I

"DARKWATER" AND "THE UPWARD PATH"

Pessimism and optimism are already suggested, perchance, if you have read the caption. "Darkwater" is a recent book by W. E. B. Du Bois, published by Harcourt, Brace and Howe, New York City; "The Upward Path" is a reader for colored children, published by the same house, compiled by Myron T. Pritchard and Mary White Ovington, and made up of sixty-five pieces of poetry and prose by Negro authors. The purpose of this article is to describe and discuss these two books, products of the Negro pen, and in connection with them two others: "The Voice of the Negro," by Robert T. Kerlin (E. P. Dutton & Co.), and "The Negro Faces America," by Herbert J. Seligmann (Harper & Brothers), the work of white men, but dealing quite frankly and directly with the Negro.

Differences, known as "race differences," have provoked strife and enmity among the sons of men from time immemorial, and even in our own good day, with the world full of light and with good will exalted by civilization, peace and justice are too often dishonored where races meet or languages differ. "Darkwater," by Du Bois, is partly an autobiography, partly a sane study of facts, and partly the rhapsody of a seer. "The Upward Path" is a collection of stories, essays, and poems, many of high quality, that almost any child or young-hearted person of older years will read with pleasure and smiles. "The Voice of the Negro" is a comprehensive compilation of sentences, paragraphs, and pages from Negro newspapers and magazines, setting forth what the American Negro thinks and what he says when he is speaking and writing for his own people. "The Negro Faces America" is a white man's judicial attempt to discuss such topics as these: "Why Race Riots?" "Certain Effects of War," "The Negro in Industry," "The American Congo," "The New Negro."

To many persons it will be a matter of surprise to learn that in this country the Negroes publish a considerable number of periodicals, not to mention books and pamphlets. There are two dailies, a dozen magazines, and nearly three hundred weeklies. Little Rock has four Negro newspapers, Louisville five, Indianapolis six, New York City ten, the state of Georgia nine, Mississippi nineteen, Illinois eleven, and California seven. Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and other great centers of population and influence have their varying quotas.

During the four months immediately succeeding the race riots in Washington City the Afro-American press was closely scanned by Dr. Robert T. Kerlin, who therefrom compiled "The Voice of the Negro," a volume of 188 pages. The Negro has recently discovered the power of his press, and in it may be found his voice—his mind and his heart. It has seemed to Dr. Kerlin that in the interest of national unity and harmony it is essential that white Americans should know what black Americans think and feel on matters of national importance, as well as what are their grievances, their aspirations, and their demands. In this book the author has certainly succeeded in giving


clearly a true cross-section of the Afro-American mind.

Dr. Kerlin is a student of maturity and cosmopolitan training. Born in Missouri in 1866, he received his first academic degree from Central College, Fayette, Mo. Later he studied at Johns Hopkins, Chicago, Harvard, and Yale, receiving the Ph. D. degree from Yale in 1906. He was a chaplain of Missouri volunteers in the Spanish-American War, and has been a teacher in a half-dozen institutions of higher learning. From 1905 to 1910 he was associate editor of *The Arena*. In 1919 he was an instructor in the A. E. F. University, Beaune, France. Since 1910 he has been professor of English in the Virginia Military Institute, at Lexington.

Regarding race riots and lynchings, the voice of the Negro is not essentially different from the voice of sane white men. It is when such topics as the Negro's reactions to the World War, his grievances and demands, and his attitude towards labor unionism and Bolshevism are discussed that our average citizen is specially interested, because on these topics he lacks definite information.

The valor and sacrifice of the American Negro in the World War are naturally exalted, while certain real or fancied discriminations during the war and following the war are just as naturally complained of. As to valor and sacrifice, the following concise summary was widely published:

"Are you aware that a Negro was the first American to receive the Croix de Guerre with palm and gold star? That three Negro regiments and several battalions and companies were cited and had their flags decorated for valorous conduct? That Negroes placed for the first time in artillery and signal corps units won high distinction? That Negroes in the ear\'v part of the war held 20 per cent of all territory assigned to Americans? That the Negro army was the healthiest on record? That out of 45,000 Negroes engaged in battle only 9 were taken prisoners? Negroes fought to the death rather than submit to captivity. That the Negroes established a record for continuous service in the trenches—191 days?"

