

Schuyler Assails "Indecency" Of So-Called Modern Race Shows

Says People Of Decency Have Become Disgusted With "Sameness" Of Shows

New York and Pittsburgh Houses and Managers Played—Says Negro Shows Have Slipped Back in Recent Years.

By GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

"White and colored managers of theaters catering to Negro audiences are probably the most courageous men in the United States."

This is the opinion of George S. Schuyler, noted columnist and critic of The Pittsburgh Courier, who has attacked Negro shows and the owners and managers.

White and colored, in an interesting article. He continues to state this fact after much observation of the shows they offer to the Negro public. If you see one of these shows, you see all of them. It is really highway robbery to charge people admission after week, when the only change in the show is its name. If there is any place where intelligence is more needed than in the Negro theatre, I would like to hear of it.

"Not only are these Negro shows devoid of intelligence and cleverness, but many of them stage the most sordid and squalid scenes of a house of prostitution. I am no Puritan. I enjoy gazing at a scene of human depravity, but I am shocked at all, because I have never seen anything worse on the American stage anywhere. It is not the nudity to which I object, but the bawdy house dances that these Negro managers seem to delight in staging. The Negro theatre is rapidly becoming a place where

people of decency and refinement are filled with disgust. I have no urge to close these dumps—what I do not like I can stay away from, but it seems to me common ordinary self-respect and a sense of decency would cause these managers, both colored and white, to call a halt. By no stretch of the imagination can these dances be called artistic and after studying the reactions of Negro audiences to them, I have come to the conclusion that they are popular only with a depraved minority.

"The other night some white people asked me where they could see a good Negro show. In all honesty, I had to reply that there were no good ones in town. Upon being urged to take them to what there were, good or bad, I had to refuse them because I was ashamed to take them to the senseless and lewd exhibitions being offered by the Harlem theatres. As far as I have been able to learn, there is no difference between what is offered to New York Negroes, and what is offered Negroes in Pittsburgh. According to authentic information I have received about white owned houses which cater to Negro patronage in Pittsburgh, this house is owned by white people, run by white people, even to the ushers, while all the Negro, who really says the freight does not come and observe the exhibitions which pass under the name of musical comedy revues. This house is a typical example of similar houses, catering to the Negro, especially throughout the North. Investigation discloses the fact that most houses catering to Negro patronage are owned by Jews and controlled by Jews with a Negro in the capacity of manager.

"No person, I believe, can observe the dances in most of these shows without a feeling of disapproval and disgust. And no person can sit through one of them without feeling at the lack of intelligence in the production. The Negro stage has traveled a long way since the days of Cole and Johnson, Williams and Walker, and the other producers of twenty years ago, and the direction seems to have been downward with only a very few exceptions."

HUNTER SIGNS WITH ROCHESTER MANAGER FOR 28 WEEKS ON STAGE



Concentration on His Pose Is One of Factors Which Has Made Him An Outstanding Success.

Above photos show (top) Maurice Hunter, famous artist's model, posing before the life class of the School of Applied Art of Mechanics Institute, Rochester, N. Y. (Bottom) Hunter, stage manager of the Eastman Theatre, Rochester, for 28 weeks in vaudeville doing a tableaux act. Mr. Hunter will arrive in New York from Rochester this week to arrange Hunter's touring. Hunter was in Rochester four weeks posing for students at Mechanics Institute. Clifford M. Uip, director of the art department, makes a special point to secure Hunter as a model for the class each year. In an interview published in the Rochester Democrat-Chronicle of Feb. 13, in which Hunter also appeared the above photographs, Mr. Uip said: "Many models slump like a lump of putty when they are placed on the studio platform, but Hunter has an excellent sense of the dramatic, which gives his poses spirit and character. He remains silent while the work is going on. It is this concentration and enthusiasm that has given him the remarkable success as a model—this and his keen sense of the dramatic."

While in Rochester Hunter also visited the Monroe County Savings Bank building in State street and viewed again the murals made by Ezra Winter for which he was used as model.

"No Negro Literary Renaissance," Says Well Known Writer

By DR. HUBERT H. HARRISON

EDITOR'S NOTE—Dr. Harrison, who contributed an article in a recent issue on West Indians, is a staff lecturer for the New York City Board of Education. Although it publishes his articles, The Courier is simply trying to arouse helpful and constructive discussion, out of which may grow a social and sound program for our younger writers. Space will be given to any literary critic qualified to reply to this article.

