

SOME NEW BOOKS ON THE NEGRO

BY MARGARET EMERSON BAILEY

TO present the negro solely in relation to the white race is to present him as the white man's negro. The failure to portray him in a more valid, not a more vital sense, has been inevitable, for until recent years he has had few leaders of his own. At his best—with what has grown to be a kind of orthodoxy—we have continued to depict him as the gentle servitor of "Toby's Bow", living selflessly the lives of the people whom he serves and adding dignity by his devotion; at his worst, as the savage of "The Clansman", inflamed to riot by contact with culture. We have not often presumed to attempt the negro at his happiest. But at his most tragic, we have conceived him as in "The Nigger", a creature of cupidity, coveting a world most vigilantly guarded, almost winning it by the mixture in his blood, and losing it eternally by the ironic prank of a black drop. His tragedy in such case has been a personal one in that he has suffered by himself, not with or for his people. Alone he has made his fight and with his back against the wall. That behind that wall of black there should be a sense of community and solidarity, a pride in tradition and in heritage, seems never to have occurred to us. Even in sober treatises, we have gone on behaving as though the black race were made up

of scattered individuals without a racial consciousness.

Whether the war has made it evident to the negro that if refused the rights, he may still be called upon to perform the duties of his citizenship and in their highest and most sacrificial sense; whether the principles for which the war was waged have stirred the hopes of desired equality; whether the recent pressure of industrialism has made him realize his importance as an economic factor; or whether racial consciousness has found expression through more efficient leaders, this consciousness has quickened until it has required recognition. Indeed, its quickening is made the subject of the new books dealing with the negro and is made so, whether the author be white or black.

How great its impact may be upon the white consciousness is best shown in "The Rising Tide of Color", by Lothrop Stoddard, who makes its growth the matter of no one country, but of the whole world. This book is a statistical melodrama, best illustrated by its jacket. Nothing is so arresting as a map when highly colored; and it is a fortunate coincidence that Africa fits the back so aptly that its foreboding gloom may even threaten from the bookstalls. The subject-matter is intentionally presented in the same startling manner, for Mr. Stod-

dard's aim is to stagger and alarm, to knock out from under the white man's smug assuredness that for all time the lion's share is his by right of colonization, trade, and conquest. His, it may be at the moment by political control; but the basic factor in human affairs, as Mr. Stoddard sees it, is not politics but race. That being so, it is well for him to be awakened to his dangers, to the restiveness felt for his control, to his outnumbering by his foes. He must be made to perceive the peril of immigration, of the ensuing fall in his own birth-rate; but above all of that color consciousness that is spreading rapidly throughout the world, ready at the signal to leap all continental obstacles in one gigantic conflagration.

How adequately to arm against the menace is the theme of the last portion of the book. Mr. Stoddard's own solution is a swift retreat from what he calls the outer dikes. This would involve the surrender of no white race areas. The inner dikes might then be safely constructed into a solid guarded wall behind which the white race might preserve its culture and supremacy, and above all, by eugenic propagation, the race type which in its integrity it is its duty to pass on. Where, while besieged, it would find its markets; how grow rich and fatten without what Mr. Stoddard himself admits to be exploited lands, he does not disclose. Nor does he settle in the reader's mind the doubt whether a race is still superior that puts itself to siege. More ideally, a wonder lurks whether if the white race type is to be preserved only by the method indicated, it may not lose its value in the very process of its preservation. Moth and rust do corrupt, even where thieves may not break in and steal. And a policy of such exclusiveness—who knows?—may shut out the very

elements essential to its being. That, however, like much in the book, is matter for conjecture. The fact essential to the theme is the deepening of the color consciousness which in the instance of the Japanese triumph in 1904 has provoked a loud alarm.