As to discriminations, the press asserted widely and often bitterly that discriminations during the war have been continued since the war in the customary lynchings, in the clever devices of legal disfranchisement, in handicaps to education, and in constant reminders of racial, social, and industrial inferiority. The fact that no American Negro troops were entered in the great peace parade in Paris on July 14, 1919, was attributed to race prejudice; and much disappointment was later voiced regarding what was hoped for but not realized at the hands of the peace conference and the League of Nations.

In 1919 the tercentenary of Negro life in North America was widely celebrated. In the various programs the note of pride—pride in progress—was in the major key, but blended with it was also an insistent minor strain of suffering—of suffering because of souls and bodies wronged. Lucian B. Watkins, in the following lines, hardly strikes the chord of pride at all:

"Three hundred years! Lord, these are they, These toil-worn souls brief-sweet with play, These dream-charmed people, vision-eyed, Whose life-free goal is yet denied. But these have heard the heavens say, In answer to the prayer they pray, 'No Christly cause can perish—nay, Though men be martyred, crucified— Three hundred years!'"

"The indisposition of the Negro to join labor unions, to participate in strikes, or in any way to foment trouble is frequently commented upon in his papers." On the other hand, some of the Negro papers and magazines have not denied a measure of friendliness toward Bolshevism and I. W. W. propaganda. But in defense this is their answer:

"If there is the least danger of the Negro race being influenced by revolutionary propaganda against the existing institutions of the country, what is the best preventive measure that could be taken? The answer is so easy that no one really needs to be told. Stop the lynchings and burnings of Negroes! Prove that the law was made for them as well as for other citizens, that the government will protect the black in the most elementary rights as well as the white."

And lest any one should jump to the conclusion that only black Americans have been infected with Bolshevist germs, let it be said that not all white Americans have proved immune. And white men have declared that certain "white" periodicals in this country are dangerously Bolshevistic.
Most Negro editors, according to Dr. Kerlin’s showing, while admitting that efforts are being made to convert our Negro citizens (along with others) to Bolshevism, make the admission in order to warn their readers against such propaganda. It is also asserted that the most influential leaders of the colored churches are consistent in warning against dangerous incendiarisms. The following exhortation, by Bishop George C. Clement, is cited as typical:

“I would urge all members of my race to obey the law and keep clear of Bolshevism and all incendiary suggestions. We must demand protection of life and property by the government, which is guaranteed as the surest antidote for Bolshevism. I believe my people should defend their homes and families. Certainly this crisis calls for great moderation and self-control. We still have faith in true democracy and expect a righteous race adjustment.”

This address was delivered at Knoxville, Tennessee, on September 9, 1919. It indicates some of the things that the Negro is claiming at the hands of society: Protection of life and property, protection of home and family, and a race adjustment upon the basis of righteousness.

More specifically, as Dr. Kerlin shows, the Negro wants education, he wants the ballot, he wants participation in government—representation on school boards, in city councils, on the police force, and on the boards of various public institutions. “Social equality,” as the term is usually employed, is not desired by the majority of the Negroes of America, according to their own press, though here and there it is advocated by small groups. What they do not want is that sort of discrimination that humiliates them and charges them continually with inferiority and criminal propensities.

In “The Negro Faces America,” the author, Seligmann, intimates that we, the people of the United States, or some of us, while we have good vision ordinarily and can see straight into most questions, have obviously a blind spot when color attaches itself to a race question. We may be able to see clearly and completely regarding the French, the Germans, the Turks, the Hindoos, and even regarding the Chinese in China, the Japanese in Japan, and the Negroes in Africa; but when race and color get together in America, in free, liberty-loving, humanity-defending America, it is altogether a different matter.

