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"If the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization, for the sake of that element, no money, nor strength, nor circumstance can hurt him; he will survive and play his part.... If you have *man*, black or white is an insignificance. The intellect--that is miraculous! who has it, has the talisman. His skin and bones, though they were the color of night, are transparent, and the everlasting stars shine through with attractive beams."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **The Value of Race Literature**

By Race Literature, we mean ordinarily all the writings emanating from a distinct class--not necessarily race matter; but a general collection of what has been written by the men and women of that Race: History, Biographies, Scientific Treatises, Sermons, Addresses, Novels, Poems, Books of Travel, miscellaneous essays and the contributions to magazines and newspapers.

Literature, according to Webster, is learning: acquaintance with books or letters: the collective body of literary productions, embracing the entire results of knowledge and fancy, preserved in writing, *also the whole body of literature*, productions or writings upon any given subject, or in reference to a particular science, a branch of knowledge, as the Literature of Biblical Customs, the Literature of Chemistry, Etc.

In the light of this definition, many persons may object to the term, Race Literature, questioning seriously the need, doubting if there be any, or indeed whether there can be a Race Literature in a country like ours apart from the general American Literature. Others may question the correctness of the term American Literature, since our civilization in its essential features is a reproduction of all that is most desirable in the civilizations of the Old World. English being the language of

America, they argue in favor of the general term, English Literature.

While I have great respect for the projectors of this theory, yet it is a limited definition; it does not express the idea in terms sufficiently clear.

The conditions which govern the people of African descent in the United States have been and still are, such as create a very marked difference in the limitations, characteristics, aspirations and ambitions of this class of people, in decidedly strong contrast with the more or less powerful races which dominate it.

Laws were enacted denying and restricting their mental development in such pursuits, which engendered servility and begot ox-like endurance; and though statutes were carefully, painstakingly prepared by the most advanced and learned American jurists to perpetuate ignorance, yet they were powerless to keep all the race out from the

Temple of Learning. Many though in chains mastered the common rudiments and others possessing talent of higher order--like the gifted Phyllis Wheatley, who dared to express her meditations in poetic elegance which won recognition in England and America, from persons distinguished in letters and statesmanship--dared to seek the sources of knowledge and wield a pen.

While oppressive legislation, aided by grossly inhuman customs, successfully retarded all general efforts toward improvement, the race suffered physically and mentally under a great wrong, an appalling evil, in contrast with which the religious caste prejudice of India appears as a glimmering torch to a vast consuming flame.

The prejudice of color! Not condition, not character, not capacity for artistic development, not the possibility of emerging from savagery into Christianity, not these, but the "Prejudice of Color." Washington Irving's *Life of Columbus* contains a translation from the contemporaries of Las Casas, in which this prejudice is plainly evident. Since our reception on this continent, men have cried out against this inhuman prejudice; granting that, a man may improve his condition, accumulate wealth, become wise and upright, merciful and just as an infidel or Christian, but they despair because he can not change his color, as if it were possible for the victim to change his organic structure, and impossible for the oppressor to change his wicked heart.

But all this impious wrong has made a Race Literature a possibility, even a necessity to dissipate the odium conjured up by the term "colored" persons, not originally perhaps designed to humiliate, but unfortunately still used to express not only an inferior order, but to accentuate and call unfavorable attention to the most ineradicable difference between the races.

So well was this understood and deplored by liberal minded men, regardless of affiliation, that the editor of "Freedom's Journal," published in New York City in 1827. The first paper published in this country by Americans of African descent, calls special attention to this prejudice by quoting from the great Clarkson, where he speaks of a master not only looking with disdain upon a slave's features, but hating his very color.

The effect of this unchristian disposition was like the merciless scalpel about the very heart of the people, a sword of Damocles, at all times hanging above and threatening all that makes life worth living. Why they should not develop and transmit stealthy, vicious and barbaric natures under such conditions, is a question that able metaphysicians, ethnologists and scientists will, most probably in the future, investigate with a view of solving what to-day is considered in all quarters a profound mystery, the Negro's many-sided, happy, hopeful enduring character.

Future investigations may lead to the discovery of what to-day seems lacking, what has deformed the manhood and womanhood in the Negro. What is bright, hopeful and encouraging is in reality the source of an original school of race literature, of racial psychology, of potent possibilities, an amalgam needed for this great American race of the future.

