free! O, that I were on your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you the turbid waters roll... O, that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hell of unending slavery. O, God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! ...⁷⁵

there came a day when he resisted punishment from Covey, a

75. Ibid. p. 152-153.

cowardly tyrant. It was the last attempt ever made to whip him.

I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before; I was a man now. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a free man.... I had reached the point at which I was not afraid to die. This spirit made me a freeman in fact, though I still remained a slave in form. When a slave cannot be flogged, he is more than half free. He has a domain as broad as his own manly heart to defend, and he is really 'a power on earth'.⁷⁴

At eighteen years of age he attempted to escape, but his plan was discovered. At twenty-one, disguised as a sailor, and through the generosity of a sailor who lent him his free papers, he succeeded in reaching the North. Hitherto he had used the name of Frederick Bailey but now for his protection, he was advised to take another. A new friend, Nathan Johnson, had just been reading "The Lady of the Lake" and admiring the hero, suggested 'Douglas'. It was immediately adopted, though always spelled with a double 's'.

The next three years were eventful ones. William Lloyd Garrison was stirring masses with his anti-slavery meetings, and his weekly publication of the Liberator. Under this guidance Frederick Douglass 'listened' and 'received'. with "its spirit" he now began to understand the principles and measures and "[his] hope for the ultimate freedom of [his] race increased". In 1841, a great anti-slavery convention was held in Nantucket under the auspices of Garrison and his friends. Noting Frederick Douglass

74. Ibid. p. 286.

among the listeners, William G. Coffin, who had heard him speak to the Negro people in New Bedford, asked him if he would contribute a few words. Concerning the occasion, Douglass later wrote:

It was with the utmost difficulty that I could stand erect, or that I could command and articulate two words without hesitation and stammering.

In Garrison's own reference to the incident he wrote:

I shall never forget his speech at the convention - the extraordinary emotion it excited in my own mind - the powerful emotion it created upon a crowded auditory, completely taken by surprise ... there stood one in physical proportion and stature commanding and exact - in intellect richly endowed - in natural eloquence a prodigy - in soul manifestly "created but little lower than the angels" - yet a slave, ay, a fugitive slave, trembling for his safety, hardly daring to believe that on American soil; a single white could be found who would befriend him at all hazards, for the love of God and humanity.⁷⁵

Marker Pillsbury, adds further conviction to the electric quality of this speech by his description of its reaction on Garrison:

When the young man closed, late in the evening though none seemed to know nor care for the hour, Mr. Garrison rose to make the concluding address. I think he never before nor afterwards felt more profoundly the sacredness of his mission... I surely never saw him more deeply, more divinely inspired. His last question was this: 'shall such a man ever be sent back to slavery from the soil of old Massachusetts?'..... Almost the whole assembly sprang with one accord to their feet, and the walls and roof of the Athenaeum seemed to shudder with the 'No! No! loud and long-continued....'⁷⁶

75. Douglass. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 1845. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 135.

76. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 606.

Within a few years the whole world knew Frederick Douglass. The anti-slavery Society, immediately following the memorable speech, insisted he become an agent for them. He gave fourteen years of brilliant service. During his apprenticeship his progress was so rapid, his genius showed such surety and quickness, that before long people were doubting he had ever been a slave. His style was moving, his invective brilliant, his story of slave life, vividly effective. Fugitive slaves were still rare and to a sympathetic listener he was a "bran new fact". At first he merely presented his own simple narrative, but night after night of this gave dullness to his vigour. With his development in reading and in thinking, his horizons broadened; mere narration of his subject no longer seemed sufficient. He knew he must denounce. The world began to doubt, to say: "He does not talk like a slave, look like a slave, act like a slave ..." The sincerity of Frederick Douglass could bear with it no longer. He therefore, was induced to write out the leading facts connected with his experience in slavery, giving names of persons, places, dates. This statement became known throughout the state of Maryland and he was again in danger of recapture. "[He] was still under the liability of losing all that [he] had gained".

The first publication to appear, came from Boston in 1845, entitled Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. To those regarding him as an impostor, this was a commitment of his origin, a full statement of the facts. Though William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips questioned the wisdom of such revelation, they both eventually wrote introductions. Prior to this,

Douglass had written open letters in the abolition journals.

In reference to them Loggins writes:

In the issue of the Liberator for November 18, 1842, appeared the first, an overstrained and crudely written expression of Douglass' feelings in regard to the case of George Latimer, whose imprisonment in Boston as a fugitive slave claimed in Norfolk, Virginia, was then stirring the abolition North.⁷⁷

That Douglass recognized his own inadequacy is evident from the conclusion of this letter:

I can't write to much advantage, having never had a day's schooling in my life, nor have I ever ventured to give publicity to any of my scribblings before; nor would I now, but for my peculiar circumstances.⁷⁸

Yet in three years time Douglass' letters had become a regular feature of the antislavery press. One written at Glasgow, April 15, 1846, to Horace Greely, received sufficient merit to reach publication in the New York Tribune, May 14, 1846.

Following the publication of his Narrative Douglass' friends deemed it wise that he should leave America. He left for England in 1845, where he remained for two years. Here he became acquainted with such eminent figures as Cobden, Bright, Peel, O'Connell and other Parliamentary debaters. His power of speech, his personal magnetism, won for him so many friends that before he left for home they raised money for his manumission and gave him sufficient surplus to found a journal of his own. Upon his return, despite the protests of Garrison, he withdrew as an anti-slavery agent and threw his influence with those who sought to do away with slavery by constitutional means. In December, 1847,

77. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 137.

78. Ibid. p. 137.

he settled in Rochester, New York, and with the financial aid given to him abroad, he commenced the publication of the "North Star", later known as "Frederick Douglass' Paper". In 1858, he began the issue of a little magazine called "Douglass' Monthly". These two merged in 1860 when Douglass went again to England, and continued until 1863. In Washington, from 1869 - 1872, he conducted another weekly, the "New National Era", and contributed several other articles to the "North American Review" and other periodicals.

His purposes were 'to attack slavery in all its forms and aspects; advocate universal emancipation; exalt the standard of public morality; promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the Coloured people; and hasten the day of freedom to the Three millions of our enslaved fellow Countrymen'. If a single editor could accomplish such purposes, Douglass was probably the man. He surmounted grave problems of finance and sectarian battles. In longevity and content, Douglass' is the most important of all Negro antebellum journalism.⁷⁹

Douglass chose the "Liberator" as his model for his journalistic venture. His motto for the "North Star" was:

Right is of no sex - Truth is of no colour - God is father of all, and all we are brethren.⁸⁰

Up to this time Douglass' great claim had been as orator; now as an independent journalist he opened his career as author.

Could all the printed writings of Frederick Douglass be collected, they would fill several lengthy volumes; but in June, 1872, his house in Rochester burned down and twelve volumes of his paper, covering the period from 1848 - 1860, were destroyed.

79. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 562.

80. Loggins. op. cit. p. 151.

Just a few weeks previously he had been invited to send his bound volumes to the library of Harvard University, where they would have been preserved in a fire-proof building; but he had not yet sent them away.

Outside the years embraced in the late tremendous war, there had been no period more pregnant with great events, or better suited to call out the best mental and moral energies of men, than that covered by these lost volumes. If I have at any time said or written that which is worth remembering or repeating, I must have said such things between the years 1848 and 1860, and my paper was a chronicle of what I said during that time. Within that space we had the great free-soil convention at Buffalo, the nomination of Martin Van Buren, the fugitive-slave Law, the 7th of March Speech by Daniel Webster, the Dred Scott decision, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas Nebraska bill, the Border war in Kansas, the John Brown raid upon Harper's Ferry, and a part of the war against the rebellion, with much else, well calculated to fire the souls of men having one spark of liberty and patriotism within them. I have only fragments now of all the work accomplished during those twelve years, and must cover this chasm as best as I am able to glean from various sources.⁸¹

Historically, this is a great loss to the American picture. However the published writings still in existence, are enormous in quantity.

During the period of his apprenticeship, Douglass' most outstanding contribution was the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. The first edition appeared in Boston in 1845. It followed in general, the plan of the usual slave autobiography, but was much superior to any previously written by slaves. It created spontaneous enthusiasm and led to this insertion by an anonymous reviewer, in the "New York Tribune", June 10, 1845.

⁸¹. Douglass. Life and Times ... p. 327-328.

Considered merely as a narrative, we have never read one more simple, true, coherent, and warm with genuine feeling. It is an excellent piece of writing, and on that score can be prized as a specimen of the powers of the black race, which prejudice persists in disputing.⁸²

In 1848, a French translation by S. K. Parkes, appeared in Paris under the title Vie de Frédéric Douglass.

The fact that Douglass, just seven years removed from slavery, produced the book - is an exciting story. The narrative is simply told but possesses a compelling charm which interests and convinces. Perhaps his years of oratory developed in him a subjectivity. Emotional himself, he had the gift of moving others; his picture is warm with incidents of laughter and of pity. Loggins commends the precociousness of Douglass' mind, the ability to look back upon his wretched past with a detached perspective. He further notes:

It the Narrative is marked with two effects, no doubt brought about unconsciously, which many writers labour vainly to obtain. One is evident in the following passage, illustrative of the manner in which a weight of feeling is compressed into very few sentences.

"I never saw my mother, to know her as such, more than four or five times in my life and each of these times was very short in duration, and at night. She was hired by a Mr. Stewart, who lived about twelve miles from my home. She made her journeys to see me in the night, travelling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day's work. She was a field hand, and a whipping is the penalty of not being in the field at sunrise, unless a slave has special permission from his or her master to the contrary".

82. Loggins. op. cit. p. 140.

An equally difficult stylistic accomplishment is seen in the gracefulness with which Douglass mingles argument with incident. His sole purpose in writing his autobiography was to produce antislavery propaganda. Unlike the great majority of abolition writers, however, he possessed the ability to bring out his sermon without destroying his story. The following passage, which happens to be probably the first printed commentary made by a Negro on the folk songs of his race, preaches while it tells:

"The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way they would make the dense old woods, for miles around reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out - if not in the word, in the sound; - and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home, they would sing most exultingly the following words:-

'I am going away to the Great House Farm!
O, yes! O, yes! O.'

This they would sing as a chorus to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do".⁸³

In 1855, ten years later than the Narrative, there is an-

83. Ibid. p. 141.

red a second autobiography entitled My Bondage and My Freedom, with an introduction by a member of the author's own race, James McCune Smith. This revealed a marked development in his education and his style. Almost four times the length of the narrative, it displayed maturity of mind, an evenness of flow. When he wrote his early autobiography he was a fugitive slave but in this he was a free man. The advantage of this new position left him free to bring out in minute detail the scourge of slavery. What he did not dare to say before, he could now say boldly.

During this period which marked My Bondage and My Freedom, Douglass was at his peak in oratory. Many of his editorials were abstracts from his speeches. J. Saunders Redding, in writing of him says:

He grew as a speaker than a writer. The speeches he made between 1849 and 1860 were never equalled in logic, in emotional force, or in simple clarity. His peculiarly stony denunciation, the calm bitterness of his irony, and his frequent use of the bible make the speeches of this period memorable examples of the oratorical art. His speech on American slavery, perhaps his greatest, delivered in celebration of Independence Day at Rochester, July 5, 1852, is an example:

"Why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice embodied in that Declaration of Independence extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits, and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us? ... What to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a

day that reveals to him more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is a constant victim".⁸⁴

Regarding the same speeches Vernon Loggins writes:

In the oratory of Frederick Douglass, American Negro literature, aside from its folk song has reached perhaps its highest plane. And the significance of his speeches lie in their intrinsic merit, not in the fact that they were created by a negro who for the first twenty-one years of his life was a slave.⁸⁵

His speech "What the Black Man Wants" is forthright, yet majestic in its presentation:

... Everybody has asked the question, and they learned to ask it early of the Abolitionists, "what shall we do with the Negro?" I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us'. Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, ... let them fall! I do not for tying or fastening them on the tree in any way, except by nature's plan, and if they will not stand there, let them fall. And if the negro can not stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone. - don't disturb him. If you see him going to the dinner table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-box, let him alone, - don't disturb him! If you see him going into a workshop, just let him alone, - your interference is doing him a positive injury. If the negro can not live by the line of eternal justice, the fault will not be yours; it will be his who made the Negro, and established that line for his government. Let him live or die by that.⁸⁶

The third period of Douglass' life did not reveal the emotional and artistic power of the second. His words lacked the

84. Hedding. To make a Foot Black. p. 33-34.

85. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 150.

86. Brawley. Negro Genius. p. 39.

fire, the spontaneity which magnetized his early listeners. Most of his speeches were now political and commemorative. His third autobiography Life and Times was absorbing aim. This is still considered the peak of his life stories. Possessing the same lucid simplicity which marked the work of earlier days, this was a more finished volume; it had the qualities of keenness and poised judgment.

The fourth edition of Life and Times, published in 1892, is generally conceded to be his weakest autobiography. Douglass enlarged it over his preceding work by more than one hundred pages; but the result is a volume which Hedding describes as "slow and repetitious".⁸⁷ Yet to those readers unfamiliar with the earlier autobiographies, this book is still vibrant with compelling interest. The tenderness with which he touched upon his baby scenes has warmth and appeal which charms the reader toward the little cabin: his slave life, simply and directly told stirs sympathy, emotion; the pensive beauty in his boyhood yearnings is lyric in its quality; the fortitude with which he won the odds is ripe with richest challenge. Cobden, Bright, O'Connell, glow as intimate portraits set in an historical colour. Garrison, Lincoln, ring with the American picture.

The last hundred pages grow tedious and slow. They are, as of a man, who having delivered his message, still lingers on the stage. It would have seemed wise to have left as star, at the apex of his victory.

⁸⁷. Hedding. *op. cit.* p. 37.

Yet withal, those who have missed the 1861 edition will still place him in the field of literature, still claim him as a great American. In the words of Hedding, "To the last, he wrote as he spoke".

I have seen dark hours in my life, and I have seen the darkness gradually disappearing, and the light gradually increasing. On by one I have seen obstacles removed, errors corrected, prejudices softened, proscriptions relinquished, and my people advancing in all the elements that make up the sum of general welfare. I remember that God reigns in eternity, and that, whatever delays, disappointments, and discouragements may come, truth, justice, liberty, and humanity will prevail.⁸⁸

88. *Ibid.* p. 37.

"I had met Dunbar five years before, when he was almost unknown; now he was at the height of his fame. When he walked into the hall, those who knew him rushed to welcome him; among those who did not know him personally there were awed whispers. But it did not appear that celebrity had puffed him up; he did not meet the homage that was being shown him with anything but hearty and friendly response. There was no hint of vainglory in his bearing. He sat quiet and unassuming while the rehearsal proceeded. He was then twenty-seven years old, of medium height and slight of figure. His black, intelligent face was grave, almost sad, except when he smiled or laughed. But notwithstanding this lack of ostentation, there was on him the hallmark of distinction. He had an innate courtliness of manner, his speech was unaffectedly polished and brilliant, and he carried himself with that dignity of humility which never fails to produce a sense of the presence of greatness".⁸⁹

⁸⁹. Johnson, James Weldon. Along This Way. p. 152.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRANSITION.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar. 1873 - 1906.

It has been difficult to ascertain just how far America made Paul Lawrence Dunbar and how slowly it failed him. As a Negro poet, a master of the dialect verse, he became a national literary figure; as an American poet expressing himself in classic English, he is a disappointment. It may be, as the critics wrote his métier lay in dialect; but with the artistry of word, the melody of rhythm, the sensitivity of thought, it seems strange he could not reach fulfillment. His life was full of promise. Born of pure Negro parentage, he was an ambitious student, pensive in nature. Unable to attend college, to obtain even a clerical position, he worked as an elevator boy and soon became known by those about the building for his poetic verses. In 1893 he was sufficiently daring to print at his own expense, a little volume entitled Oak and Ivy which he sold to his patrons, and in two years time to bring out another book Majors and Minors. It was this second attempt which brought him victory. William Dean Howells, novelist, whose particular thesis was portrayal of American life with its own atmosphere, saw in this book something delightful - in keeping with his thought.