Mr. Seligmann was formerly a member of the editorial staffs of the New York Evening Post and the New Republic. In seeking an answer to America’s great race problems, he has gathered his information at first hand—in Chicago, soon after the riots there; in Washington, following the two-day disgrace; in Omaha, and in other localities. The economic phases of the situation are emphasized and the treatment as a whole is such as to make all Americans think—all who care to think about things of vital concern.

“Darkwater” is a classic of its kind—poetical, passionate, rebellious, radical, pessimistic, yet in many ways so tragically true as to make an enemy pause, and in many parts so sane as to give the philanthropist hope. If its author were not known to be a Negro, white people would read it as a sort of wonder book—a revelation in imagination and in the power of the English language.

Du Bois, in his ability to use the English tongue effectively, has few equals and perhaps no master. The borderland of his rhapsodies lies close to the highway of his reasonings, but one can usually tell which is which without difficulty. If “Darkwater” were his first book, or likely to be his last, there would be more need to seek adjectives of description; but as it is, he who will may read, and so be qualified, perhaps, to judge for himself.

No part of “Darkwater” is more interesting than the first part, “Credo”:

“I believe in God” . . .
“I believe in the Negro Race” . . .
“I believe in Service” . . .
“I believe in the Devil and his angels” . . .
“I believe in the Prince of Peace.”
“I believe in Liberty for all men” . . .
“I believe in the Training of Children, black even as white” . . .
“I believe in Patience” . . .

And yet, in spite of this profession, the reader of “Darkwater” constantly feels that the writer finds patience a hard faith. For Du Bois resents bitterly the humiliations put upon his race, and in his demands he perhaps
asks for too much too quickly. He perhaps does not acknowledge enough the wonderful upward steps his race has taken in this country in fifty years. He perhaps is not duly optimistic over the fact that in America the whites have been losers and the blacks gainers. If he could put his patience faith somewhat more into practice, the gains to all would probably be enhanced or at least made more secure. Radical blacks are almost as dangerous as radical whites.

But in spite of Du Bois's radicalism, his rebelliousness, and his pessimism, one cannot but admire his vision and revel in his riot of rainbows, thunderstorms, and wind melodies. "The Princess of the Hither Isles," following his chapter on "The Hands of Ethiopia," is a marvelous allegory, even if one cannot tell what it means; and the poem, "The Prayers of God," following the chapter "On Beauty and Death," is like the cry of a bound but writhing and raging Titan. In certain parts of the book, for example, in Chapter VI, "Of the Ruling of Men," the author reveals his power as a sane and constructive sociologist.

"Darkwater" must be read to be appreciated. Even then it will probably not be understood. And unless the reader is quite sane, mature in experience, seasoned with at least a little suffering, and remarkably judicial in spirit and habit, it will most probably be misunderstood.

And herein we have perhaps discovered the most fateful divergence of tendencies, comparing "Darkwater" with "The Upward Path." The latter is not only likely to be understood, it is also not likely to be misunderstood. Possibly the comparison might be made more forceful and also more classical by a reference to the old fable of the wind and the sun.

In most of the sixty-five pieces that make up the sunshine book, the average reader would hardly bother to ask the question, "Was the writer white or black?" And if some meddler should volunteer, "That piece was written by a nigger," the same average reader would probably say, "I don't care if it was," and read on. And it is only fair to say that two of the selections in "The Upward Path" are from the pen of Du Bois. In charming style he writes of "My First School," and with fine historical balance he tells the thrilling story of "Hayti and Toussaint L'Ouverture."

Other well known writers who were laid under tribute for "The Upward Path" are Paul Laurence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Frederick Douglass. Others less famous, but hardly less worthy of fame, are James Weldon Johnson, Matthew A. Henson, Lillian B. Witten, and William Henry Sheppard. Johnson contributes four pieces, among them a masterpiece, "Behind a Georgia Mule." Henson writes of "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole." Miss Witten tells of "Co-operation and the Latin Class" and "The Knighting of Donald." Sheppard describes "Animal Life in the Congo" and "A Great Kingdom in the Congo."

