

CHAPEL HILL BOOKS

AUTUMN 1929

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By WILLIAM SPENCE
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**The
AMERICAN
SCHOLAR**
By
NORMAN FOERSTER

**The TREE
NAMED JOHN**
By JOHN B. SALE

**BLACK
ROADWAYS**
By
MARTHA W. BECKWITH

JOHN HENRY
By GUY B. JOHNSON

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Edited by
J. DOVER WILSON

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John, for whom the tree was named, was the little boy whose colored playmates (there weren't any white ones on that Mississippi plantation) made him believe that he had to spit on his bait to catch a fish, swallow a blown-up fish bladder to learn swimming, bite off a butterfly's head to get a new suit of clothes, and eat the brains of his first bird to become a mighty hunter. That and a lot more are all in this charming book of stories, the lore of which is authentic and fascinating. Illustrated with silhouettes. \$2.00

A study of the folk life of Jamaica, this book is the pleasant result of four trips to "the crumpled island," during one of which she was introduced by her friendly informant as a lady who "want to know about duppy and such t'ings." She learned about them and wrote them carefully, sympathetically, and charmingly—everyday matters, but more especially the "ghost" lore and its tremendous hold on even the minutest details of living and acting. Illustrated, \$3.00

The author is already known for his previous folk song investigations with Howard W. Odum. Here he follows the winding trail of the "steel driving man who died with his hammer in his hand"—the Paul Bunyan of the South, the Negro's most important hero. Besides laying a good foundation for the probability of the John Henry legend, Mr. Johnson collects and includes a number of admirable versions of the John Henry ballad. \$2.00

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Books of Special Interest

Marriage and Its Basis

MARRIAGE. By EDWARD WESTERMARCK. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1929. \$1.50.

Reviewed by V. F. CALVERTON

IN these days when books on marriage and morals seem to have multiplied beyond all reason, with many adding little to those that preceded, the appearance of this book of Edward Westermarck, which considers marriage in terms of its historical background, has unusual significance. Westermarck's book does what most books on marriage fail to do. It sets marriage in its historical position, considers its forms in various eras, its individual and social aspects, and its cultural characteristics. It is descriptive rather than dissection in method. In simple, expeditious way it provides the reader with many of the general conclusions that its author drew, after more elaborate analysis, in his noted work on "The History of Human Marriage."

One can find here, in rapid review, many of Dr. Westermarck's various conclusions as to the basis of marriage, the nature of the incest taboo, the origin of endogamy and exogamy, and the numerous theories concerning group-marriage and promiscuity among primitive peoples. The presentment is always clear but not always sufficient. The very absence of the abundant materials that made his "History of Human Marriage" such an invaluable document, tends to make this volume lag a little in interest and fall short somewhat in conviction. By way of quick contrast, for example, his book on "Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco" was striking in just those ways that this book is not. You got in the former not only a picture of marriage customs, but also the presence of the human factor, the actual "feel" of the situation, the real "spirit" of the *mores*. That you do not get in this volume. Here you have facts, but without the spirit that is or was behind them. As a result, this volume, in considerable part, reads more like a sterile monograph than a dynamic interpretation.

Nevertheless, for the general reader the book will provide an acquaintanceship with marital forms that most books on marriage leave out of account altogether or mention in a passing footnote or paragraph. The fact that marriage grows out of the family, and not the family out of marriage; that as an institution marriage is more economic than sexual in origin; that it evinces all varieties of duration through the ages—these basic facts alone will clarify the attitude of the general reader toward the whole problem of marriage and morals. In achieving such clarification the book serves a good purpose. Instead of viewing the present bankruptcy of marriage which has spread over the western world as something unprecedented, for instance, the reader can see in it a form of change that has occurred before in history, and which is to be expected in the career of any *mores*. Moralities have their curves of ascent and descent like the history of rivers. This fact is brought out in adequate detail in the discussion of the many forms of marriage that man has hitherto adopted, then rejected, and sometimes re-adopted again.

As to the specific contentions of the book—in the first place it is interesting to note that Dr. Westermarck does not here make the eager defense of pre-nuptial chastity that he did in his "History of Human Marriage." The error in his earlier position had met with severe attack by many anthropologists, in particular Robert Briffault. One of the most recent instances in disproof of Westermarck's earlier conception is to be found in Malinowski's "Sexual Life of Savages," where we find that in Melanesia pre-nuptial chastity is practically unknown. That Westermarck still refuses to recognize the matrilineal background of early primitive marriage, even when faced with all the enormous evidence of Briffault, is all the more unfortunate for his general interpretation of marriage in these mad, modern years, when, as many have augured, we are on the road to another matriarchate. The same error creeps into this book which is to be found in his earlier ones, namely, that connected with the differentiations of marriage as a concept and a practice. It is not that Westermarck, himself is not aware of the differentiations, but that the reader will most likely be misled by the failure to emphasize them. Marriage in many primitive communities resembles so little marriage as we, with our modern categories of consciousness, conceive it, that it is practically a misnomer to use the same word to de-

scribe both conditions. Among the aboriginal tribes of Malaya, for example, individuals often *marry* forty or fifty times; the Cherokee Iroquois "commonly changed wives three or four times a year, among the Hurons "women (were) purchased by the night, week, month or winter." Now while in a certain loose sense you may describe all these relationships as marital, there is a great danger of misapprehension in this type of nomenclature. It would be a highly intelligent procedure if we coined a new word for our anthropological vocabulary so that this kind of confusion could not occur. Especially is this confusion pronounced, when we discuss such a relationship as monogamy, and here Westermarck is even evasive himself.

Despite these criticisms, the general reader will find in this book a fund of data concerning the basis and background of marriage, which will make him all the better equipped to understand marriage in its present forms, and to "see through" many of the pretensions and spurious arguments that are proffered to us about marriage today.