NEW YORK, March 10.—Doubtless you who now read these lines are "genuinely interested" in the Negro as he has been exhibited in recent or contemporary literature by white and Negro writers. Perhaps you are even one of the intelligentsia (the "e" is hard as in "get"), or one of the "new" Negroes. Of course, you know who wrote "The American Cavalryman," "The Leopard's Claw," "Vellies Aristocrats," or "The Vengeance of the Gods." No? Really? Dear me! But we will let that pass. These things are fiction and are not perhaps important. Though I did think that since you have bought and read "Nigger Heaven" you might have also read Miss Sanborn's novel wherein a white author does try to hold your race up.

Well, then—But, surely, you know who is Altheus Ambush Taylor, and are acquainted with that fine sonnet on "The Mulatto," have read Ferris' book, or at least know it by name? What "Sidelights on Negro Soldiers," then? Or "Two Colored Women with the A. E. F.," or that immortal poem by the Baltimore poet entitled "Lenox Avenue"? No? Then, exactly what do you mean when you talk about a Negro literary renaissance?

Seriously, the matter of a Negro literary renaissance is like that of the snakes of Ireland—there isn't any. Those who think that there are usually people who are blissfully ignorant of the stream of literary and artistic products which have flowed uninterruptedly from Negro writers from 1850 to the present. If you ask them about the historical works of Major Wilson, George Williams, William C. Nell, William Wells Brown, Rufus Perry, Z. G. Haygood; the essays of T. Thomas Fortune, the fictional writings of Negroes from Francis E. Watkins to Pauline Hopkins, Dunbar and Chesnut, they stammer and evade to cover up their confusion. And if anyone thinks that this is true only of casual colored people, I beg him to consider the following case:

In the year 1905 Professor W. E. B. DuBois of Atlanta University was hailed by black and white people as pre-eminently the "scholar" of the race. If anyone was an authority on the Negro American he was assuredly "it." In that same year the learned literature brought forth into the auspices of Atlanta University a work which was meant to be authoritative. It was entitled "A Social Bibliography of the Negro American." Now, when this family album was assembled Charles W. Chesnut, the greatest Negro-American novelist, had already published "The Conjure Woman," "The Wife of His Youth," "The House Behind the Cedars" and "The Marrow of Tradition." Yet you will search Dr. DuBois' bibliography of 1905 in vain for any mention of Chesnut. But that is not unusual for Dr. DuBois. In his family magazine for February, 1927, he lists under "The Looking Glass" an unusual article by a black West Indian author in a white magazine called "The Modern Quarterly" on the Negro American. He mentions the writer's name, although it was and is perfectly well known to him. He did something similar to Mr. George S. Schuyler recently. The significant thing is that this is not peculiar to Dr. DuBois, but is a common trait of all our "guardians of the gate." No one can name a single Negro author or artist whom any one of them "discovered." They blissfully wait until some white person stumbles on them (as was the case with Dunbar, William Lonsdale Brown, Charles Gilpin and Countee Cullen) before they venture to acknowledge him; with the result that each such casual discoverer thinks that the stream of Negro literary production bubbled up at the precise point where he discovered it. And so long as through the niggardly narrowness of the cowardly critical defect of such people the white

man (who doesn't know our literary history) remains our only vendor of values in Negro writings, so long will we be cursed with Jeune Jazz artists who must have managed to hop over both Burns and Dunbar in their wild gyrations.

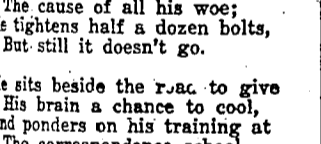
For, let it be said once for all, that if the hysteria of uneducated kiddies with which we are being deluged at this time is poetry, then the writings of Milton, Keats, Lowell, Dunbar, Hawkins and Claude McKay must be something else. At the moment of writing this I learn that one of these kiddies who has perpetrated two books of alleged "poems" is engaged in studying at school, for the first time, Milton's "Paradise Lost." One does insist that a violinist should have studied the violin and what has been done on it before venturing to ask people to pay for his performances. The same applies to a washerman with clothes—and to the entire range of art that links the two. One doesn't object to youth: Byron, Shelley, Keats and Tennyson were all youths when they mastered the technique of verse. But they mastered it first. And, after all, literature is the expression of life-values in terms of word-values. How, then, can we get literature from those who have not lived, who have not read, who have not thought?