Dr. Dvorak claims this for the original Negro melodies of the South as every student of music is well aware. On this subject he says, "I am now satisfied that the future music of this continent must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States.

"When I first came here, I was impressed with this idea, and it has developed into a settled conviction. The beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. *They are American, they are the folk songs of America, and our composers must turn to them* . All of the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people.

"Beethoven's most charming *scherzo* is based upon what might now be considered a skilfully handled Negro melody. I have myself gone to the simple half-forgotten tunes of the Bohemian peasants for hints in my most serious work. Only in this way can a musician express the true sentiment of a people. He gets into touch with common humanity of the country.

" *In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate and melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay, gracious, or what you will. It is music that suits itself to any work or any purpose. There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot find a thematic source here* ."

When the literature of our race is developed, it will of necessity be different in all essential points of greatness, true heroism and real Christianity from what we may at the present time, for convenience, call American Literature. When some master

hand writes the stories as Dr. Dvorak has caught the melodies when, amid the hearts of the people, there shall live a George Eliott, moving this human world by the simple portrayal of the scenes of our ordinary existence; or when the pure, ennobling touch of a black Hannah More shall rightly interpret our unappreciated contribution to Christianity and make it into universal literature, such writers will attain and hold imperishable fame.

The novelists most read at the present time in this country find a remunerative source for their doubtful literary productions based upon the wrongly interpreted and too often grossly exaggerated frailties. This is patent to all intelligent people. The Negro need not envy such reputation, nor feel lost at not revelling in its ill-gotten wealth or

repute. We are the only people most distinctive from those who have civilized and governed this country, who have become typical Americans, and we rank next to the Indians in originality of soil, and yet remain a distinct people.

In this connection, Joseph Wilson, in the Black Phalanx says:

"The Negro race is the only race that has ever come in contact with the European race that has proved itself able to withstand its atrocities and oppression. All others like the Indians whom they could not make subservient to their use they have destroyed."

Prof. Sampson in his "Mixed Races" says, "The American Negro is a new race, and is not the direct descent of any people that has ever flourished."

On this supposition, and relying upon finely developed, native imaginative powers, and humane tendencies, I base my expectation that our Race Literature when developed will not only compare favorably with many, but will stand out pre-eminent, not only in the limited history of colored people, but in the broader field of universal literature.

Though Race Literature be founded upon the traditionary history of a people yet its fullest and largest development ought not to be circumscribed by the narrow limits of race or creed for the simple reason that literature in its loftiest development reaches out to the utmost limits of soul enlargement and outstrips all earthly limitations. Our history and individuality as a people, not only provides material for masterly treatment; but would seem to make a Race Literature a necessity as an outlet for the unnaturally suppressed inner lives which our people have been compelled to lead.

The literature of any people of varied nationality who have won a place in the literature of the world, presents certain cardinal points. French literature for instance, is said to be "not the wisest, not the weightiest, not certainly the purest and loftiest, but by odds the most brilliant and the most interesting literature in the world."

Ours, when brought out, and we must admit in reverence to truth that, as yet, we have done nothing distinctive, but may when we have built upon our own individuality, win a place by the simplicity of the story, thrown into strong relief by the multiplicity of its dramatic situations; the spirit of romance, and even tragedy, shadowy and as yet ill-defined, but from which our race on this continent can never be disassociated.

When the foundations of such a literature shall have been properly laid, the benefit to be derived will be at once apparent. There will be a revelation to our people, and it will enlarge our scope, make us better known wherever real lasting culture exists, will undermine and utterly drive out the traditional Negro in dialect,--the subordinate, the servant as the type representing a race whose numbers are now far into the

millions. It would suggest to the world the wrong and contempt with which the lion viewed the picture that the hunter and famous painter besides, had drawn of the King of the Forest.

As a matter of history the only high-type Negro that has been put before the American people by a famous writer, is the character Dred founded upon the deeds of Nat Turner, in Mrs. Stowe's novel.

Except the characters sketched by the writers of folk-lore, I know of none more representative of the spirit of the writers of to-day, wherein is infiltrated in the public mind that false sense of the Negro's meaning of inalienable rights, so far as actual practice is concerned, than is found in a story in "Harper's Magazine" some years ago. Here a pathetic picture is drawn of a character generally known as the typical "Darkey."