He gave it a full-page review in the issue of Harper's Weekly for June 27, 1896, and Dunbar flashed into the public eye. Through this encouragement he began to prepare a new volume which he entitled Lyrics of Lowly Life. It contained the best selections from the two previous works, a few additional ones, and an appreciative Introduction by Howells. With this beneficent sponsorship, Dodd, Mead and Company published Lyrics of Lowly Life in 1896. The book became a current interest. Howells' commendation gave it sanction, intellectuals delighted in its charm; the homely simplicity was within the understanding of the working man, the rabble purchased it for curiosity. Dunbar became the fashion, a temporary satellite. Always delicate, the following years of publicity, pressure, shortened his life. Obtaining a position in the Library of Congress, he gave it up to satisfy the increasing demands which magazine editors and publishers were placing upon his work. During the next few years he published Lyrics of the Hearthside (1899), Lyrics of Love and Laughter (1903), Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow (1905); several smaller volumes, illustrated editions of poems in the preceding volumes; short stories, Folks from Dixie (1898), The Strength of Gideon (1900), In Old Plantation Days, (1903), The Heart of Happy Hollow (1904); novels, The Uncalled (1898), The Love of Landry, (1900), The Fanatics (1901), The Sport of the Gods (1902). Further writing was cut through his death by tuberculosis in 1906.

The record of this man's life is both fascinating and poignant. Fascinating because as a Negro, he shook America to re-

cognition of him; poignant because he failed to touch the height he yearned to reach. Desiring to be a universal poet, he remained - "the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically".⁹⁰ His dialect poems are little gems of lowly life. Their melody carries them easily into music; their crooning sweetness brings gentleness, and charm. The humour is pithy but seldom provocative; the pathos is sentiment rich with appeal. His tenderness produces lullaby:

Bedtime's come fu' little boys,
 Fo' little lamb.
 Too tiahied out to make a noise,
 Fo' little lamb.
 You gwine t' have to-morrer sho'?
 Yes, you tole me dat befo',
 Don't you fool me, chile, no mo',
 Fo' little lamb.⁹¹

In "Two Little Boots", Dunbar's sensitivity has painted pathos with an artist's finger.

Ain't you kin' o' sad yo'se'f,
 You little boots?
 His is all his mammy's lef',
 Two little boots.
 Sence huk baby gone an' died
 Heav'n itse'f hit seem to hide
 Des a little bit inside
 Two little boots.⁹²

His poetry is tuned with exquisitely noted sights and sounds his pastoral pictures possess charming freshness.

90. Howells, William Dean. "Introduction to Lyrics of Lowly Life". Dunbar, Paul. Lyrics of Lowly Life. p. xvi.

91. Dunbar. "Lullaby". Complete Poems of Paul Lawrence Dunbar. p. 144.

92. Ibid. "Two Little Boots". p. 144.

Squir'l a-tippin' on his toes,
 So's to hide an' view you;
 whole flocks o' camp-meetin' crows
 Shoutin' hallelujah.
 Peckwood erpon de tree
 Tappin' lak a hammah;
 Jaybird chattin' wif a bee,
 'Tryin' to teach him grammah.⁹³

Few poets, if any, could surpass this little rhapsody of nature.

Doubtlessly James Whitcomb Riley had a direct influence upon Dunbar. James Weldon Johnson, who made intensive study of the Negro poets wrote:

Dunbar's earliest verses show the influence of James Whitcomb Riley, and were patterned after Riley's Hoosier dialect poetry. This influence persisted even after Dunbar began writing in Negro dialect, but it did not limit him. It is interesting to compare Dunbar's "When De Co'n Pone's Hot" with Riley's "When the Frost is on the Runkin", and note the similarity of sentiment and the nearly identical rhythmic structure. It is also interesting to note how Dunbar demonstrated a defter technique and a more delicate sense in handling the nuances of sentiment than his early master. He gives "When De Co'n Pone's Hot" a more musical lilt, and reduces metrical monotony by compressing his stanza into what is actually a verse scheme of six couplets. And by this line arrangement he gives to the recurring title line a cumulative force that Riley misses giving to the title line of "When the Frost is on the Runkin". Dunbar profited by Riley's influence, and he transcended it.⁹⁴

Vernon Loggins, further adds:

"... In applying Riley's methods to the Negro, Dunbar achieved genuine originality. His strongest predecessors in the writing of Negro dialect verse, Sidney Lanier, Irwin Russell, and Joel Chandler Harris, were detached from their material; Dunbar was a part of his. His realism is better than theirs because it was inspired by sincere feeling and not by the search for novelty: his music appeals to us as more natural because we do not in any way have to associate it with white singers. His Negro dialect verse is today generally accep-

93. Ibid. "Song of Summer". p. 26.

94. Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. p. 50-51.

ted as the best which has been written in America. It deserves that consideration, and will probably maintain it. For the picturesque and poetic language which Dunbar knew so well is rapidly passing away; he preserved a record of it at the right time".⁹⁵

His poetry in literary English was as Howells said, "very good, and even more than very good, but not distinctively his contribution to the body of American poetry". Howells continued:

"what I mean is that several people might have written them; but I do not know anyone else at present who could quite have written the dialect pieces. These are divinations and reports of what passes in the hearts and minds of a lowly people whose poetry had hitherto been inarticulately expressed in music, but now finds, for the first time in our tongue, literary interpretation of a very artistic completeness".⁹⁶

Perhaps the very tenor of this praise was, as J. Saunders Hedding suggests, eventually Dunbar's downfall. Howells was a criterion; he placed Dunbar in a pattern which he could not pierce. Added to that, poor health, love of popularity, constant demand, became a cruel deterrent. A conversation with Dunbar, which Johnson relates in his autobiography Along this way rings with peculiar pathos.

"we talked again and again about poetry. I told him my doubts regarding the further possibilities of stereotyped dialect. He was hardly less curious than I. He said: 'You know, of course, that I didn't start as a dialect poet. I simply came to the conclusion that I could write as well, if not better, than anybody else I knew of, and that by doing so I should gain a hearing. I gained the hearing, and now they don't want me to write anything but dialect.' There was

95. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 349.

96. Howells. "Introduction to Lyrics of Lowly Life". loc. cit. p. vii.

a note of self-reproach in what he said; and five years later, in his fatal illness, he sounded that same tone more deeply when he said to me, "I've kept on doing the same things, and doing them no better. I have never gotten to the things I really wanted to do".⁹⁷

Dunbar died at thirty-three...

Loggins states as his opinion:

"most of the pieces in Lyrics of Lowly Life are in Shelley's English. Many of the subjects - including definitions of life, the mysteries of love and passion, the appeal of nature, and the premonitions of death - are such as one finds often treated in the lyrics of Shelley. If the volume had contained no more, it would be accounted merely a collection of gentle sentiments sung in pure melody, far superior, to be sure, to anything which any other American Negro poet had done, but not sufficiently strong to be considered a contribution of merit to American literature".⁹⁸

He later adds:

"A type of pure English verse which Dunbar should have cultivated more intensively is represented in Lyrics of Lowly Life by such pieces as "Frederick Douglass" undoubtedly more eloquent than any memorial poem produced by any one of Dunbar's Negro predecessors; "The Colored Soldiers", a stirring tribute to the colored men who fell in the Civil War; and "Ode to Ethiopia", perhaps the most significant of the poems which are not in dialect. It opens with:

O mother race! to thee I bring
This pledge of faith unwavering,
This tribute to thy glory.

And the concluding stanza is:

97. Johnson. Along This Way. p. 160.

98. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 346.

Go on and up! Our souls and eyes
 Shall follow thy continuous rise;
 Our ears shall list thy story
 From bards who from thy root shall spring,
 And proudly tune their lyres to sing
 Of Ethiopia's glory.

The gravest charge which can justly be brought against Dunbar ... is that he too often forgot the pledge which he made to his race in "Ode to Ethiopia". He was endowed by nature "to sing of Ethiopia's glory", but he crowded his first important volume with songs which have little relation to himself and none to his own people. Such songs can be estimated as no more than pretty exercises".⁹⁹

This appears to me a rather harsh indictment. Lyrics of Lowly Life represented Dunbar's formal introduction to the world: an introduction, no other Negro had as yet experienced. It was human that he hesitated to storm an entrance. His future swung suspended by a slender thread; folly or wisdom, scarcely discernible to him.

And so he tossed the dice and sang:

A song is but a little thing,
 And yet what joy it is to sing!
 In hours of joy it gives me zest,
 And when at eve I long for rest;
 When cows come home along the bars,
 And in the fold I hear the bell,
 As Night, the shepherd, herds his stars,
 I sing my song, and all is well.¹⁰⁰

but in his inner sense, there burned:

The soul doth view its awful self alone,
 Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.¹⁰¹

This is the poem that Negro poets have chosen to list in their anthologies. He has rarely surpassed the pure flow of mu-

99. Ibid. p. 350.

100. Dunbar. "A Song". Complete Poems ... p. 4.

101. Ibid. "Ere Sleep Comes Down to Soothe the Weary Eyes". p. 3.

sic which he put into these lines. Life has the lightness and verve which goes with singing. The words dance and scintillate like notes across a score.

A crust and a corner that love
 makes precious,
 With a smile to warm and the
 tears to refresh us;
 And joy seems sweeter when cares
 come after,
 And a moan is the finest of foils
 for laughter;
 And that is life!102

The beauty of imagery he creates in A Song is Dunbar at his best.

Thou art the soul of a summer's day,
 Thou art the breath of the rose.
 But the summer is fled
 And the rose is dead
 Where are they gone, who knows,
 who knows?103

But too often he descended into sentimental pathos; too often he catered to the racial preconceptions of his publishers and readers by employing the 'apologia' of Walter Page and Joel Chandler Harris. He sang on because he was afraid to pause; he appeased, to retain public opinion. As he sang, the elusive quality slipped into the background. There was no moment 'to recollect it in tranquility'.104

It is difficult to criticize Dunbar; to say what he might, or might not have done. A Negro's position is different from a white man's. "He is forced to take his view point on all things, not from the view point of a citizen, or a man, or even a human

102. Ibid. "Life". p. 8

103. Ibid. "Song". p. 271.

104. Wordsworth, William. "Poetry and Poetic Diction". Jones, Edmund, ed. English Critical Essays Nineteenth Century. v. cxi. p. 26.

being - but from the view point of a coloured man".¹⁰⁵ America had rediscovered "Uncle Remus". It pleased her to humour him, to be 'kind Marse' once again. But as before, she could not grant him freedom; she could not spare him the liberty he required. He needed to soar as the nightingale; to use a voice which was akin to Burns. But where Burns sang his song in a tongue known to all Scotland, America confined Dunbar to a Negro song.

Plantation days have passed; his song is merely a sweet record of the time. America may have lost her Shelley.

As for Dunbar! To the Negro he gave a new resolve not to be conquered. To white America he left as epitaph, his song -

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
 When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 When the first bird sings and the first bud ope,
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals -
 I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting -
 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, -
 Then he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings -
 I know why the caged bird sings!¹⁰⁶

105. Johnson, James Meldon, The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man. Quoted by "Times Literary Supplement", March 22, 1928, p. 207.

106. Dunbar. "Sympathy". Complete Poems ... p. 102.

"If Hampton had done nothing more than to give us Booker Washington its history would be immortality".107

107. Washington, Booker, ed. Tuskegee and Its People. Words of Dr. Curry. p. 91.

CHAPTER VI.LEADERSHIP.Booker T. Washington. (1858-1915).

Booker T. Washington belongs more rightly to the economic picture than to the literary, but his autobiography Up From Slavery is a link in the historical record. It is a simple portrait of his life; his work at Tuskegee, his own 'court of appeal' for the group which censure him. He came to the foreground during an era when the nation was shifting from the institution of slavery to the existence of a Negro problem; when the fixed social position of the Negro slave had changed by his emancipation. The literature of Frederick Douglass is an indictment against slavery; the literature of Booker Washington is the story of the positive approach of a man's plan to prepare his people for a future of equality.

Up From Slavery has no particular literary merit. The role which Washington played with the South, his recognition by such influential leaders as Walter H. Page and Theodore Roosevelt, his own significance as part of the political picture; these facts alone created a public interest in the book and gave it the position of an American classic.

The Autobiography first appeared in serial form, a feature

of the "Outlook". So eagerly did the interest in this serial advance, that upon completion, it appeared immediately in book form and attained not only American but world popularity. Up From Slavery reached American print in 1901; an English edition came out in 1902; by 1903 it had appeared in German, French and Spanish.

Washington's life was an exceedingly active one. He did not write to gain recognition in the literary world; he wrote because he had an object.

His style is too elementary to have charm. There is a pedantic note which puts the reader back behind the school desk. Washington had a singleness of purpose. It was to prove to the world that in the experiments in industrial education being carried on at Tuskegee and other institutes, lay the deliverance of the Negro people. This theory was a verity to him; he propounded it in all his speeches and he wrote of it. In his desire to gain the greatest interracial cooperation, he followed a conciliatory policy which gave him a key position with the white but led to a mounting dissatisfaction with the black. He flavours his book with these appeasement sentences.

I have entertained the idea that, notwithstanding the cruel wrongs inflicted upon us, the black got nearly as much out of slavery as the white.¹⁰⁸

Although he writes with no artistic flow, his style is never jerky. His words move with evenness throughout the book, creating sympathy rather than emotion. His prose is logical. He does not

108. Washington. Up From Slavery. p. 17.

excite but passes point by point with a deliberate thoroughness; relating his experiments and his gains as one might chronicle a voyage.

I have taken pains to go to the bottom of things and get facts, in a cold, business-like manner.¹⁰⁹

His main stylistic accomplishment is his sincerity.

There is a physical and mental and spiritual enjoyment that comes from a consciousness of being the absolute master of one's work, in all its details, that is very satisfactory and inspiring. My experience teaches me that, if one learns to follow this plan, he gets a freshness of body and vigour of mind out of work that goes a long way toward keeping him strong and healthy. I believe that when one grows to the point where he loves his work, this gives him a kind of strength that is most valuable.¹¹⁰

Washington was a realist. To him the Negro's great redemption lay in industrial education. He was convinced the crux would solve itself on that. "Cast down your buckets where you are" was the virile note he put into his famous address at the Atlanta Exposition, 1895:

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind: That whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent than in emphasizing this chance. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the production of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns

109. Ibid. p. 249.

110. Ibid. p. 221-222.

that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life that we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.

To those of the white race ... were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your buckets where you are". Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides. Cast down your buckets among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South. Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields and run your factories. ...¹¹¹

He then followed with an electric edict which became a constitution to the white American:

In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.¹¹²

This whole speech strikes strength. It reveals a procreative power, present in his sociological writing and oratory but neglected in his Up From Slavery.

Whether he was wise is argumentative. The fact is evident - his influence was far reaching. His opposition meets consideration in a further chapter.

His views were opposed by the Negro 'intellectuals' who felt he did not sufficiently emphasize political rights and that his stress on industrial education might result in keeping the Negro in virtual bondage.¹¹³

111. Ibid. "Atlantic Exposition Address". p. 219-221.

112. Ibid. p. 221-222.

113. Dictionary of American Biography. v. xix, p. 507.

"William Edward Burghardt DuBois breaks every mould into which the average American tries to put 'the Negro'. Born not in the southern rurals but in New England, educated at Harvard and Berlin, his features not black but finely chiselled in bronze, precise in speech, erudite, fastidious and haughty, he is a Boston Brahmin".¹¹⁴

114. Embree, Edwin R. 13 Against the Odds. p. 153.

CHAPTER VII.