Over the Van Vechten matter Chicago, Pittsburgh and even Charleston have begun to sneer at this mush-room mentality, product of that enlightenment which follows whenever the more sturdy types of mankind ape the more sophisticated and neurotic without understanding what they ape. The Negro has something to give to American literature; but that something is not to be found in the broad bosom of his own people. It is not a minister's son, the one youngster marked out by Nature for a poet, with a fine development ahead of him rather than adequate achievement behind him. It will disprove the white short stories of William Pickens and the reason why no white critic praises them. It will pounce on the earlier work of Kelly Miller and DuBois (before the one began to talk twaddle in print and the other to imitate himself, like an ancient and animated dower). But in that day the Negro writer will be going for his authority on race-values, not to Mr. Reuter (who lists Negro writers as a matter of course in his "The House Behind the Cedars"), nor to Mr. Herkovits (who in a review of Talbot's recent work on Nigeria shows a woeful ignorance of that author's earlier studies), but to the place where he should go to the broad bosom of his own people.

This "Negro literary renaissance" had its existence at present only in the noxious night life of Greenwich Village neurotics who invented it, not for the black brothers' profit but their own. Nor do their darker dupes stand on any safer ground. If anyone, in public, should care to pick any decade between 1850 and 1910 I will undertake to present from among the Negroes of that decade as many writers and (with thoroughness to back me) as many lines of literary and artistic endeavor as he can show for this decade. And I go further: I will also undertake to show (with perhaps three exceptions) more able Negro writers for any decade in that period than can be found today. The challenge is open to anyone—but I do suggest that they read some of the things referred to before they take up the gage.

And now, a word in closing about this Negro Harlem which the neurotics of the New Jerusalem have discovered. It has brains: I say this because I know, having lived in it for twenty years. I can walk a mile from the place where this is written and converse with the ablest economist (I used to teach economics to whites) of our race. A few blocks north I can shake hands with our best biologist (barring Ernest Just). I am acquainted with a journalist who slings niftier prose than anyone else whom I know, and a scholar whose book reveals a wider historic knowledge of racial contacts than any other scholar, white or black. Their names? Well, you would not recognize them if I gave them here. For Harlem doesn't "boost" Harlem.

Some time soon there will be a genuine literary renaissance, a renaissance of creative energy which will face the task of expressing the life-values of our people in prose-forms redolent with the tang of great literature, with poetry that bubbles up honestly and spontaneously out of the wide experience and understanding of the Head; out of the warm intuitions of the Heart. But, depend upon it, there will be nothing in that Real Renaissance for neurotics to exploit. The men and women who create it will be doing the good work in which they will not care to publish their writings.



FLIVVER SAM

The Village Motorsmith Under a spreading chestnut tree A tubular auto stands. The smith an angry man is he With trouble on his hands.

The carburetor seems to be The cause of all his woes; He tightens half a dozen bolts, But still it doesn't go.

He sits beside the r-u-c to give His brain a chance to cool, And ponders on his training at The correspondence school.

And then he starts his job once more And just by chance 'tis seen The cause of all his trouble is 'Tis out of gasoline.

Ten Commandments of Safety For Children and Pedestrians—

- 1—Look both ways before crossing the streets and highways;
- 2—Wait until it is safe to cross;
- 3—Keep to the left, facing traffic, when necessary to walk in the roadway;
- 4—Refrain from playing in the roadway;
- 5—For Parents—
- 6—Caution children frequently as to street and highway dangers.
- 7—For Motorists—
- 8—Watch out for children and pedestrians;
- 9—Watch speedometer; keep it in good order and refrain from speeding;
- 10—Keep brakes in good order;
- 11—Obey all traffic and safety rules;
- 12—Drive carefully always.

It is estimated that several million school children will be given the opportunity to sign the safety pledge.

A New Version

Many are the jars that are opened tonight,
Covered with evening dew;
Many are the kids that are howling tonight,
Many are the black flies, too.

For we
Tending tonight, tending tonight,
Tending on the old camp ground!
There's a pup in the midst of the apple pie,
At grandmother's knickers are torn,
Oh, the back tire's flat and the gas tank's dry,
And we wish that we'd never been born!

Tending tonight, tending tonight,
Tending on the old camp ground!
Oh, the girl in the car from Calumet
Is sitting with poor Uncle Will,
Oh, the canned heat's gone and the coals are wet,
For we're saving a hotel bill!

Tending tonight, tending tonight,
Tending on the old camp ground!

MAGIC HOURS IN THE THEATRE

By THEOPHILUS LEWIS

EDITOR'S NOTE—This, the conclusion of the series by Mr. Lewis, represents perhaps the first objective critical and intelligent appraisal of the theatre in the Negro community. The Courier takes pride in being the first newspaper to offer a comprehensive analysis of the Negro dramatic arts.