The man, old and decrepit, had labored through long years to pay for an humble cabin and garden patch; in fact, he had paid double and treble the original price, but dashing "Marse Wilyum" quieted his own conscience by believing, so the writer claimed, that the old Darkey should be left free to pay him all he felt the cabin was worth to him. The old man looked up to him, trusted him implicitly, and when he found at last he had been deceived, the moment he acknowledged to himself that "Marse Wilyum" had cheated him, a dejected listlessness settled upon him, an expression weak and vacant came in his dull eyes and hung around his capacious but characterless mouth, an exasperatingly meek smile trembled upon his features, and casting a helpless look around the cabin that he thought his own, nay, knew it was, with dragging steps he left the place! "Why did you not stand out for your rights?" a sympathizing friend questioned some years afterwards. To this the writer makes the old man say:

"Wid white folks dat's de way, but wid niggers its dif'unt."

Here the reader is left to infer whatever his or her predilection will incline to accept, as to the meaning of the old man's words. The most general view is that the old man had no manhood, not the sense, nothi kicking at real or imaginary wrongs, which in his estimation makes the superior clan. In a word, there was nothing within the old man's range of understanding to make him feel his inalienable rights.

We know the true analysis of the old man's words was that faith, once destroyed, can never be regained, and the blow to his faith in the individual and the wound to his honest esteem so overwhelming, rendered it out of the question to engage further with a fallen idol.

With one sweep of mind he had seen the utter futility of even hoping for justice from a people who would take advantage of an aged honest man. That is the point, and this reveals neglected subject for analytical writers to dissect in the interest of truth the real meaning of the so-called cowardice, self-negation and lack of responsibility so freely referred to by those in positions calculated to make lasting impressions

on the public, that by custom scoffs at the meaning introduced in Mrs. Stowe's burning words, when she repeated a question before answering: --"What can any individual do?" "There is one thing every individual can do. They can see to it that they feel right--an atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race."

Think of the moral status of the Negro, that Mr. Ridpath in his history degrades before the world. Consider the political outline of the Negro, sketched with extreme care in "Bryce's Commonwealth," and the diatribes of Mr. Froude. From these, turn to the play, where impressions are made upon a heterogeneous assemblage--Mark Twain's "Pudd'n Head Wilson," which Beaumont Fletcher claims as "among the very best of those productions which gives us hope for a distinctive American drama."

In this story we have education and fair environment attended by the most deplorable results, an educated octoroon is made out to be a most despicable, cowardly villain. "The one compensation for all this," my friend, Professor Greener wittily remarks, "is that the white nigger in the story though actually a pure white man, is indescribably worse in all his characteristics than the real nigger, using the vernacular of the play, was ever known to be, and just here Mark Twain unconsciously avenges the Negro while trying his best to disparage him."

In "Imperative Duty," Mr. Howells, laboriously establishes for certain minds, the belief that the Negro possesses an Othello like charm in his ignorance which education and refinement destroys, or at best makes repulsive.

In explaining why Dr. Olney loves Rhoda, whose training was imparted by good taste, refined by wealth, and polished by foreign travel, he says: "It was the elder world, the beauty of antiquity which appealed to him in the luster and sparkle of this girl, and *the remote taint* of her servile and savage origin, *gave her a fascination* which refuses to let itself be put in words, it was the grace of a limp, the occult, indefinable, loveliness of deformity, but transcending these by its allurements, in indefinite degree, and going for the reason of its effect deep into the mysterious places of being, where the spirit and animal meet and part in us.

"The mood was of his emotional nature alone, it sought and could have won no justification from the moral sense which indeed it simply submerged, and blotted out for all time."

All this tergiversation and labored explanation of how a white man came to love a girl with a remote tingle of Negro blood! But he must have recourse to this tortuous jugglery of words because one of his characters in the story had taken pains to assert, "That so far as society in the society sense is concerned we have frankly simplified the matter,

and no more consort with the Negroes than we do with lower animals, so that one would be quite as likely to meet a cow or a horse in an American drawing-room, as a person of color." This is the height of elightenment! and from Dean Howells too, litterateur, diplomat, journalist, altruist!

Art, goodness, and beauty are assaulted in order to stimulate or apologize for prejudice against the educated Negro!