William Edward Burghardt DuBois. (1868-).

No one stands out so individually an exponent of his race, as this American Negro. Of French, Dutch, and Negro background, he has directed his heritage, his intellectual supremacy, toward 'colour'; he uses his scholarship as one might use a lash to penetrate American consciousness. Born in the North, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, 1868, his childhood was comparatively happy.

"Living with my mother's people", he says, "I absorbed their culture patterns and these were not Africa so much as Dutch and New England tongue with no African dialect, the family customs were New England".¹¹⁵

During his school and university days, his eagerness lay in learning, and any restrictions placed upon his life touched him but very lightly. He was a clever, popular young lad, enjoyed by teachers in their classes. Graduating at sixteen, he had a keen desire to go to Harvard; but as money was not forthcoming, he was obliged to work. The following year, through a scholarship set up by four New England churches, he entered Fisk, a Negro university, at Nashville, Tennessee. Here, he experienced the true picture of the South, its lynchings and its Negro ne-

115. Ibid. p. 155.

gligence. During summers he taught in the rural countryside and witnessed the dire poverty, the illiteracy of the coloured people. His intense observation found an outlet in his public speaking, in his writing. As editor of the Fisk Herald he scourged at the injustices to his race. Graduating from Fisk in 1888 he entered Harvard on a scholarship. Here, he procured the same degree he had attained at Fisk, followed by an A. M. During that time he won frequent academic distinction; he gained a prize in the Boylston oratorical contest and was one of six seniors chosen for commencement speaking. On this last occasion, he took as his subject "Jefferson Davis" which Nation reported he handled "with absolute good taste, great moderation, and almost contemptible fairness".¹¹⁶

His years at Harvard were rich in intellectual pursuits. His keen scholarship delighted his professors. He sat under the tutelage of William James and George Santayana; Albert Bushnell Hart, eminent historian at Harvard, appointed himself counselor to DuBois' graduate studies. He cemented his contact with Barrett Wendell, English professor, when he replied to the brusque question, "What do you want in my classes?" by writing, "I believe foolishly perhaps, but sincerely, that I have something to say to the world, and I have taken English 12 in order to say it well". It is recorded that Wendell "chuckled", read the sentence to the class as an illustration of trenchant English and from that time gave "this coloured boy" all he had".¹¹⁷

116. *Ibid.* p. 159.

117. *Ibid.* p. 160.

His excellent work and his enthusiastic eagerness enabled him to secure through the newly established Slater Fund, a fellowship of seven hundred and fifty dollars a year, for two years study in Germany. This colourful life at the University of Berlin left deep impress on his character.

"I had been before, above all, in a hurry", he says. "Now at times I sit still. I came to know Beethoven's symphonies and Wagner's "Ring". I looked long at the colours of Rembrandt and Titian. I read in arch and stone and steeple the history and striving of men and also their taste and expression".¹¹⁸

During his long vacations he travelled throughout Europe, visiting ancient German cities, mingling with the common people. He toured Italy, experienced the rich atmosphere of Vienna; the treasures of Prague and Budapest. Travelling cheaply, he reached as far east as Polish Cracow.¹¹⁹ By turns he felt the throb of Europe, mixed with the pulse of his own people and their destiny.

DuBois returned to America in the summer of 1894; in 1895 received the Doctor of Philosophy degree at Harvard. He presented as his thesis: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870. "This is the work of sound scholarship authoritative in its field".¹²⁰ It was published in 1895.

Concerning the volume, an unnamed reviewer wrote:

"We have failed to note in the book a single important statement of fact for which specific au-

118. Ibid. p. 160.

119. Ibid. p. 161.

120. Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 824.

thority is not adduced; but there is an entire absence of anything like peantry, and irrelevant matter has been rigidly excluded".¹²¹

The same year that DuBois was presenting his thesis to Harvard, Booker T. Washington was expounding to the South: "Cast down your buckets where you are". To DuBois, just home from Europe, eager to emancipate the Negro race through learning, these words were fuel to an already burning fire. The readiness with which the white received the Negro leader, conveyed a single meaning to him; 'Industrialize the Negro - allow him to contribute to "all things essential to mutual progress" but "in all things that are purely social"¹²² - keep the Negro in his place'. He began to form a militant faction, to become the standard-bearer of a left wing. About this time the University of Pennsylvania sent him a request to make a study of the Negro in Philadelphia. DuBois was teaching at Wilberforce University, Ohio, but he moved to Philadelphia and took a year's appointment. The Philadelphia Negro, a report of more than five hundred pages, appeared in 1899, as the fourteenth volume in the Publication of the University of Pennsylvania Series of Political Economy.

"It was as revolutionary in Negro sociological studies as The Suppression of the African Slave Trade ... was in history ... In writing The Philadelphia Negro, Dr. DuBois assumed nothing. The book is a lucid report of an extensive examination of the life of the Negro in the city in which he had probably achieved most... One does not expect readability in a book like The Philadelphia Negro, to a great extent a compen-

121. "Nation". lxiii, p. 498-500. Quoted in Loggins. Negro Author. p. 281.

122. From "Atlanta Exposition Address". See 111.

dium of statistical tables. In the works which he published before 1900 Dr. DuBois had little opportunity for the display of that richness of style which his later publications have proved is his by a heritage of nature. While no other Negro who wrote on racial problems between 1865 and 1900 was his equal as a scientific thinker and as an unbiased recorder of facts, a number produced sociological treatises which meet the interests of the general reader".¹²³

From the University of Pennsylvania, DuBois went to Atlanta University where he accepted the professorship of history and economics. There he did much valuable work in connection with the Atlanta Conference. "By the Studies of Negro Problems which he edited in this connection he became known as one of the foremost sociologists of the day".¹²⁴ "He perhaps more than anyone else prepared the way for the intensive work which the Negro has done in recent years in studying scientifically the actual living conditions of his race".¹²⁵

In reference to DuBois' contribution toward the conferences, Embree writes:

"The reports of these conferences were carefully edited and published year after year, until a file of 2172 pages were assembled - a vast encyclopaedia, widely used then and now 1944 on Negroes in church, school, and business, on Negro health and Negro crime, on Negroes' efforts for their own betterment, even on Negro morals and manners."¹²⁶

From now on, DuBois thought only in terms of 'colour', the

123. Loggins. Negro Author. p. 282-284.

124. Brawley. Negro Genius. p. 196.

125. Loggins. op. cit. p. 283.

126. Embree. 13 Against the Odds. p. 163. The Negro artisan is a report of the Seventh Conference, and is in the University of Ottawa Library.

"veil" which 'separates the world within from the world without'.¹²⁷ He had mingled with the greatest minds at Harvard and in Europe, had travelled widely, thought more deeply than most people of the South; yet his own country denied him every culture, save by a means which it was slavery to accept.

"Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed around about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above..."

"... One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder".¹²⁸

The above excerpt is from the first of a collection of essays which DuBois published in 1903 under the title, The Souls of Black Folk. This book discusses various topics, all relating to the Negro race. J. Saunders Redding describes it as "the first product of his combined thinking and feeling".

"It is in this book that he grows to fulness as a writer, fusing into a style that is beautifully lucid the emotional power that later made his "Crisis" editorials unsurpassed by any writing of their kind".¹²⁹

The volume is 'a mind' of rare, artistic feeling coupled with most forthright, vigorous thought. It moves from touching incidents of teaching days to the most sensitive etchings of a lyric

127. DuBois, W. E. B. Souls of Black Folk. p. 3.

128. Ibid. p. 3.

129. Redding. To Make a Poet Black. p. 79-80.

desolation. It attacks Booker Washington with the astute rancour of a politician; lashes the white world with virile and invective thrust. Insisting upon suffrage, civic equality, and education according to ability as racial objectives, DuBois called attention to "the triple paradox" of Washington's career:

1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage.
2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run.
3. He advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutes of higher learning; but neither the Negro common-schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates".¹³⁰

DuBois reduces the Atlantic Exposition address to the "Atlantic Compromise" and refers to its author as "certainly the most distinguished Southerner since Jefferson Davis, and the one with the largest personal following".¹³¹

"This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years. As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.

130. DuBois. op. cit. p. 52.

131. Ibid. p. 43.

3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.¹³²

... we have no right to sit silently by while the inevitable seeds are for a harvest of disaster to our children, black and white".¹³³

In the same book he promulgates his personal theories:

"What place in the future development of the South ought the Negro college and college-bred man to occupy? That the present social separation and acute race-sensitiveness must eventually yield to the influences of culture, as the South grows civilized, is clear. But such transformation calls for singular wisdom and patience. If, while the healing of this sore is progressing, the races are to live for many years side by side, united in economic effort, obeying a common government, sensitive to mutual thought and feeling, yet subtly and silently separate in many matters of deeper human intimacy, - if this unusual and dangerous development is to progress amid peace and order, mutual respect and growing intelligence, it will call for social surgery at once the delicatest and nicest in modern history. It will demand broad-minded, upright men, both white and black, and its final accomplishment, American civilization will triumph...

... for this is certain, no secure civilization can be built in the South with the Negro as an ignorant, turbulent proletariat. Suppose we seek to remedy this by making them labourers and nothing more: they are not fools, they have tasted of the Tree of Life, and they will not cease to think, will not cease attempting to read the riddle of the world. By taking away their best equipped teachers and leaders, by slamming the door of opportunity in the faces of their bolder and brighter minds, will you make them satisfied with their lot? or will you not rather transfer their leading from the hands of men taught to think, to the hands of untrained demagogues? We ought not to forget that despite the pressure of poverty, and despite the active discouragement and even ridicule of friends, the demand for higher training steadily increases among Negro youth. ... Here, then, is the plain thirst for training: by refusing

132. Ibid. p. 43.

133. Ibid. p. 55-56.

to give this Talented Tenth the key to knowledge, can any sane man imagine that they will lightly lay aside their yearning and contentedly become bearers of wood and drawers of water?"¹³⁴

Souls of Black Folk was DuBois' literary and sociological announcement to the world. For fifty years the Talented Tenth has been his thesis.

It was not, alone, the polemical substance in this book which brought Souls of Black Folk to the foreground as a literary classic. It was the rare quality which blended clarity of thought, with acute and sensitive expression.

"I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the colour-line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?"¹³⁵

The two most poignantly perceptive essays are Of the Sorrow Songs and Of the Passing of the First-Born. These are exquisite prose poems, pregnant with anguished beauty. It is said that one man, on reading the latter to a group of friends, choked when he came to the lines "an awful gladness" flung the book down and cried, "No man has a right to utter such terrible sorrow".¹³⁶

134. Ibid. p. 104-105.

135. Ibid. p. 109.

136. Sabree. 13 Against the Odds. p. 166.

"He died at eventide, when the sun lay like a brooding sorrow above the western hills, veiling its face; when the winds spoke not, and the trees, the great green trees he loved, stood motionless. I saw his breath beat quicker, pause, and then his little soul leapt like a star that travels in the night and left a world of darkness in its train. The day changed not; the same tall trees peeped in at the windows, the same green grass glistened in the setting sun...

All that day and all that night there sat an awful gladness in my heart: nay, blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the Veil, - and my soul whispers ever to me, saying, "Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bound but free".¹³⁷

No Negro, before or since, has presented bondage with such penetrating loneliness. These essays mark the apogee of DuBois' artistic promise. Souls of Black Folk brought him to the cross-roads; his choice, literary creativeness, or the 'colour fight'.

"I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like passionate women wakened with harvest. And there in the King's Highway sat and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which the traveller's footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries' thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century now for the duty and the deed. The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour-line".¹³⁸

DuBois chose the latter; since then his writing has burned with propagandic fuel. Race pride and race consciousness have been his slogans. He has written intensively for nearly fifty years.

Under DuBois' leadership a Negro conference was launched in 1903, at Buffalo, New York, called the Niagara Movement. It pledged itself to work upon the abolishment of all distinctions based

137. DuBois. Souls of Black Folk. p. 211-213.

138. Ibid. p. 40.

on race, class, and colour. The following year they met at Harpers Ferry. This conference probably led him to John Brown, a biography, published in 1909. The preface reads:

"The viewpoint adopted in this book is that of the little known but vastly important inner development of the Negro American. John Brown worked not simply for Black Men - he worked with them..."¹³⁹

This biography was a contribution to the series of American Crisis Biographies. "Nation" described it as "disappointing in that it betrays no original research and abounds in inaccuracies. The last chapter is a notable discussion of the race question as it stands today in the light of John Brown's sacrifice".¹⁴⁰

"It is now full fifty years since this white-haired old man lay weltering in the blood which he spilled for broken and despised humanity, let the nation which he loved and the South to which he spoke, reverently listen again today to those words, as prophetic now as then:

"You had better - all of you people of the South - prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question... You may dispose of me very easily - I am nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled - this Negro question, I mean. The end of that is not yet".¹⁴¹

Redding, Negro critic, summarizes the new DuBois:

"From 1909, the year of his biography John Brown, he was an avowed propagandist, setting himself the task of remolding the destiny of the race. It is doubtful that from that time forward, he considered himself a literary artist in the strict sense of the term. This is not to say that he smothered his appreciation for the esthetic qualities of his medium. But he did not hoodwink him-

139. DuBois. John Brown. Preface, p. 7.

140. "Nation". 89 : 405. Oct. 1909. Book Review Digest, 1911. p. 133.

141. DuBois. John Brown. p. 396.

self that propaganda could successfully masquerade as art. He continued to write with the craftsman's care and sensitiveness that has made him a master of English prose style, but toward ends that were utilitarian".¹⁴²

In 1911 DuBois published his first novel, The Quest of the Silver Fleece. It is a sociological story which Redding describes as "not a novel so much as it is fact fictioned."¹⁴³ The Literary Digest remarked: "If the reader can lay aside prejudices, he will thoroughly enjoy the story, which is dramatic, original, and convincing".¹⁴⁴

The Quest of the Silver Fleece is a story of the cotton industry. Toomsville is an Alabama community elevated "above the cotton and the corn, fringed with dirty, straggling cabins of black folk. In the commercial centre of the town "great bales of cotton, yellow-white in its soiled packing, piled in lofty, dusty mountains, lay listening for the train that, twice a day, ran out to the greater world".

"American cotton-spinning supremacy is built on cheap cotton; cheap cotton is built on cheap niggers. Educating, or rather trying to educate niggers, will make them restless and discontented - that is, scarce and dear as workers".¹⁴⁵

In 1910 DuBois had left Atlanta to become director of publications and research for the newly formed N.A.A.C.P. (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People). He was instrumental in founding Crisis, a magazine which wielded influence

142. Redding. To Make a Post Black. p. 80.

143. Ibid. p. 81.

144. "Literary Digest". 43:926. Nov. 18, 1911. B. R. D., 1909. p. 128.

145. Closter, Hugh. Negro Voices in American Fiction. p. 75. From "Quest of the Silver Fleece".

for a quarter of a century. "It kept the colour question actively before the thinkers of the nation, month after month, year in and year out. It introduced to many people, who did not know such folks lived, Negro writers, thinkers, crusaders. Its circulation ran to 100,000 in the period just after the first world war".¹⁴⁶ DuBois' influence here, cannot be minimized. He projected his thought toward a new school of writers who sought to destroy the gentleness of "Uncle Tom"; to supplant him with rugged protest stern determination.