Sheppard, whose address some years ago at the University of Virginia was listened to with much interest by the reviewer, is a native of Virginia, born at Waynesboro in 1865, who has done a notable work as a missionary in Africa. He is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Booker T. Washington was also a native of Virginia, as is also John W. Cromwell, who contributes the interesting history of Paul Cuffe. Cromwell was born in Portsmouth in 1846, and is a lawyer and writer of prominence. Paul Cuffe was a Negro merchant and philanthropist of Revolutionary days.

Some years ago I heard Dr. Charles W. Kent, in one of his lectures at the University of Virginia, say that he believed it not only fair but also desirable to put into our school readers at least a few pieces about Negroes—such pieces as will let white children know that Negroes are human beings and that they may also be heroes and heroines. It seems to me that "The Upward Path" will offer a fine opportunity to those teachers and textbook-makers who may entertain similar convictions.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? What is the solution of the race problem in the United States of North America? It is the same as the solution anywhere else and everywhere else in the world: it is the Golden Rule. This means a square deal. It means simple justice.

But a square deal is square on both sides; and justice is justice only when right and duty on one side balance right and duty on
the other. Truth and old-fashioned honesty, not to say chivalry and honor, will often help very much in the search after justice and right.

It might be well for the Negro in this country to remember that he has gained racially and socially while the white man has lost. It might be well for the white man to remember that the Negro did not come to this country upon his own initiative—he came at the “urgent invitation” of the white man. It might be well for the Negro to remember that he is in the majority, so far as his desire for a really square deal is concerned: most white men as well as most black men want him to have that. It might be well for the white man to remember that the large majority of cases of blood-mixing in this country are not chargeable to the Negro, but to the white man. In short, if we are in danger of “social equality” the white men of this country have the chief cause and the chief cure in their own hands—without any resort to force or violence.

This permits one to say a word about a recent attempt to organize another Ku-Klux Klan. Such a move at this time is almost certain to result in misfortune rather than in good fortune. Such an organization is almost certain to exert its activities not on the side of law and order, but rather in opposition to them. Prejudice and passion are almost certain to direct it rather than justice and fair-mindedness. To be sure, if the aim of our civilization be to exterminate the Negro—or to exterminate somebody—then a revival of the Ku-Klux and similar agencies may serve the purpose. It is easy enough to stir up war and massacre. But what is all this talk we have recently heard about a war for humanity? Or is it that Negroes are not human, and that human beings have no humanity toward lower animals? Yes, a war of extermination is always possible, easily possible, where race prejudice has its perfect work.

But before any such program is started it may be well to ask where it would stop. Are the majority of white men in the United States willing to exterminate any people just on the ground of race and color, Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, or Indians? No, they are not. They never have been and they never will be. It will be possible to start another war in this country, but it will never be possible to array all of any race against all of any other race, just because of race. And suppose it were possible? Suppose it were possible to array all the white men of this country and other countries against all non-white men in this country and all other countries, what would be the result? Who can tell? If a large majority in numbers would be any determining factor, the wrong party might be eliminated in the final wind-up. That would be too bad. It would be too bad either way.

And why should it be necessary to talk of such things when there is a more excellent way, and that way so plain and easy? Have we not had enough of the bitter fruits of race prejudice (blindness to justice) in the recent war? This war grew out of race prejudice more than from anything else—more than from all things else.

Several years ago I traveled a considerable distance on the trains to hear an eminent student of sociology lecture on the race question, the race problem, in this country. At one of the stations, as I neared my destination, a dear old lady came into the coach and sat down in the seat with me. In our talk I said:

“I am going to C—to hear Dr. D—lecture on the Negro problem.”

She smiled and then she answered. This was her answer:

“I think they are doing very well. I treat them right and they treat me right.”

And that, I found, was also Dr. D—’s solution.

Can any one find a better way? Can any one find any other way?

Optimism and justice are obviously preferable to pessimism and injustice.

**John W. Wayland**

In 1841 the young woman who taught country school received $2.50 a week. This year the typical teacher in rural schools receives $17.50 for each week she teaches, an increase of 600 per cent. In spite of the increases, however, the average pay for teachers has never risen as high as wages paid to such artisans as blacksmiths, carpenters, and painters.