In Dr. Huguet, we have as a type a man pitifully trying to be self-conscious, struggling to feel within himself, what prejudice and custom demand that he feel.

In "A Question of Color" the type is a man of splendid English training, that of an English gentleman, surrounded from his birth by wealth, and accepted in the most polished society, married to a white girl, who sells herself for money, and after the ceremony like an angelic Sunday-school child, shudders and admits the truth, that she can never forget that he is a Negro, and he is cad enough to say, so says the writer that he will say his prayers at her feet night and morning notwithstanding!

We all know, no man, negro or other, ever enacted such a part; it is wholly inconsistent with anything short of a natural-born idiot! And yet a reputable house offers this trash to the public, but thanks to a sensible public, it has been received with jeers, And so stuff like this comes apace, influencing the reading-world, not indeed thinkers and scholars; but the indiscriminate reading-world, upon whom rests, unfortunately, the bulk of senseless prejudice.

Conan Doyle, like Howells, also pays his thoughtful attention to the educated negro--making him in this case more bloodthirsty and treacherous and savage than the Seminole. One more, and these are mentioned only to show the kind of types of Negro characters eminent writers have taken exceeding care to place before the world as representing us.

In the "Condition of Women in the United States," Mme. Blanc, in a volume of 285 pages, devotes less than 100 words to negro women; after telling ironically of a "Black Damsel" in New Orleans engaged in teaching Latin, she describes her attire, the arrangement of her hair, and concludes, "I also saw a class of little Negro girls with faces like monkeys studying Greek, and the disgust expressed by their former masters seemed quite justified."

Her knowledge of history is as imperfect so far as veracity goes, as her avowal in the same book of her freedom from prejudice against the Negro. The "little girls" must have been over thirty years old to have had any former masters even at their birth! And all this is the outcome in the nineteenth century of the highest expressions of Anglo-Saxon acumen, criticism and understanding of the powers of Negroes of America!

The point of all this, is the indubitable evidence of the need of thoughtful, well-defined and intelligently placed efforts on our part, to serve as counter-irritants against all such writing that shall stand, having as an aim the supplying of influential and accurate information, on all subjects relating to the Negro and his environments, to inform the American mind at least, for literary purposes.

We cannot afford any more than any other people to be indifferent to the fact, that the surest road to real fame is through literature. Who is so well known and appreciated by the cultured minds as Dumas of France, and Pushkin of Russia? I need not say to this thoughtful and intelligent gathering that, any people without a literature is valued lightly the world round. Who knows or can judge of our intrinsic worth without actual evidence of our breadth of mind, our boundless humanity. Appearing well and weighted with many degrees of titles, will not raise us in our own estimation while color is the white elephant in America. Yet, America is but a patch on the universe: if she ever produces a race out of her cosmopolitan population, that can look beyond mere money-getting to more permanent qualities of true greatness as a nation, it will call this age her unbalanced stage.

No one thinks of mere color when looking upon the Chinese, but the dignified character of the literature of his race, and he for monotony of expression, color and undesirable individual habits is far inferior in these points to the ever-varying American Negro. So our people must awaken to the fact, that our task is a conquest for a place for ourselves, and is a legitimate ground for action for us, if we shall resolve to conquer it.

While we of to-day view with increasing dissatisfaction the trend of the literary productions of this country, concerning us, yet are we standing squarely on the foundation laid for us by our immediate predecessors?

This is the question I would bring to your minds. Are we adding to the structure planned for us by our pioneers? Do we know our dwelling and those who under many hardships, at least, gathered the material for its upbuilding? Knowing them do we honor--do we love them--what have they done that we should love? Your own Emerson says--"To judge the production of a people you must transplant the spirit of the times in which they lived."

In the ten volumes of American Literature edited by H. L. Stoddard only Phyllis Wheatley and George W. Williams find a place. This does not show that we have done nothing in literature; far from it, but it does show that we have done nothing so brilliant, so effective, so startling as to attract the attention of these editors. Now it is a fact that thoughtful, scholarly white people do not look for literature in its highest sense, from us any more than they look for high scholarship, profound and critical learning on any one point, nor for any eminent

judicial acumen or profound insight into causes and effects.