In "The Negro Faces America", Mr. Seligmann's attitude is in sharp contrast. He deals with this consciousness only nationally, but while he does not blink at its fearful possibilities, he makes it a matter less for alarm than self-reproach. He blames the white race, not for the "new negro" in so far as he is a natural development; but he does blame it for the accidents of birth, for the oppressions which have marred with resentment and with a sense of difference what should have been a straight, clean pride of race. His book is thus an entreaty to declare a truce. If we will but come forth, he urges, from behind the barricade that we are still erecting, we may change conflicting aims for common ones.

The past, however, lives on in the present and traditional passions sway a multitude. In investigating the causes which have led to the erection of this barricade, his aim is thus to keep a scientific spirit and to let the facts speak for themselves. He starts with the foundation, the terror of black domination felt at the close of the Civil War. Then with acuteness he shows how industrial exploitation set to work, shrewdly shaping terror to a wall that would restrain the negro in his earlier position, if not as slave, then serf. In a virtual state of peonage he has remained, the victim often of loose business dealings and extortion from which he may find no redress. These failing, mob violence stirred by the old high-sounding names may be called in. Only natural,

then, is the denial of education to the negro by the South, since "it is against the prosperous colored man that fury is most frequently directed". The conclusion is that what we had thought a race problem is an economic one, a part of our industrial and political life.

Since white responsibility is also the subject of Mr. Sandburg's "The Chicago Race Riots", it is to the white race that his message is addressed. He, too, like Mr. Seligmann, presents squarely, but with restraint, even what is most intolerable in the facts. In the effort to produce reform by an apprehension of conditions, the papers in this pamphlet were published in the Chicago "News" prior to the disturbance: They deal thus not with the actual riots, but the exploding causes, and stress not so much the attitude of the "new negro" as the excitements by which locally it was increased. At the same time they make clear the negro's awareness of his economic power and of industrial organization as the road to be pursued. The pamphlet is naturally less constructed, less pondered than Mr. Seligmann's careful thesis. But it has the advantage of its journalistic method, for by personal narrative and comment it makes vivid its statistics and analysis, and brings the general problem down to more specific terms.

How seriously the "new negro" is considered by the white man is obvious in the fact that for the most part, the books which deal with him are analyses and not interpretations. One recent play there is, however, by Ridgely Torrence, which breaks clear of the old traditions in its presentation of the negro's pride of race. "Granny Maumee" is its fierce translation into flesh and blood. Royal black is her line and royal black it

shall stay. Her tragedy is not her blindness, incurred in the attempt to save her only son from lynching; not even, in comparison, the brooding horror of that crime; but her granddaughter's weak betrayal of her racial loyalty. Outlasting three generations, the old negress has clung to life in the hope that again a man child of her own blood will be given to her arms and is firm in the faith that at its coming she will be given back her sight. When by a miracle of belief her vision is restored, she is mocked at the very moment of her triumph. After a scene of elemental passion the play closes on the weak note of her forgiveness. Better, one likes to think, had she died as she had lived, proud, indomitable. But in contrast to the close there is a desperate beauty in the moment of discovery. The play, moreover, is written not in a spirit of propaganda or of patronage. Miscegenation and lynching play their parts, but they are the inexorable facts of an ironic tragedy.

When one turns to negro literature, it is impossible to affirm this racial consciousness as a new spirit, whatever be its modern manifestations. The poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar, it is true, reunite us with another world in which the negro, if considered, was the "white man's burden", not his "problem". They are simple-hearted people of whom he writes. Plantation life was yesterday and the habit of irresponsibility is still upon them. His attitude is thus primarily one of tenderness. But there are poems, "The Colored Soldiers", the "Ode to Ethiopia", where affection turned to pride speaks strongly. In the tributes to Frederick Douglass and to Booker Washington, there is exultation in the intrepid leaders of his own folk. Moreover, in the stern horror

of "The Haunted Oak", in the challenge "To the South" against the new economic slavery, there is a vehemence, a lashing questioning that link him with the later negro poets.