Black Ulysses

WINGS ON MY FEET. By HOWARD W. ODUM. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by R. EMMET KENNEDY

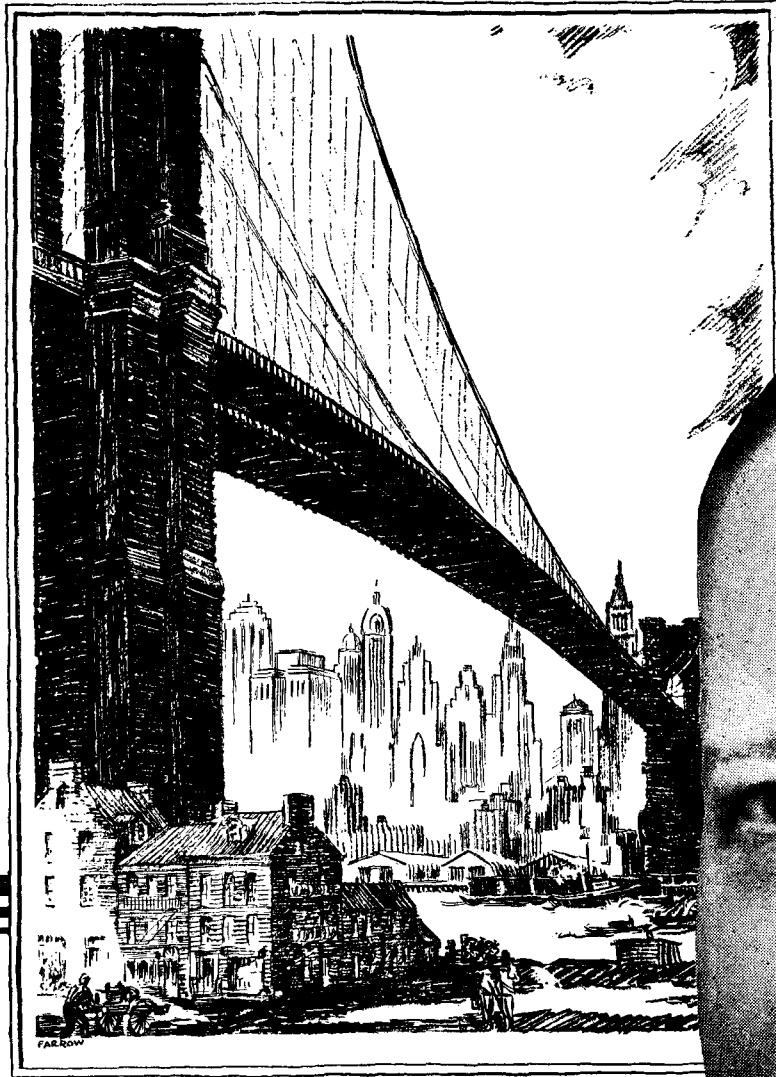
AS an authentic, emotional record of the attitude of mind of the American negro soldier during the late war, "Wings on My Feet" contains much that is interesting and diverting. Preoccupied with his uncertain fate, Black Ulysses contemplates death and destruction and the terrors of war surrounding him, voicing his sentiments and speaking his mind without fear or reservation. At times there is an undercurrent of reckless humor so unexpected it is almost grotesque.

Written in monologue form, the hero gives his impressions with a natural egotism and child-like bravado quite true to life; except in a few instances where certain ideas are advanced so at variance with the immaturity of his mind, it seems that he is being used as a medium to give expression to the author's own philosophies of life. One misses, however, the pleasing originality, the variety of incident, and the frequent change of tempo, all of which gave such character to Dr. Odum's former book, "Rainbow Round My Shoulder." Black Ulysses, the troubadour, was spontaneous and amusing, chiefly concerned with his private amours and the sheer delight of roaming abroad in the happy-go-lucky world. Black Ulysses, the soldier, conscious of his uniform and brass buttons, has become self-important. Affected by the nearness of an audience hitherto ignored, he seems inclined to show off; often more deeply concerned about the impression he is making than he is about the general tone of his rambling discourse.

Prevailing monotony, more than anything else, unfortunately mars the appeal of the story. Before long the reader finds himself losing interest and growing impatient. It is like listening to a long, well-written piece of piano music, where there is never a change of key: or like hearing a performance of an unending oratorio where certain unimportant, meaningless words are sung again and again, their only mission being to fill the listener with righteous annoyance. This defect might easily have been overcome if Dr. Odum had shown a more generous sense of elimination in selecting his material. Likewise the monotony would appear less insistent if he had supplied the original music that goes with the song fragments breaking into the theme from time to time, that is, if such music is extant. For, after considering the strange verse mixture, where familiar lines of old spirituals join with the words of a well-known folk-song, with the occasional ringing-in of a line from a bawdy street ballad intended to give novel flavor, there is reason for suspecting someone guilty of a flagrant disregard of artistic verity, and the reader is left trying to decide whether the fault is due to the over-ingeniousness of the author or to the reckless fancy of his singing soldier.

However important the merits of "Wings On My Feet" as an authentic document echoing the war and revealing the vital sensations of an actual flesh and blood personality, as straight fiction the book lacks certain enduring qualities and the inventive force that would serve to rank it as an important literary achievement.

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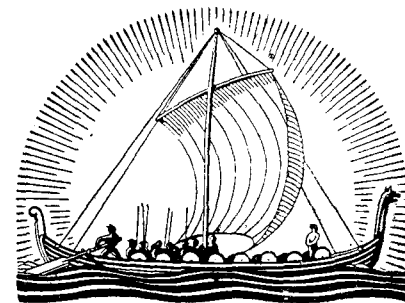
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