These are properly regarded as the results only of matured intellectual growth or abundant leisure and opportunity, when united with exceptional talents, and this is the world's view and it is in the main a correct one. Even the instances of precocious geniuses and the rare examples of extraordinary talent appearing from humble and unpromising parentage and unfortuitous surroundings, are always recognized as brilliant, sporadic cases, exceptions.

Consequently our success in Race Literature will be looked upon with curiosity and only a series of projected enterprises in various directions--history, poetry, novel writing, speeches, orations, forensic effort, sermons, and so on, will have the result of gaining for us recognition.

You recall Poteghine's remark in Turgenev's novel of "Smoke." How well it applies to us.

"For heaven's sake do not spread the idea in Russia that we can achieve success without preparation. No, if your brow be seven spans in width *study*, begin with the alphabet or *else remain quiet* and say nothing. Oh! it excites me to think of these things."

Dr. Blyden's essay, Dr. Crummell's sermons and addresses, and Professor Greener's orations, all are high specimens of sustained English, good enough for any one to read, and able to bear critical examination, and reflect the highest credit on the race.

Your good city of Boston deserves well for having given us our first real historian, William C. Nell--his history of "The colored Patriots of the Revolution"--not sufficiently read nowadays or appreciated by the present generation; a scholarly, able, accurate book, second to none written by any other colored man.

William Wells Brown's "Black Man" was worthy tribute in its day, the precursor of more elaborate books, and should be carefully studied now; his "Sights and Scenes Abroad" was probably the first book of travel written by an American Negro. The same is doubtless true of his novel, "Clotilde." The "Anglo-African" magazine published in New York City in 1859, is adjudged by competent authority to be the highest, best, most scholarly written of all the literature published by us in fifty years.

We have but to read the graphic descriptions and eloquent passages in the first edition of the "Life and Times" of Frederick Douglass to see the high literary qualities of which the race is capable. "Light and Truth," a valuable volume published many years ago; Dr. Perry's "Cushite!" "Bond and Free, or Under the Yoke," by John S. Ladue; "The Life of William Lloyd Garrison," by Archibald Grimke; Joseph Wilson's "Black Phalanx;" and "Men of Mark," by Rev. W. J. Simmons; "Noted Women," by Dr. Scroggs; "The Negro Press and Its Editors," by I. Garland Penn; "Paul Dunbar's Dialect Poems," which

have lately received high praise from the Hoosier Poet, James Whitcomb Reilly, "Johnson's School History;" "From a Virginia Cabin to the Capitol," by Hon. J. M. Langston; "Iola Leroy," By Mrs. F. E. W. Harper; "Music and Some Highly Musical People," by James M. Trotter, are specimen books within easy reach of the public, that will increase in interest with time.

Professor R. T. Greener as a metaphysician, logician, orator, and prize essayist, holds an undisputed position in the annals of our literature second to none. His defense of the Negro in the "National Quarterly Review," 1880, in reply to Mr. Parton's strictures, has been an arsenal from which many have since supplied their armor. It was quoted extensively in this country and England.

And it is not generally known that one of the most valuable contributions to Race Literature, has appeared in the form of a scientific treatise on "Incandescent Lighting" pulished by Van Nostrand of New York, and thus another tribute is laid to Boston's credit by Lewis H. Latimer.

In the ecclesiastical line we have besides those already mentioned, the writings of the learned Dr. Pennington, Bishops Payne and Tanner of the A.M.E. Church.

The poems, songs and addresses by our veteran literary women F. E. W. Harper, Charlotte Forten Grimke, H. Cordelia Ray, Gertrude Mossell, "Clarence and Corinne," "The Hazelton Family" by Mrs. G. E. Johnson, and "Appointed" by W. H. Stowers, and W. H. Anderson are a few of the publications of similar subjects; all should be read and placed in our libraries, as first beginnings it is true, but they compare favorably with similar work of the most advanced people.

Our journalism has accomplished more than can now be estimated; in fact not until careful biographers make special studies drawn from the lives of the pioneer journalists, shall we or those contemporary with them ever know the actual meed of good work accomplished by them under almost insurmountable difficulties.