In 1915, he published The Negro in which he traced the ancestry of the Negro race. This came from a desire to procreate race pride; to justify the black man's right to the full heritage of American citizenship. In 1920, he received the Spingarn medal; an award offered each year to that Negro man or woman who, by his or her individual achievement as judged by a committee, shall have reflected most credit upon the race in any field of honourable endeavour. In 1921, he published Darkwater, a collection of essays, editorials, poems, and sketches. Most of the selections from this collection had appeared previously as magazine articles in the "Atlantic Monthly", "Independent", and the "Crisis". The Litany of Atlanta, his major work in poetry, appears in this collection. Negro Caravan refers to it as, "one of the earliest poems by a Negro in free verse... the author's impassioned prose at its most typical, prose that has crossed the tenuous line dividing it from poetry".¹⁴⁷

146. Embree. 13 Against the Odds. p. 168.

147. Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 321.

It is an utterance of helpless grief, an entreaty born of desolation. The occasion is the Atlanta race riots in 1906.

O silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist
and mystery hath left our ears an-hungered in
these fearful days -

Hear us, good Lord!

....

We are not better than our fellows, Lord, we
are but weak and human men. When our devils do
deviltry, curse Thou the deed and the deed: cur-
se them as we curse them, do to them all and more
than ever they have done to innocence and weak-
ness, to womanhood and home.

Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!

....

A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from
her loins sprang twin 'murder and Black Hate. Red
was the midnight; clang, crack and cry of death
and fury filled the air and trembled underneath
the stars when church spires pointed silently to
Thee. And all this was to sate the greed of gree-
dy men who hide behind the veil of vengeance!

Send us Thine ear, O Lord!

....

Sit no longer blind, Lord God, deaf to our pray-
er and dumb to our dumb suffering. Surely Thou too
art not white, O Lord, a pale, bloodless, heartless
thing?

Ah! Christ of all the Pities!

....

Forgive the thought! Forgive these wild, blas-
phemous words. Thou art still the God of our black
fathers, and in Thy soul's soul sit some soft dark-
enings of the evening, some shadowings of the vel-
vet night.

.... 148

"Thou art not white" is an irony, which springs from fetter-
ed anguish; "shadowings of the velvet night" the beauty of eter-
nal hope which clings throughout despair.

148. DuBois. "A Litany at Atlanta", which appeared in "Darkwa-
ter", 1920. Brown ... eds. op. cit. p. 764.

The Gift of Black Folk appeared in 1924. This contained an introduction by Edward F. McSweeney and was published under the Knights of Columbus Racial Contribution series. It was an essay attempt to set forth the effect which the Negro has had upon American life. In 1928, he brought out another novel, The Dark Princess. Redding describes this

"a strange book, a strange compound of revolutionary doctrine and fatalistic philosophy, refuting, it seems, Dr. DuBois' own text of aggressive independence.... there is an unwholesome sanity, a poisonous power in the book. It calls for mithridatic stomachs".¹⁴⁹

The theme represents the furious conflict which exists in the heart of Negro men. Closter suggests the book is probably the result of the Pan-African conferences which DuBois inaugurated, following the first Great War, when N.A.A.U.P. sent him to Paris to study the treatment and the record of American Negro soldiers. The fourth congress had met in New York, 1927. The French government blocked the fifth one which was to be in Tunis, Africa, in 1929, and there have been none since. The Dark Princess is a reflection on "the advisability of the international collaboration of darker races.... [It] is significant because it is the only novel by an American Negro which makes an exhaustive study of the place of black folk among the darker races of the earth". Closter continues:

"Dark Princess is important not only because it is the first novel by an American Negro to take a cosmopolitan view of the plight of darker races; it is

149. Redding. To Make a Poet Black. p. 81.

also noteworthy because it offers a more detailed satire of contemporary Negro political organization than any other work of fiction by a coloured writer of this country... In the main, however, DuBois is more of a propagandist than a realistic painter of folk and the social scene".¹⁵⁰

DuBois published Dusk of Dawn in 1940. This is his autobiography in essay form. It is provocative, yet much mellowed than Souls of Black Folk. It fails to achieve the sensitive beauty of the other book. Library Journal described it:

"... a mood of mounting intensity, sternly held in check, his own changing attitudes towards the restricting bars set up against the world of colour. The story of Dr. DuBois' life ... presents an unforgettable picture of the changing social life of our time. It should be read widely".¹⁵¹

Dusk of Dawn is the autobiography of a race concept. It includes an essay, The DuBois - Washington Controversy.

"I believed in the higher education of a Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization. I knew that without this the Negro would have to accept white leadership, and that such leadership could not always be trusted to guide this group into self-realization and to its highest cultural possibilities. Mr. Washington, on the other hand, believed that the Negro as an efficient worker could gain wealth and that eventually through his ownership of capital he would be able to achieve a recognized place in American culture and could educate his children as he might wish and develop his possibilities. For this reason he proposed to put the emphasis at present upon training in the skilled trades and encouragement in industry and common labour".¹⁵²

150. Closter. Negro Voices in American Fiction. p. 153-156.

151. "Library Journal". 67:707. Sept. 1940.

152. DuBois. "The DuBois - Washington Controversy". Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 764.

In 1947 DuBois returned to his study of the ancestry of the Negro race, and published The World and Africa. Using his subtitle, it is an inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history. The Foreward states his purpose:

"Twice before I have essayed to write on the history of Africa: once in 1915 when the editors of the Home University Library asked me to attempt such a work. The result was the little volume called The Negro, which gave evidence of a certain naive astonishment on my own part at the wealth of fact and material concerning the Negro people, the very existence of which I had myself known little despite a varied university career. The result was a condensed and not altogether logical narrative. Nevertheless, it has been widely read and is still in print.

Naturally I wished to enlarge upon this earlier work after World War I and at the beginning of what I thought was a new era. So I wrote Black Folk: Then and Now [1939], with some new material and a more logical arrangement. But it happened that I was writing at the end of an age which marked the final catastrophe of the old era of European dominance rather than at the threshold of a change which I had dreamed in 1935. I deemed it, therefore, not only fitting but necessary in 1946 to essay again not so much a history of the Negroid peoples as a statement of their integral role in human history from prehistoric to modern times".¹⁵³

The books already listed, with the additional volumes, Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880 [1935] and Colour and Democracy: Colonies and Race [1945], constitute the great part of DuBois' contribution to American literature. He has given his whole life to the Negro cause, fighting race caste, inciting strong race consciousness. Booker T. Washington was a leader. Though his policy is controversial, he waxed outstanding influence upon his race. Conservative that he was, he accepted the

153. DuBois. The World and Africa. p. vii-viii.

immediate; and in doing so he won the ardour of the white.

"I would set no limits to the attainments of the Negro in arts, in letters or statesmanship, but I believe the surest way to reach those ends is by laying the foundation in the little things of life that lie immediately about one's door. I plead for industrial education and development for the Negro, not because I want to cramp him, but because I want to free him. I want to see him enter the all-powerful business and commercial life".¹⁵⁴

DuBois has been the Leader of the Opposition, whose party never yet has been in power. From a liberal, striking with courageous independence, he became a radical, living one consuming thought. Booker T. Washington's writing is important, merely in the light it sheds upon himself. William Edward Burghardt DuBois is a literary artist. His words make music even when his thinking does not soothe. His power of writing, is rousing to the soporific, yet leaves the reader pensive, as to what his literary promise might have been. He has lived 'colour'; it has both incited and disrupted his rare gift. Out of the Negro, he has fostered 'The New Negro'; he has inculcated in his people pride of race. But his gift of expression will never meet the praise which it deserves, because his intransigent spirit holds him to a single, indefatigable cause - "the problem of the Twentieth Century".¹⁵⁵

The Message.

"Reader of dead words who would live deeds, this is the flowering of my logic. I dream of a world of infinite and invaluable variety; not in the laws of gravity or atomic weights, but in human variety in height and weight, colour and skin, hair and nose and lip. But more especially and

154. Franklin, John Hope. From Slavery to Freedom. p. 387.

155. DuBois. Souls of Black Folk. p. 40.

far above and beyond this, in a realm of true freedom: in thought and dream, fantasy and imagination; in gift, aptitude, and genius - all possible manner of difference, topped with freedom of soul to do and be, and freedom of thought to give to a world and build into it, all wealth of inborn individuality. Each effort to stop this freedom of being is a blow at democracy - that real democracy which is reservoir and opportunity ...

There can be no perfect democracy curtailed by colour, race, or poverty. But with all we accomplish all, even Peace.

This is this book of mine and yours".

DuBois. 1947 156

That the Negro was stimulated to greater creative effort by the interest of white America is beyond doubt. It is remarkable, however, that his semi-dependent position as an artist (and especially as a writer) did not lead him in most instances into the production merely of what the white man wanted. Black and white America had come a long way in the two decades since 1900. Though there was still in the attitude of white America something of the playful indulgence of a giant for a pigmy, there arose up important numbers of critics and readers like Robert Korlin, Waldo Frank, Paul Rosenfeld, Louis Untermeyer, V.F. Calverton, Joel Spingarn, and Henry Mencken who were sincere and strong in their belief that the Negro writer had a particular gift to make to American culture.¹⁵⁷

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEGRO RENAISSANCE.

In 1910, Philip A. Payton, a real estate operator, persuaded two landlords in Harlem to rent apartments to Negroes; in spite of attempts to interfere, the area rapidly grew. Today the population stands at approximately half a million. It was a natural conclusion that this centre should become a mecca for Negro progress in all channels. Through white influence, the National Urban League was formed in 1910, with its primary object, the development of industrial opportunities. Charles S. Johnson, Negro Sociologist, coming to the central office in 1921, founded "Opportunity", a journal of Negro life and progress. Although its primary object was to stress social reports, it soon included a cultural expression. Johnson canvassed schools and colleges, urged his friends to write, hunted for new talent. He offered prize contests for creative work and brought in as judges eminent literary critics. Among the judges were Carl Van Doren, Zona Gale, Fannie Hurst, John Dewey. Johnson was quick to perceive the value of discoveries concerning African art and in May, 1924, brought out through his magazine, an African Art issue containing Africa - inspired poems by Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Lewis Alexander. It also contained articles: A Note on African Art, by Alain Locke, The Temple, by Albert C. Barnes, and Afri-

can Art at the Barnes Foundation, by Paul Guillaume. Prize winners were Langston Hughes with his Weary Blues, and Zora Hurston, with one of her short stories of Deep South primitives. Arna Bontemps, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen and Sterling Brown were steady contributors. Among the artists were Aaron Douglas, Richmond Barthe, Augusta Savage, and E. Simms Campbell. The musical world gained recognition through the compositions of W. C. Handy, father of the blues, of William Grant Still, and the rhythmic lyrics of Rosamond Johnson. "Crisis" with DuBois as editor, had appeared in 1910; this was the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. It was first of all, a newspaper recording movements of inter-racial relations; secondly, a review of opinion and literature on matters relating to the race problem; thirdly, it published a few short articles; and lastly, it contained an editorial page whose policy was to represent the highest ideals of American democracy.

By 1918, the paid monthly circulation had reached over a hundred thousand copies and had incited the assistance of Jane Addams, the Spingarns, and others. Of the role played by "Crisis" DuBois wrote:

By 1920, we could point out that most of the young writers among American Negroes had made first publications in the columns of "The Crisis". In the next years we published work from Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Anne Spencer, Abram Harris and Jessie Fauset.¹⁵⁸

"Crisis" gave annual prizes for creative writing.

158. DuBois. Dusk of Dawn. p. 70. Quoted in Clester. Negro Voices in American Fiction. p. 114.

But it was the close of World War I, which revolutionized the whole aspect of Negro literature. The restrictions placed upon European immigration had created a labour shortage in the North and this became the open door through which a half million Negroes began their exodus from the agricultural South in answer to the challenge of industrial wages. Alarm spread throughout the South at fear of a financial breakdown; repressive measures were enacted; race riots occurred. Negro masses for the first time in history were making money, experiencing comfort, gaining an opportunity to educate their children. Negroes returning from war zones were no longer submissive toward their former status. The Negro had become an individual, suffering exploitation only when he could not help himself, eager as every human being for advancement. The campaigns projected by administrative leaders to convince Negroes that the general pattern was unchanged, met with stern opposition. DuBois voiced the new sentiment in an article Returning Soldiers which he published in "Crisis", 1919:

Under similar circumstances we would fight again. But, by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if, now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our land.¹⁵⁹

With security strengthened, the Negro had courage to write. He did not select the stereotypes of "Uncle Tom", nor the appease-

159. DuBois. "Returning Soldiers". The Crisis. xviii, 1919. Quoted in Glester. op. cit. p. 114.

ment poetry of dialect. He wrote forcefully, defiantly, of his rightful heritage as a Brown American. The foremost leader of this audacious group was Claude Mc.Kay, whose voice struck out in ringing protest:

If we must die - let it not be like hogs,
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot...
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!¹⁶⁰

Yet born in Jamaica and remembering its lush warmth, he still could write:

So much I have forgotten in ten years,
So much in ten brief years! I have forgot
That time the purple apples come to juice,
And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.
I have forgot the special, startling season
Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting,
That time of year the ground doves brown the fields
And fill the noonday with their curious fluting.
I have forgotten much, but still remember
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.¹⁶¹

This range of expression was to become the substance of the New Negro.

Amongst the women poets, Georgia Douglas Johnson was producing lyrics of the heart, conventional in metre, but with a poignant charm which touched her readers.

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,
As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,
Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam
In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

The heart of a woman falls back with the night,
And enters some alien cage in its plight,

160. Mc.Kay, Claude. "If We Must Die". Harlem Shadows. Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. p. 168.

161. Mc.Kay. "Flame Heart". Johnson. op. cit. p. 45.

And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars
While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.¹⁶²

Angela Grimke sought her release in delicate little threads of imagism, which she expressed in "carefully worded and cadenced free verse".

- I weep -
Not as the aged rustily,
But quietly,
Drop by drop the great tears
Splash upon my hands,
And save you saw them shine,
You would not know
I wept.¹⁶³

With the awakening of a new artistic consciousness, Harlem, the Mecca of the New Negro, became a national vogue. Negro entertainers dazzled audiences, the African theme began to lead in art, renewed interest took up the spiritual. White writers turned to portraiture of Negro life. Eugene O'Neill, with Emperor Jones, Paul Greengard, with Out of the South and Marc Connelly with Green Pastures brought the Negro to the drama. Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, carried him to the poetic field. Nigger Heaven by Carl VanVechten is alleged "to have affected the work of Negro fictionists more than any other book in the history of American literature".¹⁶⁴ It painted Harlem cabaret life with animalism and exoticism and was the first and most popular novel in the black ghetto of Negro life. Exciting white applause, it aroused much controversial discussion amongst Negroes. From all

162. Johnson, Georgia. "The Heart of a Woman". Cullen. ed. Caroling Dusk.

163. Grimke, Angela. "I weep". Ibid. p. 45.

164. Gloster. Negro Voices in American Fiction. p. 153.

directions whites poured in, seeking escape and thrill. Negro writers met with white; benefactors vied with each other in the sponsorship of Negro proteges; Harlem became a literary treasure trove of interest. Not all produced was good; but in the words of Hedding: "the thing the New Negro followed was soul-deep".¹⁶⁵

It was the Negro renaissance.

James Weldon Johnson. (1871-1938).

Different in temperament from DuBois, James Weldon Johnson stands out as a promotor of the cultural movement. Lawyer, poet, musical comedy composer, diplomatic official, author, editor, orator, educator, Johnson straddled or bridged the gulf of prejudice and carried the Negro before the public in all directions. As lawyer he walked sure-footedly within his right. As poet he contributed toward the history of a national literature. As musical comedy composer he, with his brother Rosamund, won the wide acclaim of Broadway. As diplomatic official in Haiti, he gained prestige and recognition. As teacher, he began his adult career in Jacksonville, Florida. As author, his leisurely style revealed a straightforward intelligence; he had a gift of sensitivity which enabled him to combine a pithy wit, a quiet irony, with a light deftness which melted prejudice. As editor, he brought out the first anthology of poetry written entirely by Negroes. The Book of American Negro Poetry was published in

165. Hedding. To Make a Poet Black. p. 119.

1922, with a revised edition in 1931. There is a comprehensive Preface of forty pages in essay style, in which the Negro's capacity for making original contributions to American art and literature is pictured. He presents an historical survey of the achievements of Negro poets in the past, beginning as far back as 1750. In the main text a short appreciation preceded each poet's verse. The poetry is a prophecy of larger things to come in literature.