Of his successors the most powerful is James Weldon Johnson. Though he uses dialect in his croons and jingles, his best poems are those where he is least indigenous, where he is the spokesman, not of the soil, but of the soul. In "O Black and Unknown Bards" by a sympathy, which is never sentimental, he has caught the elusive pathos and plaintive undertones of those who sang in bondage. But in "Fifty Years", a commemorative ode, he speaks with the new voice of race, celebrating his people as patriots in a land not of their own choosing and as citizens by the right of the brave contributions which they have added to its history. The clean strength of diction is suited to the elevation of the thought and sustains the conscious dignity of accomplishment. Significant, too, are the few poems of Joseph S. Cotter, Jr., who died recently at the age of twenty-two. "The Band of Gideon" by its opulent imagery, its impulsive rhythm and wild ringing chorus, claims blood relation to the negro spirituals which were its author's heritage. But there are two short poems written in free verse which are most memorable. In "A Mulatto to his Critics", Cotter writes with a whimsical gentleness of his delight in that inheritance that "crinkles his hair and puts sweet music in his soul". In stern contrast is the answer to this poem, "And What Shall You Say?", where in microcosm he has stated the crux of the whole negro question with a simple poignancy that at the same time holds no bitterness. It is a pity that in his

brief life he did not write more poems of this kind.

The sturdy pride of race accomplishment is most clearly voiced in biographies, the most important of which are "The Black Man's Burden" by William Holtzclaw, principal of the Utica Normal and Industrial Institute, and "Finding a Way Out", by Robert Moton, who succeeded Booker Washington at Tuskegee. Stories of sheer grit and the triumph of character, they are not unlike the personal record of Booker Washington in "Up From Slavery". Like his book, moreover, they have two serious purposes, to secure the cooperation of the white race by convincing them of the need and benefits of negro education and to act as inspiration to those of their own people whose fortunes were their own. With these aims in mind, they are written with a complete candor and unself-consciousness and with the stress laid less on the individual attainments than on the racial possibilities which these attainments represent. For all that, as one reads of these two men, beginning life with every obstacle before them, and advancing irresistibly to the goal which they had set themselves, one is apt to lose the larger application in the personal romance. Our country has been founded by adventurers, merchant and spiritual, but they were not more doughty, more resolute in the face of danger than these negroes who struggled to find education, not merely for themselves, but for their race.

In "Darkwater", by W. E. B. Du Bois, there is the pride of rebellion that in its austerity knows no compromise. A champion of his people, he makes no plea for aid. Justice in the form of recognition is what he wants, not mercy; and for justice one does not rightly sue. What has

brought him to his defiant attitude is, first, his own intellectuality and sensitiveness of temperament. His is the resistance of a high spirit that must ride free. But added to the personal revolt against a prejudice that has worked harm to himself and to the people whom he loves, there is indignation against it as a wastrel which wrecks men's usefulness or talent by the irrelevance of color.

The first chapter of biography is written that we—the white race—may look in upon him, only to look out upon the world bathed in that sinister light that has been cast by race. For that purpose it is necessary that we know his people; his grandfather, a stern, silent man who, while ship-steward, slyly wrote his poetry,—“stilted bitter things from a soul astray”; his romantic roving father; his mother, whose infinite patience was curiously the covering of her force. For these people whom he portrays with beauty and with dignity, and whose struggle against poverty he accepted first unconsciously, came later to have a significance above the personal one, when he perceived the nature of the pressure that drove them from their farms to menial jobs. His own early untroubled years by the “golden river” in the Berkshires, his sharp awakening to the world as not before him where to choose, but as a place of narrow range; the personal triumph by which he forced its bounds, he tells only that we may realize that the exhilaration of the personal triumph came to weigh as nothing beside the sobering conviction that he must engage himself in the larger conflict of his race.