Beginning with the editors of the first newspapers published in this country by colored men, we New Yorkers take pride in the fact that Messrs. Cornish and Russwurm of "Freedom's Journal," New York City, 1827, edited the first paper in this country devoted to the upbuilding of the Negro. Philip A. Bell of the "Weekly Advocate," 1837, named by contemporaries "the Nestor of African American journalists." The gifted Dr. James McCune Smith was associated with him. The "Weekly Advocate" later became the "Colored American." And in 1839, on Mr. Bell's retirement Dr. Charles Ray assumed the editorial chair continued until 1842, making an enviable record for zeal on all matters of race interest. These men were in very truth the Pioneers of Race Journalism.

Their lives and record should be zealously guarded for the future use

of our children, for they familiarized the public with the idea of the Negro owning and doing the brain work of a newspaper. The people of other sections became active in establishing journals, which did good work all along the line. Even the superficial mind must accept the modest claim that "These journals proved to a powerful lever in diverting public opinion, public sympathy, and public support towards the liberation of the slave."

Papers were edited by such men as Dr. H. H. Garnet, David Ruggles, W. A. Hodges, and T. Van Rensselaer, of the "Ram's Horn." In 1847 our beloved and lofty minded Frederick Douglass edited his own paper "The North Star," in the City of Rochester, where his mortal remains now peacefully rest. His paper was noted for its high class matter--and it had the efering tribute. "Samuel Ringold Ward," the sage of Anacostia once said to the writer, "was one of the smartest men I ever knew if not the smartest."

The prevailing sentiment at that time was sympathy for the ambitious Negro. At a most opportune time, "The Anglo African," the finest effort in the way of a magazine by the race up to that time, was established in January of 1859 in New York City, with Thomas Hamilton as editor and proprietor. The columns were opened to the most experienced writers of the

day. Martin R. Delaney contributed many important papers on astronomy, among which was one on "Comets," another on "The Attraction of the Planets." George B. Vashon wrote "The Successive Advances of Astronomy," James McCune Smith wrote his comments "On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia" and his "German Invasion"--every number contained gems that to-day are beyond price. In these pages also appeared "Afric-American Picture Gallery," by "Ethiophe" --Wm. J. Wilson; Robert Gordon's "Personality of the First Cause;" Dr. Pennington on "The Self-Redeeming Power of the Colored Races of the World;" Dr. Blyden on "The Slave Traffic;" and on the current questions of the day, such brave minds as Frederick Douglass, William C. Nell, John Mercer Langston, Theodore Holly, J. Sella Martin, Frances Ellen Watkins, Jane Rustic, Sarah M. Douglass, and Grace A. Mapps! What a galaxy! The result was a genuine race newspaper, one that had the courage to eliminate everything of personal interest, and battle for the rights of the whole people, and while its history, like many other laudable enterprises, may be little known beyond the journalistic fraternity, to such men as Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, the paper and staff were well known and appreciated. In those days, the Negro in literature was looked upon as a prodigy; he was encouraged in many ways by white people particularly, as he was useful in serving the cause of philanthropic agitators for the liberation of the slave. The earnest, upright character and thoughtful minds of the early pioneers acted as a standing

argument in favor of the cause for which the abolitionists were then bending every nerve when the slave was liberated and the Civil War brought to a close. The spirit of Mr. Lincoln's interview with a committee of colored citizens of the District of Columbia, in August, 1862, as told by William Wells Brown, in which Mr. Lincoln said, "But for your people among us, there would be no war," reacted upon the public, and from that time until the present a vicious oppression, under the name of natural prejudice, has succeeded immeasurably in retarding our progress.

As a matter of history we have nothing to compare with weekly publications of 25 or 30 years ago. The unequal contest waged between Negro journals and their white contemporaries is lost sight of by the people, as only those connected with various publications are aware of the condition and difficulties surrounding the managements of such journals.

Our struggling journalists not only find themselves on the losing side, but as if to add to their thankless labor, they oftentimes receive the contemptuous regard of the people who should enthusiastically rally to their support. The journalist is spurred with the common sense idea that every enterprise undertaken and carried on by members of the race is making a point in history for that entire race, and the historians of the future will not stop to consider our discontented and sentimental whys and wherefores, when they critically examine our race enterprises; but they will simply record their estimate of what the men and women journalists of to-day not only represented, but actually accomplished.

It is so often claimed that colored newspapers do not amount to anything. People even who boast of superior attainments, voice such sentiments with the most ill-paced indifference; the most discreditable phase of race disloyalty imaginable--one that future historians will have no alternative but to censure.