James Weldon Johnson had the rare ability to discuss the race question in a quiet, forthright manner. In the review of his novel, The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, which appeared, anonymously, in 1912, and in new issue during 1927, the "Literary Supplement of the London Times" commented:

Mr. Johnson has a gift of storytelling which is rather rare; he can set down social facts of a serious and disturbing kind with extreme simplicity, and although his sympathies are never in question, without appearing to plead a case.¹⁶⁶

Although in his earlier poetry Johnson had included dialect, he considered it too limiting as a poetic medium. In God's Trombones, a Negro Sermon, "he turned to the model of Synge dealing with the Aran Islanders and sought to 'express the racial symbol from within rather than without'."¹⁶⁷

And God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said:
I'm lonely,
I'll make me a world.¹⁶⁸

166. Times Literary Supplement, March 22, 1928. p. 207.

167. Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. p. 116. Biographical sketch of Johnson, by Sterling Brown.

168. Johnson. "The Creation", from God's Trombones. Johnson, ed. op. cit. p. 117.

The work Johnson did on editing and encouraging research toward the spiritual is scarcely describable. Comment was made on it earlier in this book.

His autobiography Along This Way, 1933, written five years before his death, is rich with intimate pen portraits. Amongst them are Frederick Douglass, Booker Washington, Paul Dunbar, .. E. B. DuBois, and interesting profiles of the Negro Renaissance.

In 1925, he was awarded the Spingarn medal.

A strong character, Johnson both received and gave the life which he encountered. On a high intellectual level he preserved a human dignity; he gave warmth and understanding to young Negro writers and through his influence Negro listeners grew.

Jean Toomer.

As Claude McKay startled the poetic world in 1922 with Harlem Shadows, so also did Jean Toomer in 1924 with Cane, a book of poems, sketches, stories. He was the first fiction writer to appear in the new movement. Cane portrays Negroes and whites in rural Georgia. Closter describes it, "a potpourri of stories, sketches, poetry, and drama" by a coloured writer, who, "for possibly the first time in American Negro fiction, handles inflammatory interracial themes without abandonment of the artist's point of view".¹⁶⁹

Cane opening with rural Georgia, shifts to bourgeois Negro

169. Closter. Negro Voices... p. 128.

society in Washington, returning in its third section to rural Georgia again. Gloster writes:

The chief importance of these stories lies in their departure from the traditional treatment of sex by Negro authors. The candour, shamelessness, and objectivity manifested by Toomer in the presentation of these women caused DuBois to designate him as "the writer who first dared to emancipate the coloured from the conventions of sex".

... Toomer neither debunks nor glorifies but, as Sterling Brown observed, "pictures Washington with the thoroughness of one who knew it from the inside". ... In the stories of the second part of Cane, therefore, Toomer shows the Negro facing the problems of caste, respectability, and prejudice in Washington and Chicago.

Cane, being an experimental work in its quest for appropriate literary forms and diction, is debilitated by occasional incoherence, which may have been inspired by Waldo Frank, and undue striving for effect. Munson has noted the architectural influence of Sherwood Anderson in "Fern" and "Avey" as well as that of Frank in "Theatre". All these considerations notwithstanding, Cane is noteworthy because of its departure from argumentation and apologetics in the treatment of interracial subject matter as well as because of its prefiguration of Southern realism and Negro self-revelation.¹⁷⁰

Toomer withdrew from the literary field in 1923. Since then he has published practically nothing. His lapse means loss to American Negro culture. His mood was intimate, redolent with nature; his thoughts palpable, steeped with the brooding beauty of the South.

O land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree
So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,
Now just before an epoch's sun declines,

170. Ibid. p. 130. The above reference to Munson concerns an article which appeared by him in "Opportunity", III, 1925, entitled, The Significance of Jean Toomer

Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,¹⁷¹
 Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee.¹⁷¹

His prose descriptions have a touch of Hardy; they portend ominous mystery, exotic beauty, in their 'dusk' and 'mellow moons'.

Up from the deep dusk of a cleared spot on the edge of the forest a mellow glow arose and spread fan-wise into the low-hanging heavens. And all around the air was heavy with the scent of boiling cane. A large pile of cane - stalks lay like ribboned shadows upon the ground.... The scent of cane came from the copper pan and drenched the forest and the hill that sloped to factory town, beneath its fragrance.¹⁷²

Redding's summary seems sufficient as conclusion:

A youth of twenty-eight fresh from the South when Cane was published, he held nothing so important to the artistic treatment of Negroes as racial kinship with them. Unashamed and unrestrained, Jean Toomer loved the race and the soil that sustained it. His moods are hot, colourful, primitive, but more akin to the naive hysteria of the spirituals than to the sophisticated savagery of jazz and the blues. Cane was a lesson in emotional release and freedom. Through all its prose and poetry gushes a subjective tide of love.¹⁷³

Jessie Fauset. Nella Larsen. Walter White (1893-).

One cannot discuss the Negro Renaissance without including Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Walter White. Jessie Fauset's There is Confusion is important, not only because she was the first American coloured woman to have a novel nationally reco-

171. Toomer, Jean. "Song of the Son". from Cane. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 355.

172. Toomer, "Blood Burning Moon", from Cane. Ibid. p. 43.

173. Redding. To Make a Poet Black. p. 104.

gnized, but because of the subject she presented. In clean, neat style she wrote of the life she knew, the Negro middle class of New York and Philadelphia. Reading suggests she may have been shocked at the kind and quality of truth in *Tomor*, and therefore sought relief through depiction of the bourgeois Negro. Her treatment of race has an "incidental air, avoids the heavier going of propaganda".¹⁷⁴ The theme is the struggle for expression and social betterment of the educated Negro. She wrote:

It [the complex of colour] comes to every coloured man and every coloured woman, too, who has any ambition.... But every coloured man feels it sooner or later, It gets in the way of his dreams, of his education, of his marriage, of the rearing of his children. The time comes when he thinks, "I might just as well fall back; there's no use pushing on. A coloured man just can't make any headway in this awful country". Of course, it's a fallacy. And if a fellow sticks it out he finally gets past, but not before it has worked considerable confusion in his life.¹⁷⁵

Alain Locke summed up There is Confusion as

the novel that the Negro intelligentsia have been clamouring for... not merely a race story told from the inside, but a cross-section of the race life higher up the pyramid and farther from the base-line of the peasant and the soil than is usually taken.¹⁷⁶

Plum Bun (1929), The Chinaberry Tree (1931), Comedy: American Style (1933) all followed as novels dealing with the bourgeois Negro. In these she depicts the impulse and the repercussions following 'passing'.

174. Ibid. p. 107.

175. Gloster. Negro Voices ... p. 133. From "There is Confusion".

176. Gloster. op. cit. p. 134.

Jessie Fauset's novels are not great; they are significant. To her, "treatment of colour is the most important factor in her method of living life". In summarizing the value of her four novels Negro Caravan states:

...bearing of caricature and underestimation, Miss Fauset performed pioneering service in attempting to describe the Negro middle class. But realism yielded to idealizing, with a heavy dash of argumentation. In her last three novels, Miss Fauset has made the phenomenon of "passing" more important and spectacular than it really is in middle-class Negro life. Comedy, American Style (1933) however, has power in its revelation of the tragedy that can be caused by colour prejudice within the race itself.¹⁷⁷

Hella Larsen's Quicksand (1928) and Passing (1929) deal with the Negro upper class; the theme, the maladjustment wrought by miscegenation. "New York Herald Tribune" credited the true charm of Quicksand to

Miss Larsen's delicate achievement in maintaining for a long time an indefinable, wistful - that feeling of longing and at the same time a conscious realization of the impossibility of obtaining - that is contained in the idea of Helga Crane.¹⁷⁸

In discussing Passing the Saturday Review of Literature wrote:

Miss Larsen has produced a work so fine, sensitive, and distinguished, it rises above race categories and becomes that rare object, a good novel.¹⁷⁹

Walter White's Fire in the Flint (1935) directed its theme toward lynching. Negro Caravan describes it:

a swiftly paced novel by a man who probably knows more actual details of the rope and faggot mobs than any other American. ... [It] is more than a lynching novel, however; it is the first novel

177. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 142.

178. "New York Herald Tribune". May 13, 1928. p. 1. 1929.

179. "Saturday Review of Literature", May 13, 1929. p. 1. 1929.

after Chestnutt's to show the lives of ambitious, moderately successful Negroes in the South.¹⁸⁰

Flight (1926) concerns itself with the Negro bourgeois of Atlanta, Georgia. It also deals with 'passing'. White satirizes Negroes who place a sole importance upon wealth, and projects his praise toward the genuine strength of the hard working Negro:

... she marvelled at their toughness of fibre which seemed to be a racial characteristic ... In slavery it had kept them from being crushed and exterminated as oppression had done to the Indian. In freedom it had kept them from becoming mere cogs in an elaborately organized machine.¹⁸¹

Gloster adds, in reference to the above:

This power to resist and endure is attributed largely to Negroes' "rare gift of lifting themselves emotionally and spiritually far, far above their material lives and selves".¹⁸²

Neither Fire in the Flint nor Flight have claim to greatness. They are but links in the new determinism to expose.

From adulthood, Walter White has devoted himself to the "National Association For the Advancement of Coloured People"; he has investigated lynchings, civil rights. Because of his pale skin he has mingled with white people in the South and has thus probed deeply into the lynching problem. When James Sel- don Johnson resigned as executive secretary of N.A.A.C.P. in 1931, to go to Fisk University, White received the appointment. In 1936, when Dubois left his position as the Association's di-

180. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 141.

181. Gloster. Negro Voices ... p. 140. From Flint.

182. Gloster. op. cit. p. 140.

rector of publications, White became general secretary, "the single great force in the organization's work". In recent years (1948) he published A Man Called White. It is not the usual style of biography. It is a documentary record of the N. A.A.C.P. with intimate portrayals of eminent people, stories of race pressure which arouse human interest. It has been much reviewed, and praised.

Countee Cullen. (1903-1946).

Langston Hughes. (1902-).

Arna Bontemps, Negro writer and critic, describes Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes as "the two brightest stars of the Negro Renaissance".¹⁸³ Both coloured and a year apart in age, they faced the same era, yet wrote in it contrastingly. Cullen's themes reveal the pensive beauty and the sadness felt in twilight, or the sun's glow which colours into darkness. He begins his poems with positive note:

We shall not always plant while others reap
The golden increment of bursting fruit.

But his final note is one of unhealed wound:

So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds
And wait and tend our agonizing seeds.¹⁸⁴

Sometimes he opens with a skipping happiness:

183. Bontemps, Arna. "The Harlem Renaissance". Saturday Review of Literature. March 22, 1947. p. 12.

184. Cullen, Countee. "From the Dark Tower". Cullen, ed. Caroling Dusk. p. 183.

Once riding in Old Baltimore
 Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
 I saw a Baltimorean
 Keep looking straight at me.

But quiet hurt and pathos take form in his conclusion:

Now I was eight and very small
 And he was no whit bigger
 And so I smiled, but he poked out
 His tongue and called me "Nigger".

I saw the whole of Baltimore
 From May until December,
 Of all the things that happened there
 That's all I can remember.¹⁸⁵

Hughes' poetry has the unpredictability of changing moods.

It has an insouciant recklessness which arrests and shocks:

A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord,
 A clean bright spittoon all newly polished -
 At least I can offer that.
 Com'mere, boy!¹⁸⁶

His moods change with the variance of summer days, and the deep-
 soul of the lyricist speaks of rivers.

I've known rivers;
 I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
 the flow of human blood in human veins;
 My soul has grown deep like the rivers.¹⁸⁷

He vaults into a vibrant challenge and he calls:

I am the darker brother
 They send me to eat in the kitchen
 When company comes.
 But I laugh
 And eat well,
 And grow strong.

185. Cullen. "Incident". Ibid. p. 187.

186. Hughes, Langston. "Brass Spittoons". Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. p. 235.

187. Hughes. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". Ibid. p. 241.

Tomorrow
 I'll sit at the table
 When company comes.
 Nobody'll, dare
 Say to me,
 Eat in the kitchen
 Then.¹⁸⁸

And sometimes he writes mere wisps of thought; fragments of poems, which read:

Suicide's Note.

The calm,
 Cool face of the river
 Asked me for a kiss.¹⁸⁹

It is interesting to reflect upon these two men as writers; Cullen, subjective, conservative; Hughes, to a large extent objective, daring. Their background in part, reflects their story. Countee Cullen, born in 1903, lived a conventional life in a New York parsonage with his foster parents. He had an eagerness for studies, a willingness to please, which produced in him a scholar. This environment coupled with inherent traits, made him seek the intellectual rather than the bizarre, self-conscious promulgators of renaissance Harlem. Although he served for two years as associate editor of "Opportunity", he never became a follower of the modern verse form. He never strove for arresting effects in line or form, but lived in the tradition of the old masters. His poetic expression lay in the measured line and skilful rhyme; he gained his inspiration, his rhythms and

¹⁸⁸. Hughes. "I, Too". Cullen, ed. op. cit. p. 145.

¹⁸⁹. Hughes. "Suicide's Note". Ibid. p. 12.

patterns, as well as much of his substance from the world's lore of scholarship".¹⁹⁰ Critics attribute the influence of Keats and Shelley, or in a later era, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Laurence Housman. One of his most highly polished lyric poems was To John Keats, Post, At Springtime.

"John Keats is dead", they say, but I
 who hear your full insistent cry
 In bud and blossom, leaf and tree,
 Know John Keats still writes poetry.
 And while my head is earthward bowed
 To read new life sprung from your shroud,
 Folks seeing me must think it strange
 That merely spring should so derange
 My mind. They do not know that you,
 John Keats, keep revel with me, too.¹⁹¹

Cullen wished to be judged as an American poet. He wanted no consideration or allowance because of race. He states this quite clearly in the foreword of *Caroling Dusk* (1927):

I have called this collection an anthology of verse by Negro poets rather than an anthology of Negro verse, since this latter designation would be more confusing than accurate. Negro poetry, it seems to me, in the sense that we speak of Russian, French, or Chinese poetry, must emanate from some country other than this in some language other than our own. Moreover the attempt to corral the outbursts of the ebony muse into some definite mold to which all poetry by Negroes will conform seems altogether futile, and aside from the facts. This country's Negro writers may here and there turn some literary facet toward the literary sun, but in the main, since theirs is also the heritage of the English language, their work will not present any serious aberration from the poetic tendencies of their times. The conservatives, the middlemen, and the arch heretics will be found among them as among the white poets; and to say that the pulse beat of their verse shows generally such a fever, or the

190. Bontemps. "The Harlem Renaissance", N. A. L. p. 12.
 191. Cullen. "John Keats at Springtime". Color. p. 3.

symptoms of such an ague, will prove on closer examination merely the moment's exaggeration of a physician anxious to establish a new literary ailment. As heretical as it may sound, there is the probability that Negro poets, dependent as they are on the English language, may have more to gain from the rich background of English and American poetry than from any nebulous atavistic yearnings toward an African inheritance.¹⁹²

Secondly, he wished to have no limitation to racial themes and forms. He projects this idea also, in the foreword:

If dialect is missed in this collection, it is enough to state that the day of dialect as far as Negro poets are concerned is in the decline. Added to the fact that these people are out of contact with this fast-dying medium, certain sociological considerations and the natural limitations of dialect for poetic expression militate against its use even as a tour de force. In a day when artificiality is so vigorously condemned, the Negro poet would be foolish indeed to turn to dialect. The majority of present-day poems in dialect are the effort of white poets.¹⁹³

Cullen kept in line with this belief. Although he wrote some poems motivated by race, "he is not a Negro poet, but an American poet who happens to be a Negro".¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, his best poems were motivated by race. One of his most quoted is Yet I Do Marvel, which appears in his volume of verse, Colour.