The Lafayette Players did not call themselves a repertory theatre, they used the term "stock company," nevertheless their experiment has provided several useful lessons for the serious and women who are now making an effort to establish a Negro dramatic theatre. The object of the Lafayette Players was to present Broadway successes to Negro audiences at popular prices. They organized themselves in two or three acting companies, and while the first company was presenting one play the other companies would be in rehearsal. It is interesting to note in passing that while in the streets and alleys while the Lafayette Players were moving in the opposite direction. The results have shown that Hill's method was sound, one, but it is certainly reasonable to offer the plea of expediency in behalf of the Lafayette Players. Hill had the advantage of being able to use his material almost exactly as he found it in the streets and alleys while the Lafayette Players could only use material which had already been organized in the form of plays. As there was no Negro drama available at that time they were forced to seek their plays in some other field.

Besides the Lafayette Players were actors and naturally considered acting the most important thing in the theatre. The fact is that to establish a sound theatre the emphasis must be placed on drama. But their idea of forming acting companies and presenting plays in rapid succession was a good one and the chances are any enduring Negro theatre will have to adopt it. This will both stimulate the production of drama and make for good acting. Playwrights will be forced to write in order to keep up with the demand while playing numerous roles will help develop the versatility of the actors and prevent them from degenerating into type players, those able to portray only one type of character. If we can learn this lesson from the experiment of the Lafayette Players they

will not have worked in vain.

The Lafayette Players did not actually begin with producing second hand Broadway productions. Before the stock company was formed some of the actors who later became prominent in the organization presented a Negro play called "The Old Man's Boy," a rather pleasing gesture in the direction of sentimental comedy. Henry Creamer was the dominant spirit of the play, and conspicuous in the cast were Ruth Cherry, Andrew Bishop, Alexander Rogers and Charles Gilpin. Gilpin had an interesting comedy part—and here I mean a comedy part, not merely a comical part—which was the hit of the play. This pioneer venture in drama was presented in the Lafayette theatre. Some months later two Negro melodramas were presented in the Lincoln, with Anita Bush starring and Charles Gilpin playing minor roles, and immediately afterward the company was fully organized and moved back to the Lafayette, taking the name of that theatre.

The company enjoyed several prosperous years and for a while were able to maintain a circuit consisting of theaters in Harlem, Baltimore and Washington, and, intermittently, Philadelphia. Eventually the company failed, although its spook fingers on in Chicago, and it is generally thought that its failure was the result of unsound financial management. My own belief is that the movement failed because it neglected to cultivate Negro drama. I remember a period when the New York company played to packed houses every night. That was when the movement was new. But novelty quickly ceases to be novel, and when that happened to the Lafayette venture patronage fell off and the decline of the movement became inevitable.

The company certainly made a remarkably good showing within the limits of the field they attempted to develop. They presented popular productions of all types from musical comedies to light opera and the heaviest of melodramas, and many of the actors played in all the various types of productions. For example, Charles Mores, Walker Thompson, Abbie Mitchell and Laura Bowman were equally facile in light opera and emotional drama. They were advancing along sound repertory lines and giving the Negro public the best continuous theatrical entertainment it has ever enjoyed.

Among my fondest recollections is the delightful performance of Laura Bowman in "Madame X." Miss Mitchell played the leading female role, but for sheer beauty of acting I think Mrs. Bowman surpassed them. But in the "Chocolate Soldier" Miss Mitchell's wonderful voice reigned supreme, even though the cast included such able players as Charles Mores, Charles Olden, Susie Sutton and Inez Clough.

Gilpin left the company shortly after its organization, but not until he had given a capital performance in the part of the police inspector in "Within the Law." Ida Anderson played the main female character in the drama and also in "Kick In," in which she was given fine support by Laurence Chesnut and Charles Mores. Walker Thompson scored again in "The Fortune Hunter." Clarence Muse, who became the outstanding star after Gilpin left the company, gave a really wonderful performance in the "Master Mind," and even at that he had only a narrow margin of advantage over Sydney Kirkpatrick in the same play. Indeed to mention all the plays the Lafayette Players presented credibly would be to name some colored actors in connection with almost every contemporary Broadway success.

Since the collapse of the Lafayette movement several attempts have been made to resuscitate dramatic acting in the Negro theatre, most of them launched by "art" or little theatre groups. The two that attracted most attention were "The Ethiopian Art Theatre," fostered by Raymond O'Neil and the National Ethiopian Art Theatre, inaugurated by Anne Wolter. The former played one short run on Broadway, presenting plays by Oscar Wilde and Shakespeare, then its members dispersed. The second organization disintegrated when most of its members were absorbed by David Belasco's "Lulu Belle" company. Two

A LENTEN THOUGHT!