If our newspapers and magazines do not amount to anything, it is because our people do not demand anything of better quality from their own. It is because they strain their purses supporting those white papers that are and always will be independent of any income derived from us. Our contributions to such journals are spasmodic and uncertain, like fluctuating stocks, and are but an excess of surplus. It is hard for the bulk of our people to see this; it is even hard to prove to them that in supporting such journals, published by the dominant class, we often pay for what are not only vehicles of insult to our manhood and womanhood, but we assist in propagating or supporting false impressions of ourselves or our less fortunate brothers.

Our journalistic leader is unquestionably T. Thomas Fortune, Editor of "The New York Age," and a regular contributor of signed articles to the "New York Sun," one of the oldest and ablest daily

newspapers in the United States, noted on two continents for its rare excellence.

For many years Mr. Fortune has given his best efforts to the cause of race advancement, and the splendid opportunities now opening to him on the great journals of the day, attest the esteem in which he is held by men who create public opinion in this country.

If John E. Bruce, "Bruce-Grit," "John Mitchell, Jr." W. H. A. Moore, Augustus M. Hodge "B Square," were members of any other race, they would be famous the country over. Joe Howard or "Bill Nye" have in reality done no more for their respective clientage than these bright minds and corresponding wits have done for theirs.

T. T. Fortune of "The Age," Ida Wells-Barnet of the "Free Speech," and John Mitchell of the "Richmond Planet," have made a nobler fight than the brilliant Parnell in his championship of Ireland's cause, for the reason that the people for whom he battled, better knew and utilized more the strength obtained only by systematic organization, not so is the case with the constituents of the distinguished journalists I have mentioned.

Depressing as this fact is, it should not deter those who know that Race Literature should be cultivated for the sake of the formation of habits. First efforts are always crude, each succeeding one becomes better or should be so. Each generation by the law of heredity receives the impulse or impression for good or ill from its predecessors, and since this is the law, we must begin to form habits of observation and commence to build a plan for posterity by synthesis, analysis, ourselves aiming

and striving after the the highest, whether we attain it or not. Such are the attempts of our journalists of to-day, and they shall reap if they faint not.

Race Literature does not mean things uttered in praise, thoughtless praise of ourselves, wherein each goose thinks her gosling a swan. We have had too much of this, too much that is crude, rude, pompous, and literary nothings, which ought to have been strangled before they were written much less printed; and this does not only apply to us; for it is safe to say that, only an infinitesimal percentage of the so-called literature filling the book shelves to-day, will survive a half century.

In the words of a distinguished critic, "It is simply amazing" how little of all that is written and printed in these days that makes for literature; how small a part is permanent, how much purely ephemeral, famous to-day on account of judicious advertising, forgotten to-morrow. We should clear away the under-brush of self-deception which makes the novice think because sentences are strung together and ordinary ideas evolved, dilated upon and printed, that such trash is literature." If this is claimed for the more favored class, it should have a tendency with us to encourage our work, even though the results do not appear at once.

It should serve the student by guarding him against the fulsome praise of "great men," "great writers," "great lawyers," "great ministers," who in reality have never done one really great or meritorious thing.

Rather should the student contemplate the success of such as Prof. Dubois who won the traveling fellowship at Harvard on metaphysical studies, and has just received his Ph.D., at the last commencement, on account of his work. For such facts demonstrate that it is the character of the work we do, rather than the quantity of it, which counts for real Race Literature.

Race Literature does mean though the preserving of all the records of a Race, and thus cherishing the materials saving from destruction and obliteration what is good, helpful and stimulating. But for our Race Literature, how will future generations know of the pioneers in Literature, our statesmen, soldiers, divines, musicians, artists, lawyers, critics, and scholars? True culture in Race Literature will enable us to discriminate and not to write hasty thoughts and unjust and ungenerous criticism often of our superiors in knowledge and judgement.

And now comes the question, What part shall we women play in the Race Literature of the future? I shall best answer that question by calling your attention to the glorious part which they have already performed in the columns of the "Woman's Era," edited by Josephine St. P. Ruffin.

Here within the compass of one small journal we have struck out a new line of departure--a journal, a record of Race interests gathered from all parts of the United States, carefully selected, moistened, winnowed and garnered by the ablest intellects of educated colored women, shrinking at no lofty theme, shirking no serious duty, aiming at every possible excellence, and determined to do their part in the future uplifting of the race.