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
And did he stoop to quibble could tell why
The little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die,
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisypheus
To struggle up a never ending stair.

192. Cullen. Caroling Lusk. Foreword. p. xiii.

193. Ibid. p. xiv.

194. Brown... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 280.

Inscrutable His ways are, and immune
 To catechism by a mind too strewn
 With petty cares to slightly understand
 What awful brain compels His awful hand.
 Yet I do marvel at this curious thing-
 To make a poet black, and bid him sing: 195

There was nothing chauvinistic about Cullen. His poem Heritage,

What is Africa to me:
 Copper sun or scarlet sea, 196

remains, despite its colour, unconvincing. Redding displays a sensitive understanding of Cullen when he writes:

He [Cullen] is the Ariel of Negro poets. He cannot beat the tom-tom above a faint whisper nor know the primitive delights of black rain and scarlet sun.... He was not among the Negroes who were made Africa conscious and Africa proud by the striding Colossus, Marcus Carvey, by Vandercook's Tom-Tom, and O'Neill's The Emperor Jones. Cullen's gifts are delicate, better suited to bons mots, epigrams, and the delightfully personal love lyrics for which a large circle admire him. 197

At "The Dark Tower" a salon in Harlem, sponsored by A'Leila Walker, the young writers of the Negro literary movement gathered and Countee Cullen was one whose name merited distinction there. On the walls hung Cullen's poem The Dark Tower and Langston Hughes' The Weary Blues, painted in brilliant red and gold colours. During this time a dozen or more magazines were publishing Cullen's poetry. In 1925, the first collection of these lyrics made their appearance in Colour. This is conceded his best. Even at that time he was revealing a pessimism. He could not lose himself in the elemental hysteria which swept the Harlem

195. Cullen. "Yet I Do Marvel". Color. p. 3.

196. Ibid. p. 36.

197. Redding. To Make a Poet Black. p. 111.

twenties. Avoiding it, he framed his ivory tower. His other volumes, Copper Sun, The Black Christ, The Medea, never flowered as did his first publication. Redding indicts him thus:

A poet untouched by his times, by his conditions, by his environment is only half a poet, for earnestness and sincerity grow in direct proportion as one feels intelligently the pressure of immediate life.¹⁹⁸

Whatever thwarted Cullen, he never fulfilled the promise of his youth. An esoteric, he perhaps foresaw the folding of his fate; for in his earliest published volume, Colour he inserted:

I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth,
And laid them away in a box of gold;
Here long will cling the lips of the moth,
I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth;
I hide no hate; I am not even wroth
Who found earth's breath so keen and cold;
I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth,
And laid them away in a box of gold.¹⁹⁹

A brilliant student, winner of poetry contests at school and university, travelling on a Guggenheim Fellowship abroad in 1928 - he wrote to a friend a few years before his death in 1946:

"My muse is either dead or taking a twenty year sleep".²⁰⁰

Cullen, like Dunbar is a mystery. Lyrical, subjective, promising, he faltered at the turn. One cannot lay his failure to the circumstances; it is outside our power. But one wonders whether in the heart of the chauvinistic element, the white hysteria, and the gay vogue, his intellectual, sensitive spirit floundered, smothering his muse. At any rate, he opened Colour

198. Ibid. p. 102.

199. Cullen. "A Poet". Color. p. 45.

200. Bontemps. "The Harlem Renaissance". S. A. L. p. 12.

with

To You Who Read My Book

Soon every sprinter
 However fleet,
 Comes to a winter
 Of sure defeat;
 Though he may race
 Like the hunted doe,
 Time has a pace
 To lay him low.²⁰¹

Could this reasoning be Countee Cullen's acceptance of his resignation?

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Langston Hughes is the Renaissance. His spirit burns with the music of the spirituals and his strength is strong enough to keep it vibrant. Sadness, beauty, laughter, everything he finds in life, he makes his own and he emits it in the form with which he feels it. He does not close his dreams in a box of gold; he folds in the world's dreams too, and he protects and nurtures them.

Bring me all your dreams,
 You dreamers,
 Bring me all of your
 Heart melodies
 That I may wrap them
 In a blue cloud-cloth
 Away from the too-rough fingers
 Of the world.²⁰²

He laughs, he cries, he shocks, as his spirit prompts, and he grows stronger by it.

201. Cullen. "To You Who Read My Book". Color. p. xiii.
 202. Hughes. "Dreams". Bontemps. loc. cit. p. 12.

Clean the spittoons, boy.

Detroit,
Chicago,
Atlantic City,
Palm Beach

Clean the spittoons,
The steam in hotel kitchens,
And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
And the slime in hotel spittoons:
Part of my life.

Hey, boy!
A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,
Two dollars

Buys shoes for the babies.
House rent to pay.
Gin on Saturday,
Church on Sunday.

My God!

Babies and gin and church
and women and Sunday
all mixed with dimes and
dollars and clean spittoons
and house rent to pay.

Hey, boy!²⁰³

With the utmost agility he moves between the shadows and the light. He stands within the glare of crooning blatancy and his mood plays to the exotic dusk of night, dropping poetry into the lurking crevices.

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!²⁰⁴

Darkness enfolds him ... with its swift reality of 'colour':

Shadow
I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.

203. Hughes. "Brass Spittoons". Johnson, ed. Book of American Negro Poetry. p. 235.

204. Hughes. "Jazzonia". Ibid. p. 236.

My hands!
 My dark hands!
 Break through the wall
 Find my dream!
 Help me to shatter this darkness,
 To smash this night,
 To break this shadow
 Into a thousand lights of sun,
 Into a thousand whirling dreams
 Of sun! 205

The great richness which lies in Langston Hughes, is his ability to be both participant and observer. Always he is sensitive to his moods. He lets them sway and bend, but they are never broken. They go like vagrants, visiting every scene and bring him back its rhythm. He lends them sorrow, happiness, all the things they need, but his command returns them.

To fling my arms wide
 In some place of the sun,
 To whirl and to dance
 Till the white day is done.
 Then rest at cool evening
 Beneath a tall tree
 While night comes on gently,
 Dark like me, -
 That is my dream.

To fling my arms wide
 In the face of the sun,
 Dance! whirl! whirl!
 Till the quick day is done.
 Rest at pale evening ...
 A tall, slim tree ...
 Night coming tenderly
 Black like me. 206

His vagabond life has carried him far. He has shocked people by his engrossment with low life, his 'spittoons', his 'cabaret girls'. But they have been blended with his living. He has been

205. Hughes. "As I Grew Older". Ibid. p. 240.

206. Hughes. "Dream Variations". Cullen, ed. Caroling Dusk. p. 149.

doorman in a Montmartre cabaret, a second cook and pancake maker at the Grand Duc in Paris. He has voyaged as crew member to the West Coast of Africa, has known Italy, has painted and scrubbed decks on a tramp steamer. It was while serving as a bus boy at the Seward Hotel in Washington, that he met Vachel Lindsay. Hughes, recognizing the writer, had shoved three of his own poems beside the poet's plate; next morning's papers carried headlines of Lindsay's 'discovery' of 'a Negro bus boy poet'.

Always, he has felt the enduring tie of Negro background. At sight of Africa his feelings surged and he felt beauty.

Sometimes life is a ripe fruit too delicious for the taste of man: the full moon hung over Burutu and it was night on the Nigerian delta...

... In the distance we heard the drums of Gmali, the Ju-Ju. Their measured beating came across the swamplands at the edge of the forest. Tonight the natives danced to their gods.... We turned back towards the docks and followed the river road...

I climbed the rope ladder of the deck of the 'Malone'. Far off, at the edge of the clearing over against the forest, I heard the drums of Gmali, the Ju-Ju. Above the moon was like a gold ripe fruit in heaven, too sweet for the taste of man.

For a long time I could not sleep.²⁰⁷

His folk-lyrics contained in Weary Blues [1926] are products of devotion, spontaneity, toward his people:

I tried to write poems like they sang on Seventh Street - gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going. Their songs - those of Seventh

207. Hughes. The Big Sea. p. 117.

Street - had the pulse-beat of the people who
kept on going.²⁰⁸

De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
Eber time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere.²⁰⁹

Hughes' most beautiful expression toward his people is Poem:

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the
souls of my people.²¹⁰

As contemporaries, Hughes and Cullen were foils for each other. Both won poetry prizes for their work, both were recipients of the Guggenheim Fellowship. For his volume of poems, Colour [1925] Cullen won the Harmon Gold award for literature. In 1931, Hughes received the Harmon award for his novel Not without Laughter. Cullen was a student, moving in his studies from school to university. Hughes, the son of parents who had separated, spent part of his High School years in Mexico; with his father. On finishing school, his father sent for him again to help him again in the business. They did not get on well together; which resulted in Hughes' return to New York, with a year at Columbia University. Too restless at this time for either

208. Ibid. p. 209.

209. Hughes. "Homesick Blues". Cullen, ed. op. cit. p. 147.

210. Hughes. "Poem". Ibid. p. 150.

books or study, he withdrew from his academic life and shipped on a freighter for Africa. It was only after the publicity which he received through Vachel Lindsay, that he re-entered university; he graduated from Lincoln in 1929. All this reflects itself within Hughes' poetry.

Through acquaintanceship with Vachel Lindsay and Carl Van Vechten, his popularity prospered with rapidity. This was the period of the Van Vechten vogue and Weary Blues (1926) Hughes' first collection of verse, appeared in the same year as Nigger Heaven. Weary Blues "brought over into literature the jazz and swing of the cabaret, 'droning a drowsy syncopated tune' and finding "joy in the jungle mood at night". It also included The Negro Speaks of Rivers, which is still considered one of the finest poems which Hughes has written.

In 1927 Fine Clothes to the Jew aroused much controversy, both vitriolic and favourable. Brawley criticized:

It passes from jazz to the "blues", which we are reminded, have a strict poetic pattern - one long line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two; but it would have been just as well, perhaps better, if the book had never been published. No other ever issued reflects more fully the abandon and the vulgarity of its age.²¹¹

On the other hand "Current Biography" comments:

A second volume Fine Clothes to the Jew (1927) was almost as well received by the white press but generally condemned by Negro critics such as Benjamin Brawley, who missed its satire and felt it was 'holding up our imperfections to public gaze.'²¹²

211. Brawley. Negro Genius. p. 248.

212. "Current Biography". 1940. p. 410.

Alain Locke asserts his conviction in his essay The Negro in American Culture.

A Negro editor of the new school, Charles S. Johnson, says: 'The new racial poetry of the Negro is the expression of something more than experimentalism in a new technique. It marks the birth of a new racial consciousness and self-conception. It is first of all a frank acceptance of race, but the recognition of this difference without the usual implications of disparity. It lacks apology, the wearying appeals to pity, and the conscious philosophy of defense. In being itself it reveals its greatest charm; and in accepting its distinctive life, invests it with a new meaning'. 'Mr. Johnson is further right in saying that 'the poetry of Langston Hughes is without doubt the finest expression of this new Negro poetry. It is also a significant part of the poetry of new America, recording its beauty in its own idiom'.²¹³

Locke then quotes Hughes' memorable manifesto of the movement:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it does not matter. We know that we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If coloured people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.²¹⁴

This, writes Locke, is the young Negro's spiritual declaration of independence and marks the attainment, nearly two generations after physical freedom, of spiritual emancipation.²¹⁵

Langston Hughes' literary announcement, which Locke has included, leaves us with no uncertainty regarding the young artist's purpose. He is a rebel, "a cosmopolite" who intends to

213. Locke, Alain. "The Negro in American Culture". Watkins, ed. Anthology of American Negro Literature. p. 158-159.

214. Ibid. p. 159. Quoted from "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" which appeared in "Nation". cxxii, 1926. p. 694.

215. Ibid. p. 159.

portray life not only as he feels it, but as he sees it. Where Cullen confined himself to tradition and convention, Hughes intends to take his subject from any level of life that interests him. His verse is experimental; the 'blues' form, the regular stanza, and free verse. Where Cullen chose for his model Keats, Hughes has substituted Sandburg. Though both poets reveal pessimism, Cullen's work is subjective; one might say, it is narrowed by the concept of race. Hughes' purpose over-rides his subjectivity; actually, his race frees him.

With the depression of 1929, the Harlem fad took sudden death, following its peak in 1928. Primarily a vogue, it would have been short lived; but the toll was heavy for the Negro artist. Hughes wrote of it:

The spring for me (and I guess, all of us) was the end of the Harlem Renaissance. Sophisticated New Yorkers turned to Noel Coward. Coloured actors began to go hungry, publishers politely rejected new manuscripts, and patrons found other uses for their money. The cycle that had charlestoned into being on the dancing heels of Shuffle Along now ended in Green Pastures with De Lawd.

The generous 1920's were over. 216

The post Civil War household word among Negroes - "He's an Uncle Tom"! - which denoted reluctant toleration for the cringing type who knew his place before white folk, has been supplanted by a new word from another generation which says: - "Uncle Tom is dead!"²¹⁷

CHAPTER LX.THE NEW NEGRO.

Arna Bontemps. (1902 -).

Richard Wright. (1909 -).

With the recession of white patronage from Harlem, Negro literature fell into the background once again. Of all the writers whose names studied the Renaissance, only Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes remained. Away from the bizarre influence of the Jazz School, they turned to themes which interested them. Bontemps chose his medium in the historical novel; Hughes, in the proletarian. New novelists who made their entrance during the 1930's were Zora Hurston, George Wylie Henderson, George W. Lee, Waters Edward Turpin, William Attaway, Richard Wright, Mercedes Gilbert, John H. Paynter, Victor Daly, John H. Hill, and O'Wendell Shaw. These writers wrote to please themselves, not to give ~~glare~~ ~~glare~~ to a vogue; their output launched itself upon a keel of firmness. Between 1933 and 1942 there was no novel on the theme of passing. The culture of the bourgeoisie was dismissed and mass problems came into the ascendancy.

Two writers who make interesting contrasts placed in juxtaposition, are Arna Bontemps and Richard Wright. Bontemps, born in 1902, observed the Negro Renaissance, as he puts it him-

self, "from a grandstand seat". Wright was barely twenty when the vogue dissolved, so grew up under the reactionary influences of those who knew it. Both men, unlike in temperament and subject theme, represent two approaches in the literature of the New Negro.

Bontemps does not throb with protest; he words his message with dignity, sincerity. His work is sensitive, yet steady. When he writes historical novels, they are controlled; his poetry is mystic, yet with philosophical quality. Darkness in them is an expression of saddened reverie, not despair.

There is a simple story on your face;
Years have wrinkled you. I know, Bethesda!
You are sad. It is the same with me.²¹⁸

He has known desolation; sometimes his thoughts are wrenched from him in penetrating beauty:

Oh broken house
Crumbling there alone,
wanting me!
Oh silent tree
Must I always be
A wild bird
Riding the wind
And screaming bitterly?²¹⁹

Occasionally his spirit speaks of Africa with atavistic longing:

There are mountains in Africa too.
Treasure is buried there
Gold and precious stones
And moulded glory.
Lush grass is growing there
Sinking before the wind.

218. Bontemps. "Nocturne at Bethesda". Cullen, ed. Caroling Dusk. p. 167.

219. Bontemps. "Heming". Ibid. p. 173.

Black men are bowing
 Naked in the grass
 Digging with their fingers.
 I am one of them:
 These mountains should be ours.²²⁰

His poetry becomes the yield of a skilled craftsman when he writes:

Oh, I've seen mountains:
 Pale purple mountains melting in the evening mists
 and blurring on the borders of the sky.²²¹

He is responsive to the sights, the sounds of nature; trees touch him mystically, and he feels as

A tree bent down and dew dripped from its hair.