How far the iron has entered in his soul is evident in the next chapters where he shows the evil passion that “the modern discovery of personal

whiteness” has engendered in both races, black and white. In its fierce exaltation of the colored peoples and its hatred for the Anglo-Saxon, this book might well be an answer to the gage let fall by Mr. Stoddard, for to much that Mr. Stoddard claims it gives the lie direct. Indeed, were it not for the few fraternizing hands held out along the lines, one might view these two as engaged in single combat to the death between the lists. But while Mr. Stoddard enters the fray from fear, from the basic instinct of self-preservation, Mr. Du Bois seeks out the contest prompted by resentment and by hate. Motives enough he furnishes for his eager presence: the restrictions and discriminations that enthrall his people; the murder and mob-violence that so often have made their lives an existence of capitulation and of fear; the conscienceless exploiting that led to foreign colonization and so directly to the war. It is a stern indictment and one to which we cannot close our ears. It is a lesson, however, that cannot be driven home by storming, no matter how righteous be the anger. Better is it imparted by such careful scholarly instruction as that furnished in “Negro Migrations During the War” by Dr. Emmett Scott, where the emotion is reached through the intelligence. The significance of “Dark-water” thus lies in the spiritual history of the author and in the passages of lyrical poetic beauty where he has expressed the extremity of racial pride.

From its black philosophy it is a relief to turn to what is a significant venture for the negro race, a book that marks a distinct advance in education over the past indifferent methods. This is “The Upward Path; a Reader for Colored Children”. The selec-

tions in it are ably chosen and present a great variety. They include, for instance, a short story and a poem of Paul Laurence Dunbar's, excerpts from the lives of Scott Bond, Booker Washington, Holtzclaw, and Du Bois, the adventures of Henson, Peary's companion at the Pole, and of Shepard in the Congo, the patriotic poems of Johnson and of Cotter, and the "Credo" of Du Bois. The result is a volume that is of interest, whatever be the race or age. But more important is the fact that it must accomplish its intent. For while giving pleasure, it will foster the love of tradition, and from the evidences of past

accomplishment, an honest racial pride.

The Rising Tide of Color. By Lothrop Stoddard. Charles Scribner's Sons.
 The Negro Faces America. By Herbert Seligmann. Harper and Bros.
 The Chicago Race Riots. By Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace and Howe.
 Granny Maumee. By Ridgely Torrence. The Macmillan Co.
 Complete Poems. By Paul Laurence Dunbar. Dodd, Mead and Co.
 Fifty Years. By James Weldon Johnson. The Cornhill Co.
 The Band of Gideon. By Joseph S. Cotter, Jr. The Cornhill Co.
 The Black Man's Burden. By William Holtzclaw. The Neale Publishing Co.
 Finding a Way Out. By Robert Russa Moton. Doubleday, Page and Co.
 Darkwater. By W. E. B. DuBois. Harcourt, Brace and Howe.
 Negro Migrations During the War. By Emmett Scott. Oxford University Press.
 The Upward Path. Compiled by Pritchard and Ovington. Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

NEW YORK, *December, 1920.*

WITH this paper, having some time since got back from our travels, we return to the "head" carried by our articles before we became Murray Hill on wheels. We are demobilized, rendered stationary—until such time as we again take wing.

But we have no intention of becoming less voluble because of that. When we have ceased to talk you may know that our spirit has, as Stevenson puts the matter, "left behind a mocking, tragical, and soon intolerable residue, which must be hurriedly concealed". Or, to say the thing with something less of "style", that it is time to bury us. And, maybe then, we shall arise in our large, white cravat and say, "One word more".

Until that dire time, however, put your mind at ease. You may count on an adequate supply of eloquent and

moral teaching from the one authentic spring, name-blown-in-the-bottle brand. Beware of imitations, and take no substitute. In short, patronize us and you will prosper.

As we say, we are again doing business under the old sign-board "With Malice Toward None". But—there are a lot of things to be said now about that head. We are beginning to fear that throughout our past we have been too soft, too much the good and easy man. Bad! Very bad thing for a first-rate talent. What is it the most knowing of living American critics (though he is today frequently called very old school),—what is it W. C. Brownell says of Lowell? That he possessed "too little *malice* to be distinctly penetrating". Yep! Right-O!

Away, then, with the soft pedal! Skidoo the pussyfoot! Soak it to 'em to get "Results"! We're agoin' to take