Lenten Season is on, the Forty Day period prior to Easter, the Glad Day. This season is observed by many religious groups for the purpose of sacrificing pleasures and thinking deeply on the ways of life. The idea is a good one. The trouble with most of us is in not stopping to think, inwardly and outwardly. We are more inclined to think outwardly than inwardly. We are inclined to see the other fellow's faults without measuring up our own. That's human nature. We are farmers—and framers—of righteousness, but we too often use a pitchfork when we should use a rake. Looking through the field glasses of disillusionment, we are all about the same size. This fact should knock our self-conceit into a cocked hat and make us humble, but determined to do our level best.

Faint Smell of Coffee

He sat waiting, one dull morning, for the landlady to bring in his breakfast. She arrived at last with a scrappy bit of bacon, a very small pat of butter, half of a stale loaf and a pot of alleged coffee. She poured out a cupful of this liquid and then, looking out at the leaden sky, began to manufacture a little polite talk.

"Looks like rain, sir," she remarked, conversationally.

"Er—yes," he answered gloomily, regarding his cup, "but it has a faint smell of coffee."—St. Louis Times.

His Chief Qualification

Cashier—I don't believe, dear that your father will consent to our marriage.

Banker's Daughter—Oh, yes, he will, after he has examined your book. He'll want to keep the money in the family.

Dear O. H. L.

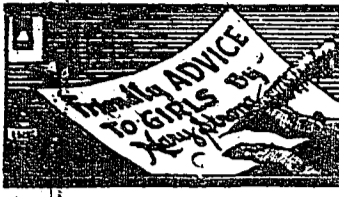
I am sending to you the private address of the young lady as soon as it comes to me together with the advertisement you sent to me.

M. S.

Mrs. R. B.

I have your envelope and will send the information you are waiting for in a day or two.

ings. (For so long as the Negro plays the mountebank or the coward so long will his Boys' Brigades be worth playing with.) None of the white experts on "Negro" literature today seem to have heard of Taylor Brown—Bogers while they are trying ribbons on the little tabby-kittens whose reputations will be as dead as David's sow a short ten years from now. Even so, in that day to come, will they ignore all those who will be doing the good work in which they will not care to publish their writings.



Mrs. Strong:

I am twenty-one and married but a few months. But already I am having a difficult situation to face. I am not a coward. I know that. But there are some conditions that are not at all easy to handle, this is one: What should a young man do in a case like this?

My wife is very young and attractive, she knows it and does not try to hide her charms. She comes to me with complaints that this friend's husband and that girl's father and some passer by on the street, has insulted her. Now I can't go out Don Quixote like and fight the world, but she seems to throw down these facts as challenges. I'll tell you the truth, I'm stumped. Help me if you can. Thanks.

J. R.

My Dear J. R.

In the first place your wife is vain. You see that much yourself. She thinks this method best to enhance her value in your eyes. Again, if you have an attractive sister, you will recall that she is not continually trying to press you into some frame, that she is as, that she really loves you. Your wife loves herself. Women can take care of all such situations themselves and modest women do so. They do not seek to flout their confidantes.

Again, your wife is much like the fascinating creatures of fiction, who send the lover to dangerous precipices to gather posies, that their vanity may be fed.

And still again, there is another construction that may be placed upon such recitals. They sometimes serve as fortifications, alibi's, etc.

You show common sense in pausing before you rush into indiscriminate frays. Study your wife a little. Talk to her. Get her view point if she is reasonable enough. Write me again J. R. I judge you to be a motherless boy or you would have consulted your mother about this. All mothers know what I am advising, to be correct.

Sincerely, M. S.

Dear Mary Strong:

I've been watching your columns to see if any one would have a trouble like mine. But it seems that my case is different to anybody's. I'm not so young, but nice looking and attractive, have had lots of beaux but none of them appeal to me except one, and he is a young man who is not a fool and I am an artist and artists should not work. He spends all his time drawing pictures. They really are good pictures I think, but nobody wants to buy them and he is living with his father who is supporting him. Some day he is proud and he has asked me to marry him but I know he wants to but hates to ask me because I would have to support him. Now I don't mind supporting him, but my friends would look at me as a fool and laugh at me behind my back. To tell you the truth, I'd rather marry him than the richest man on earth, but I do hate ridicule. What could I do?

A Maid.