To him

A tree is more than an April design
 Or a blighted winter bough
 Where love and music used to be.
 A tree is something in me;
 Very still and lonely now.²²²

But Bontemps takes only winged flights into poetry. He is librarian of Fisk University, as well as professor of creative writing there. In 1938-1939, he received a Rosenwald Fellowship for creative writing. He reviews regularly for the "Herald Tribune Books", the "Chicago Sun Bookweek" and has also contributed to the "Saturday Review of Literature". He frequently writes for children. You Can't Pet a Possum (1934) and Sad-Faced Boy (1937) are on the shelves of modern libraries. In 1941, he brought out Golden Slippers, an anthology of Negro poetry for young readers. This volume has much appeal. It is unfortunate

220. Bontemps. "Golgotha is a Mountain". Ibid. p. 174.

221. Ibid. p. 173.

222. Bontemps. "A tree Design". Ibid. p. 170.

that due to its limited range of readers, it has gone out of print. In conjunction with Langston Hughes he has written Pope and Fifine (1932), a story of two Haitian children, and with him in 1949, edited Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949. This is an anthology which brings up to date, Negro poets of the U. S. A.; Tributary poems by non-Negroes; The Carribean. Suitable for High School students is We Have Tomorrow, (1945). The title is symbolic of Arna Bontemps' constructive outlook toward his race. The book is a collection of twelve biographies of living men and women who have achieved success in their endeavours. Hazel Scott is included in this group. The biographies are sincere, straightforward portrayals, simply and directly told. The Story of the Negro (1948) is another excellent teen-age book which traces the race back to its American beginning.

Since 1931 Bontemps has been writing novels. His first story God Sends Sunday reflects the influence of Van Vechten's Higger Heaven. With an emphasis on sex, fast living, it revolves upon the world of sporting life. The central character is Little Augie, a jockey, who succumbs to evil influences, mixes too freely with liquor, with women, and ends his existence as a murderer. In this novel Bontemps treats race dispassionately. He writes realistically but devoid of irony or pity. Black Thunder (1936) is an historical novel portraying Gabriel's insurrection in the Virginia of 1800. Drums at Dusk (1939) is also an historical narrative, the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black insurrection of Haiti, the social upheaval and class prejudice existing in San Domingo. He delineates such

subjects as miscegenation, class dominance, slave ships. These two books reveal the possibilities of the Negro as material for historical fiction. Bontemps does not make his thesis protest. He records the Negro's quest for freedom, but he avoids a vivid realism. He presents rather, a figurative picture, written as from a detached point of view.

To read with Richard Wright is to perceive, to live, within the confines of stark horror. Where Arna Bontemps builds, even amidst defeating forces, a constructive pattern, Wright tears all that is decent from underfoot and plants frustration, evil. Having grown up in an atmosphere of cruelty, hate, he has determined to strike at the economic oppression and race violence which is stunting Negro American development. Though he chooses a Negro as the ground on which to hurl his missile, the invective is a strong protest against the corrupt conditions which society has imposed. Aware of the repercussions which Native Son (1940) would bring, he wrote an article for the "Saturday Review of Literature", June, 1940, entitled How Bigger was Born. It is a clear picture of his determined reasoning.

What will white people think if I draw the picture of such a Negro boy? Will not they at once say: "See didn't we tell you all along that niggers are like that? Now, look, one of their own kind has come along and drawn the picture for us! ... What will Negro doctors, lawyers, dentists, bankers, school teachers, and business men think of me if I draw such a picture of Bigger? ... Never did they want people, especially white people, to think that their lives were so touched by anything so dark and brutal as Bigger. Their attitude toward life and art can be summed up ... "But, Mr. Wright, ... Why don't you portray in your fiction the best traits of our race, something that will show the people what we have done in spite of oppression? ... Never let him feel that you are so small that what he has done to crush you has made you hate him! And above all, save your pride".²²³

He put aside all these claims and went on building Bigger. His character did not take shape from one bully, but from a group

223. Wright, "How Bigger Was Born". First appeared in S. R. II. xii, 1930. p. 20. Is included in Native Son. p. xxxiii-xxxvi.

of bullies. He discovered that Bigger Thomas was not black all the time; he was white, too and there were literary millions of him everywhere. During this period of conceiving, he met white writers who talked of their responses, who told him how whites reacted to this lurid American scene. As they talked he would translate what they said in terms of Bigger's life. He took the techniques of their novels, these ways of seeing and feeling, and in his own words: "twisted them, bent them, adapted them, until they became my ways of apprehending the locked-in-life of the Black Belt area".²²⁴ This association with white writers, he describes as the life preserver of his hope to depict Negro life in fiction, for,

my race possessed no fictional works dealing with such problems, had no background in such sharp and critical testing of experience, no novels that went with a deep and fearless will down to the dark roots of life.²²⁵

But Bigger still was not complete. Wright knew that if he did not present him as he was - resentful toward whites, sullen, angry, ignorant, emotionally unstable, depressed and unaccountably even, because of his own lack of inner organization which American oppression has fostered in him²²⁶ - he could not write of him at all. There was the question of whites who doubting his authenticity would say: "this man is preaching hate against the whole white race!"²²⁷ The more deeply he

224. Ibid. p. xxvi.

225. Ibid. p. xxvi.

226. Ibid. p. xxxiii.

227. Ibid. p. xxxiii.

penetrated the greater he became convinced that if he did not produce his character as he saw him, he would be reacting exactly as Bigger himself reacted - he would be acting out of fear²²⁸ if he let what he thought whites would say restrain and paralyze him.

Another thing which influenced him was the public's reception of his previous book Uncle Tom's Children (1939), a series of short stories, which won a prize of five hundred dollars. When reviews of it began to appear he felt that he "had made an awfully naive mistake".²²⁹ He writes:

I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore that if I ever wrote another book no one would ever weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears. It was this that made me get to work in real earnest.²³⁰

Wright has attained this in both Black Boy and Native Son. One dwells in Bigger's gutter, loathing him and all humanity, infected by the stark, horrible realities of sensuality and crime. One hurls the book down in grim disgust, or one reads on, hypnotized, clutching the hand of fear.

Up to this time he had not thought much about the plot of Native Son, but the moment he began to write, the "plot fell out, so to speak".²³¹ Any Negro who has lived in the South knows that time after time a Negro boy has been picked up in the streets, carried off to jail, and charged with rape. This

228. Ibid. p. xxxiv.

229. Ibid. p. xli.

230. Ibid. p. xli.

231. Ibid. p. xlii.

thing has happened so often that, to Wright's mind, it had become a representative symbol of the Negro's uncertain position in America.²³² And so he began to feel with his mind the inner tensions of all the people he met. He would hear a Negro say: "I wish I didn't have to live this way. I feel like I want to burst".²³³ He would read a passage in a book dealing with old Russia which said: "We must be ready to make endless sacrifices if we are to be able to overthrow the Czar".²³⁴ And he would say to himself: "I've heard that somewhere, somewhere before".²³⁵ And he would hear Bigger Thomas, far away and long, telling some white man who was trying to impose upon him: "I'll kill you and go to hell and pay for it".²³⁶ And so he would come back and write about Bigger - this "product of a dislocated society" - "a dispossessed and disinherited man" - "all of this" living amid the greatest possible plenty on earth.²³⁷ He writes:

I don't say that Bigger knew this in the terms in which I am speaking of it; I don't say that any such thought ever entered his head. His emotional and intellectual life was never that articulate. But he knew it emotionally, intuitively, for his emotions and his desires were developed, and he caught it, as most of us do, from the mental and emotional climate of our time. Bigger had all of this in him, dammed up, buried, implied.²³⁸

232. Ibid. p. xlii.

233. Ibid. p. xxii.

234. Ibid. p. xxvii.

235. Ibid. p. xxviii.

236. Ibid. p. xxviii.

237. Ibid. p. xxxi.

238. Ibid. p. xxviii.

As Wright wrote on, living his thesis more and more intensely, he could no longer restrain his character. His impulses became intoxicated; he was as powerless to control them as Dr. Jekyll to control Mr. Hyde. Thus, everything that is lurid, awful, terrifying - comes into this story. We are not shaken emotionally by tears; we are swept into a livid gulf of desperate horror.

Despite the fact that Wright's style is melodramatic, that he presents his matter in an unlovely, and at times revoltingly obscene manner, he has developed a powerful thesis. He has hurled, in truth, "a bomb" upon American consciousness. We do not know the direct impact of this bomb, but we do know that Black Boy was one of the most widely reviewed of its year, as was Native Son, on its appearance. That these books may be read through curiosity because of their sensational content may be accepted, but in the reading, even those most adversely critical will find room for thought. And to think upon this problem is vital. For this problem is a matter of national life and death and the American people sit at the heart of it.

Edwin R. Embree in his book, 13 Against the Odds writes:

From earliest life, Wright has been fascinated by the emotion of fear. He knew an excess of fright in his own life as a black boy in the Deep South. He watched fear turn men sometimes into cowards, sometimes into bullies. Fear runs through all of his stories. It is terror that has interested him most in the psychological studies he has made of motives and behavior.²³⁹

239. Embree. 13 Against the Odds. p. 44.

Although Wright has found companions among Socialists and Communists, he refuses to follow any party line or be bound by any group.

"Though my heart is with the collectivist and proletarian ideal", he says, "something deeper than politics or race is at stake, and that is a human right, the right of a man to think and feel honestly.²⁴⁰

He makes a brilliant plea for the Negro cause through the Jewish lawyer Mr. Max. Mr. Dalton, the philanthropist in Native Son gains a good part of the money he spends on charity from the exorbitant rents he charges the Negroes to live in the overcrowded, rat-infested tenements that he owns in the Black Belt - in part, from the very room Bigger had left that morning.

"Mr. Dalton, why is it that you charge the Thomas family and other Negro families more rent for the same kind of houses, than you charge whites?"

"I don't fix the rent scales". Mr. Dalton said.
"Who does"?

"Why the law of supply and demand regulated the price of houses".

"Mr. Dalton, you give millions to help Negroes. May I ask you why you don't charge them less rent for fire-traps and check that against your charity budget?"

"Why to charge them less would be unethical".

"Unethical"?

"Why, yes. I would be underselling my competitors".

"So the profits you take from the Thomas family in rents, you give back to them to ease the pain of their gouged lives and to salve the ache of your own conscience".²⁴¹

Mr. Max seems to be the one wholly admirable character in the cast. In his programme lies the sole hope of lasting improve-

240. Wright. "How Biggar Was Born". Native Son. Introd. xxxii.

241. Wright. Native Son. p. 277-278.

sent for the Negro.

Wright is at all times ruthless with his characters. In Black Boy he is ruthless with himself and his own family; in his contacts with white people, he only relates the humanity of three. There was a kindly policeman whom he encountered when a little boy:

I opened my eyes and looked into a "white" face of another policeman who was sitting beside me. He asked me questions in a quiet, confidential tone, and quite before I knew it he was not "white" any more.²⁴²

A white man from Illinois once showed him interest; and an Irish Catholic lent him his library card. Negroes have not been allowed access to the libraries in the South.

Embree, writing of him says:

He has not even sought the security of his own race. He never lost himself in the sprawling, friendly Negro group on the South side of Chicago, and now that he has moved East, he has not joined the noisy Harlem crowd.²⁴³

Wright speaks for himself in Black Boy:

My reading had created a vast sense of distance between me and the world in which I lived and tried to make a living, and that sense of distance was increasing each day. ... The White South said that I had "a place" in life. Well, I had never felt my "place"; or, rather, my deepest instincts had always made me reject the place to which the White South had assigned me. It had never occurred to me that I was in any way an inferior being.²⁴⁴

Yet Wright is intuitive and speaks scathingly of the type of

242. Wright. Black Boy. p. 28.

243. Embree. 13 Against the Odds. p. 227.

244. Wright. Black Boy. p. 227.

fraternizing as offered by Mary Dalton and Communist Jan Erlone, in Native Son. Max has been asking Bigger why he hated Mary Dalton.

I don't know. She didn't do nothing to me... She asked me a lot of questions... She made me feel like a dog... "Aw, Mr. Max, she wanted me to tell her how Negroes live. She got into the front seat of the car where I was...

"But Bigger, you don't hate people for that. She was being kind, to you".

"Kind, hell, she wasn't kind to me... Mr. Max, we're all split up. What you say is kind, ain't kind at all. I didn't know anything at all about that woman. All I knew was that they kill us for women like her. We live apart. And then she comes and acts like that to me".²⁴⁵

Wright's all pervading theme in both Black Boy and Native Son is to project his analysis, that it is a prejudiced, capitalistic social order, rather than a human weakness that is the cause of crime and frustration amongst under-privileged Negro youth of America.

In Richard Wright's resolve to replace pathos with perfidy, he has swept away the chains of censorship and plunged everything unlovely into a single circumstance. This accentuated picture of life at lowest level, mirrors sensationalism, inflates morbidity, recoil. But although he has built his portrayal from a segment of life rather than a whole of life, his strong indictment presses power. Turpitude tears complacency and horror explodes its venom into social consciousness.

245. Wright. Native Son. p. 296-297.

I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown, to meet other situations that would perhaps elicit from me other responses. And if I could meet enough of a different life, then, perhaps, gradually and slowly I might learn who I was, what I might be. I was not leaving the South to forget the South, but so that some day I might understand it, might come to know what its rigours had done to me, to its children. I fled so that the numbness of my defensive living might thaw out and let me feel the pain - years later and far away - of what living in the South had meant.

...

With ever watchful eyes and bearing scars, visible and invisible, I headed North, full of a hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity, that the personalities of others should not be violated, that men should be able to confront other men without fear or shame, and that if men were lucky in their living on earth they might win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered here beneath the stars.²⁴⁶

This is the quiet, lyric note of Richard Wright - the poetry of style and thought which makes him, not only the stark interpreter of social ills, but a sensitive painter of his race's yearnings.

246. Wright. Black Boy. p. 228.

The intelligent Negro of today is resolved not to make discrimination an extenuation for his shortcomings in performance, individual or collective; he is trying to hold himself at par, neither inflated by sentimental allowances nor depreciated by current social discounts. For this he must know himself and be known for precisely what he is, and for that reason he welcomes the new scientific rather than the old sentimental interest.... Now we rejoice and pray to be delivered both from self-pity and condescension.

Alain Locke.²⁴⁷

247. Locke, Alain. "The New Negro". Brown ... eds. Negro Caravan. p. 952.

CHAPTER X.CONCLUSION.

The New Negro has dissolved the stereotype of the contented slave. In his own image, he is marching through the cross-road. Those who give intelligent listening to his voice perceive the resonant ring of surety and challenge. He has dismissed the comic Negro as part of the white man's programme; the terms 'nigger' and 'negress' as elements of a debasing polity. He has crashed the invidious bar of dialect, resolving to express himself as he alone sees fit. His dialect is no longer his voice; it is merely a quaint charm, a folk expression of an early literature. He has discarded the cream-complexioned, tragic figure - the mulatto, scarred by black blood running through her veins. He does not ask for pity or for tears; he asks for justice and for human rights.

What we want then is, first, economic opportunity - the right to earn our money at any trade or profession open to other Americans...

Second, we want equal educational opportunities all over America. All schools supported by public funds should be open to Negro students whose parents, too, contribute to these public funds...

Third, we want decent housing. In the big cities we are very tired of living in the ancient abandoned sections deserted by the whites, for which we pay double rents... We resent not being able to get loans on our property, or loans for building or insurance after we build, simply because we are coloured and live in coloured neighbourhoods...