If twenty women, by their concentrated efforts in one literary movement, can meet with such success as has engendered, planned out, and so successfully consummated this convention, what much more glorious results, what wider spread success, what grander diffusion of mental light will not come forth at the bidding of the enlarged hosts of women writers, already called into being by the stimulus of your efforts?

And here let me speak one word for my journalistic sisters who have already entered the broad arena of journalism. Before the "Woman's Era" had come into existence, no one except themselves can appreciate the bitter experience and sore disappointments under which they have at all times been compelled to pursue their chosen vocations.

If their brothers of the press have had their difficulties to contend with, I am here as a sister journalist to state, from the fullness of knowledge, that their task has been an easy one compared with that of

the colored woman in journalism.

Woman's part in Race Literature, as in Race building, is the most important part and has been so in all ages. It is for her to receive impressions and transmit them. All through the most remote epochs she has done her share in literature. When not an active singer like Sappho, she has been the means of producing poets, statesmen, and historians, understandingly as Napoleon's mother worked on Homeric tapestry while bearing the future conqueror of the world.

When living up to her highest development, woman has done much to make lasting history, by her stimulating influence and there can be no greater responsibility than that, and this is the highest privilege granted to her by the Creator of the Universe.

Such are some brief outlines of the vast problem of Race Literature. Never was the outlook for Race Literature brighter. Questions of vast importance to succeeding generations on all lines are now looming up to be dissected and elucidated.

Among the students of the occult, certain powers are said to be fully developed innately in certain types of the Negro, powers that when understood and properly directed will rival if not transcend those of Du Maurier's Svengali.

The medical world recognizes this especially when investigating the science of neurology,--by the merest chance it was discovered that certain types of our nurses--male and female--possessed invaluable qualities for quieting and controlling



patients afflicted with the self-destructive mania. This should lead our physicians to explore and investigate so promising a field.

American artists find it easy to caricature the Negro, but find themselves baffled when striving to depict the highest characteristics of a Sojourner Truth. If he lacks the required temperament, there is thus offered a field for the race-loving Negro artist to compete with his elder brother in art, and succeed where the other has failed.

American and even European historians have often proved themselves much enchained by narrow local prejudice, hence there is a field for the unbiased historian of this closing century.

The advance made during the last fifteen or twenty years in mechanical science is the most encouraging nature possible for our own ever-increasing class of scientific students.

The scholars of the race, linguists and masters of the dead languages have a wide field before them, which when fully explored, will be of incalculable interest to the whole people--I mean particularly the translators of the writings of the ancient world, on all that pertains to the exact estimate in which our African ancestors were held by contemporaries. This will be of interest to all classes, and especially to our own.

Until our scholars shall apply themselves to these greatly neglected fields, we must accept the perverted and indifferent translations of those prejudiced against us.

Dr. Le Plongeon, an eminent explorer and archaeologist, in his Central American studies, has made startling discoveries, which, if he succeeds in proving, will mean that the cradle of man's primitive condition is situated in Yucatan, and the primitive race was the ancestor of the Negro.

The "Review of Reviews," of July has this to say: "That such a tradition should have been handed down to the modern Negro is not so improbable in view of the fact that the inhabitants of Africa appear certainly to have had communication with the people of the Western world up to the destruction of the Island of Atlanta, concerning which even Dr. Le Plongeon has much to tell us."

Think of it! What a scope for our scholars not only in archaeology, but in everything that goes to make up literature!

Another avenue of research that commands dignified attention is the possibility that Negroes were among those who embarked with Columbus. Prominent educators are giving serious attention to this. Prof. Wright, of Georgia, lately sailed to England with the express purpose of investigating the subject, during his vacation, in some of the famous old libraries of Europe.

The lesson to be drawn from this cursory glance at what I may call the past, present and future of our Race Literature apart from its value as first beginnings, not only to us as a people but literature in general, is that unless earnest and systematic effort be made to procure and preserve for transmission to our successors, the records, books and various publications already produced by us, not only will the sturdy pioneers who paved the way and laid the foundation for our Race Literature, be robbed of their just due, but an irretrievable wrong will be inflicted upon the generations that shall come after us.