That is why, fourth, we want full participation in government - municipal, state, and national. Only where we participate in government have we any sure and effective way of remedying these unfortunate conditions...

We want, fifth, a fair deal before the law. That means we desire Negroes on all jury panels, and that we be fairly called for jury service. We desire the right to elect judges (which means again that we must vote)... We desire protection from police brutality, which is severe in Negro neighbourhoods, and against which we have no redress. We desire Negro policemen. In other words, we desire equality before the law...

Sixth, we desire public courtesy, the same courtesy that is normally accorded other citizens. We desire polite service in the shops and at the gas stations and in restaurants and on the trains and buses...

And, finally, we want social equality in so far as public services go. White people have it... we want the right to use, and be protected in the use of, all the public conveniences that other Americans may use; the municipal parks, play grounds, auditoriums, hospitals and schools. We want the right to ride without Jim Crow in any conveyance carrying the travelling public. We want the right when travelling to dine in any restaurant or seek lodgings in any hotel or auto camp open to the public which our purse affords...

...
There is nothing wrong in wanting these things, is there? If so, wherein lies the wrong?²⁴⁸

This is the voice of the New Negro speaking with honesty, with firmness.

Now that he has reached the point where he can view his position with scientific interest, his approach is positive, constructive. He is moving forward not by paternalized white philanthropy or sentimentalism, but under the control of his own objectives. Denied a civil freedom, he has used his voice in print.

248. Hughes. "What the Negro Wants". Watkins, ed. Anthology of American Negro Literature. p. 263-265.

He has substituted self-respect for defeat, self-pity; he has moved from the scar of race to pride of race. His psychology has replaced a sense of social debt by the responsibilities of social contribution. W. E. B. DuBois was the first scientific scholar of social affairs, also the first scientific historian, His deep research in African heritage has been invaluable toward the obliteration of a warped social perspective, toward the growth of race cooperation. At Fisk University, George E. Haynes did much work in social research; his early study of the Negro in New York led to the foundation of the National Urban League. The efficacy of Charles S. Johnson (1893-) has been immeasurable. In 1928, after a period as editor of "Opportunity" he became head of the Department of Social Science at Fisk University. Of all the Negro social scientists, he has been the most productive; his service to Negro expression has been very great. In addition to contributions to numerous magazines he has had published: The Negro in American Civilization (1930), The Economic Status of the Negro (1933), The Shadow of the Plantation (1934), Race Relations with W. D. Weatherford (1934), The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy (with Edwin R. Embree and W. W. Alexander, 1935), A Preface to Racial Understanding (1936), The Negro College Graduate (1936), which won the Anisfield Award, and Growing Up in the Black Belt (1940). He is still writing.

E. Franklin Frazier (1894-) has written with provocative viewpoint. His important contributions to American sociology have been: The Negro Family in Chicago (1932), The Negro

Family in the United States (1939), and Negro Youth at the Crossroads (1940). His knowledge of his subject is significant through his various appointments: 1920-1921, he was research fellow at the New York School of Social Work; 1921-1922, Fellow of the American Scandinavian Foundation to Denmark; 1922-1927, Director of Atlanta School of Social Work; 1929-1934, professor of sociology, Fisk University; since 1934, professor and head of the department of sociology, Howard University. In 1940-1941, he was awarded the Guggenheim fellowship to Brazil and the West Indies; he has also been a fellow of the American Sociological Society and a member of the Society for Research in Child Development.

Negro colleges have not stressed political science, but Ralph Bunche, (1904-) as head of the department of political science at Howard University, has brought scientific treatment to the subject - not only of the Negro in American politics, but in world politics. As a Social Science Research Fellow, he has made investigations of imperialism in Africa; as a staff member of the Carnegie-Myrdal Study of the Negro, he has made a study of the Negro in American political life. As successor to Count Bernadotte, he has revealed acumen. In addition to articles which have appeared in scholarly magazines, he is the author of A World View of Race (1936).

Benjamin Brawley (1882-1939) was the outstanding pioneer in Negro cultural essays, literary histories. In 1910, The Negro in Literature and Art appeared. Though first in booklet

form, Brawley enlarged it twice under the same title. In 1937, two years before his death, he gave it a final revision and had it published under a new title The Negro Genius. Though Brawley's work is scholarly, it reveals more restraint than the writing of the later school. It is well-bred, refined, but less critical than biographical. As a pioneer in literary criticism, Brawley's volumes The Negro Genius and Negro Heroes and Builders published the same year (1937) merit value as helpful reference aids. His contribution was a sincere, an erudite approach, toward race appreciation and cooperation.

William Stanley Braithwaite (1878-) also gained prominence as a critic, an anthologist. For several years he was a member on the editorial staff of the "Boston Transcript" and in addition contributed both verse and essays to the "Century", "Forum", "Scribner's", and "Atlantic" periodicals. From 1913 to 1929 he published a yearly Anthology of Magazine Verse. He has also collected and edited the following anthologies: The Book of Elizabethan Verse (1906), The Book of Georgian Verse (1908), The Book of Restoration Verse (1909), The Golden Treasury of Magazine Verse (1918), The Book of Modern British Verse (1919), Victory! Celebrated by Thirty-eight American Poets, with an Introduction by Theodore Roosevelt (1919), Anthology of Massachusetts poets (1922), Our Lady's Choir, A Contemporary Anthology of Verse by Catholic Sisters (1931). Though more widely known as a critic and anthologist, he published in 1904 a small volume of his own poems, Lyrics of Life and Love.

and in 1908, The House of Falling Leaves. In 1941, he published his autobiography The House Under Arcturus. It appeared in "Phylon", the Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture, founded and edited by W. E. B. DuBois. For many years Mr. Braithwaite held the post of Professor of Creative Writing at Atlanta University. Though awarded the Spingarn medal in 1918, his position as a Negro contributor toward race advancement has been controversial. Self educated, his temperament is classical. Though sponsoring the New Poetry movement in America, his own work follows the pattern of the late nineteenth-century poets. With singleness of purpose he has confined himself to world literature rather than to Negro literature. His own poems do not direct themselves toward race; they are polished lyrics, dealing with themes of love and death, or in his later years, with mysticism. His anthologies include Negro poems, but do not lay emphasis upon them. His critical introductions to the anthologies reveal an acute, perceptive grasp of poetry, but he never uses his sensibility to make race consciousness his thesis. Many Negro thinkers criticize this attitude, as neglected toward race promulgation. In his autobiography, Braithwaite related the influence of G. Lowes Dickinson when he delivered the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard, on the immortality of the soul. "Nor race, nor wealth, nor social position, makes any difference", he quotes Dickinson, "it is only the growth of the soul".

Braithwaite continues:

And in my artistic ambitions I had dimly formulated this belief, certain that the truth of it would

dissolve the obstacles that presented a diverted pathway in the practice of one's idealistic vocation. The racial conditions which closed the doors to opportunities for employment of the kind I sought in New York that winter convinced me that whatever may be the quality and distinction of achievement in literature, if that literature was confined to racial materials and experiences, it would be appraised and judged by a different standard from the literature of American writers in general. For the good of the artistic sincerity, for the cultural values, which must be purified and sustained in a country so much below the standard of European achievements, this double standard of criticism must be destroyed. This purpose became the dominating influence upon my efforts in the career I dreamed for the future...

The resolution I formed in that darkened room was to express myself on the common ground of American authorship, to demonstrate, in however humble a degree, that a man of colour was the equal of any other man in possession of the attributes that produced a literature of human thought and experience, and to force a recognition of this common capacity and merit from the appreciation of reading public and the authority of critical opinion. And I resolved, with equal determination, not to treat in any phase, in any form, for any purpose, racial materials or racial experiences, until this recognition had been won, recorded and universally confirmed.

This is the first recorded explanation of a course which had invited some criticism from my own people who accused me of retreat from, and discrimination against, racial materials and interests.²⁴⁹

Braithwaite's poetry undoubtedly lacks fire; his great worth lies as an anthologist, a critic, rather than a poet. Whether his attitude has been right or wrong, could furnish lively discussion. But whatever the concluding judgment, his sincerity, his cultural quietness has been a keel, a balance, bringing by contrast, depth to the Negro mosaic.

249. Braithwaite, William S. "The House Under Arcturus". Ibid. p. 406.

Alain Locke's (1886-) contribution is compiler, commentator, rather than creative writer. His several essays contained in The New Negro form an accurate picture of the aims of the New Negro movement. His interest in cultural expression focused attention upon creative writing and brought unity to Negro literature. Highly intellectual, he is a Harvard graduate, a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, with a year of further specialization in philosophy at the University of Berlin. Since 1912, he has been teaching philosophy at Howard University. Of himself he writes:

I have devoted most of my literary effort and time to this avocational interest of Negro culture, with occasional excursions into the sociological side of the race question.²⁵⁰

As contributor to "Opportunity's" annual retrospective reviews of literature on the Negro, he has been a moulder of Negro opinion. Of late years he has taken much interest in the presentation of native African art.

Sterling Brown, (1901-) associate professor of English at Howard University, is a current promulgator of Negro thought. From 1936-1939 he held the position of Editor on Negro Affairs for the Federal Writers' Project; in 1939 he served as staff member of the Carnegie-Myrdal Study of the Negro. In 1937-1938 he received a Guggenheim fellowship. His first collection of poems, Southern Road is a series of folk songs. He does not shun dialect: he gives it, however, a racy quality which is

250. Locke. "Biographical Note". Watkins, ed. op. cit. p. 471.

redolent with folk spirit. Brown has made intensive study of folk portraiture; he has captured the road songs of the wandering roustabout. His poetry is the comedy, the tragedy, of the folk people. He is a regional poet, with his characters inhabitants of their Southern setting. He uses free verse as well as traditional and folk forms; his poems have frequently a note of social protest. As critic, he occupied a foremost place; Negro in American Fiction (1937), and Negro Poetry and Drama (1937) are both valuable and scholarly. The Negro Caravan, (1941), of which he is co-editor with Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee, is a summary of the entire literary picture. As source book, anthology, it is an unbiased presentation of creative literature, dispassionate, authentic. The introduction which prefaces each anthology is a survey of that particular field. In each case it is compact, erudite, elucidating.

J. Saunders Redding, (1906-) author of To Make a Poet Black (1939) and Hugh Morris Gloster, (1911-) of Negro Voices in American Fiction (1943) have both provided invaluable assistance to the research student. Redding blends an artistry of phrase with scholarly analysis; Gloster's work is a review of the entire fiction field, quiet, authoritative. In Black Odyssey (1948), Roi Ottley (1906-) has shed light on the sociological picture. His presentation is enlightening and human. These Negro writers deserve recognition in the field of study.

Carter G. Woodson (1875-) is generally considered as

the dean of American Negro historians. He was the pioneering influence in the founding of the association for the Study of Negro Life and History and The Journal of Negro History. This journal has been most helpful to younger Negro historians who have used it as a vehicle for entrance toward research.

Toward the interest in African heredity, two influences have been paramount; first, the entrance of Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican Negro, to Harlem in 1922; second, the bibliophile, Arthur Schomburg, who discovered many curiosities about African, South American, and Caribbean Negroes. Garvey had a four-fold purpose. He sought to reach out to the very poorest Negroes, to exalt blackness, to pierce it with a glamour. In order to facilitate this programme he visioned the need of a culture and an historical background for the Negro people. They were Garveyite parades displaying banners, "Princes Shall Come out of Egypt". A romantic, a chauvinistic pride was fostered to inflame the movement. Garvey's third move was to secure the freedom of all Negroids throughout the world. The fourth, an Utopian ideal, was his desire to establish a black republic in Africa. The Garvey movement was a momentary bubble. It failed through financial mismanagement, a stupid vanity upon the part of Garvey, the disapproval of the Negro intellectuals. The significance of the enterprise lies in the electric interest toward African art and African history. This was further stimulated by the rediscovery of primitive African painting and sculpture by French artists during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Arthur Schomburg, a Puerto Rican, came to the United States in 1891. He became president of the American Negro Academy and co-founder of the Negro Society for Historical Research. His contribution does not lie in his creative literature, but in the vast library which he has assembled - a treasury of Negro thought. Schomburg searched the book markets throughout Latin America, Western Europe and the United States for material on the Negro. He did not confine his efforts to the American Negro but scoured every section of the world where the Negroes have dwelt in sufficient numbers to merit attention. In 1928, the Carnegie Corporation presented the collection to the New York Library. It is located at the 135th Street Branch, which lies in Harlem. Schomburg served as curator there until his death in 1938. The Schomburg collection included Africa, The West Indies, Brazil, and other regions in South America. The Haitian collection is considered the best in the United States. The writings of several European Negroes, Alexander Puskin's poems, Jacobus Capitein's Latin thesis, Dumas' novels, various editions of the autobiography of Gustavus Vasa, are to be found there too.

At present, there are many young writers experimenting in Negro expression. In 1942, Margaret Walker won the Yale University Younger Poets Competition with her volume of poems, For My People. Stephen Vincent Benet contributed the foreword. The book consists of three sharply contrasting groupings. Section One contains Public Poems in which the poet speaks directly for the Negro people. They are in Biblical style and appear for

the most part in free verse, or as rhythmical prose poems. The second section contains folk ballads written in Negro dialect; the third section is a series of sonnets, formal yet personal. A chief interest in the book lies in its variety of verse forms. Much of it is difficult poetry from which to quote. The following passage is from the title poem:

For my people lending their strength to the years
to the gone years and the now years and the maybe
years, washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing
mending hoeing plowing digging planting pruning
patching dragging along never gaining never reaping
never knowing and never understanding...251

Each poem of this section is a sustained utterance from its beginning to its ending.

Of late, there has been a growing trend among Negro writers to deal with other phases of American life than the problems of the Negro minority. Willard Motley, Ann Petry and Frank Yerby are representatives of this. Ann Petry won the 1945 Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship for her novel, The Street. Her purpose is to portray the Negro as a human being rather than a type. Frank Yerby writes about American people who are not Negroes. The Foxes of Harrow (1946), the Vixens (1947) both emphasize romanticism; they do not stress the author's identity as a Negro American. Willard Motley uses an Italian boy from the Chicago streets. Knock On Any Door (1947) does not treat the problem of a segregated minority; it pens with depressing realism the evils incurred by sociological neglect, through

251. Walker, Margaret. For My People. quoted in "Current Biography". Nov. 1943. p. 799.

ignorance and lack of interest in unjust and dire conditions. These books, dealing primarily with white characters, predict the gradual emancipation of Negro writers from the strictly racial treatment to the widening universal.

At Fisk University, a young cultural group is operating at the present time, under the name of "Counterpoise". It invites to membership "friends of modern arts and devotees of ideas significant for universal human values". The aim is to encourage both the writing and reading of serious experimental poetry and prose. Their declaration prefaces their invitation.

we are unalterably opposed to the chauvinistic, the cultish, to special pleading, to all that seeks to limit and restrict creative expression

we believe experimentation to be an absolute necessity in keeping the arts vital and significant in contemporary life; therefore we support and encourage the experimental and the unconventional in writing, music and the graphic arts, though we do not consider our own work avant garde in the accepted sense of the term

as, writers who belong to a so-called minority we are violently opposed to having our work viewed, as the custom is, entirely in the light of sociology and politics

to having it overpraised on the one hand by those with an axe to grind or with a conscience to salve

to having it misinterpreted on the other hand by coterie editors, reviewers, anthologists who refuse us encouragement or critical guidance because we deal with realities we find it neither possible nor desirable to ignore

as poets we naturally believe that it is more profitable for generation to read good poetry than it is to listen to soap opera. since poetry has humanistic and spiritual values not to be ignored with impunity

we believe in the oneness of mankind and the importance of the arts in the struggle for peace and unity²⁵²

This creed is the thought and voice of a New Negro Renaissance.

252. Fisk University. A leaflet, advertising "Counterpoise".

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