

HARLEM.

(From a New York Correspondent.)

In the heart of New York is a great negro city, a solid city of black faces and homes of black folk, small in area but holding twice as many coloured people as any city in the South. This is Harlem, and it is a creation of the last dozen years. A recent issue of the "Survey Graphic," dedicated to Harlem, gives an amazing picture of the cultural meaning of this new capital of an oppressed race.

Fifteen years ago barely a half-dozen coloured people owned real estate in all New York. To-day negroes own real property worth more than sixty million dollars, and they are increasing their holdings every day. Every ship from the West Indies brings negroes from the British West Indies seeking the larger economic opportunities of the States; every train brings families from the South eager for the freer life of the North. There are 25,000 West Indians among the 175,000 negroes in Harlem, and nearly 100,000 born in the South. From Fifth Avenue to Eighth Avenue, from 127th Street to 145th Street, Harlem is black; and since the negroes have proved themselves able to earn their way in New York and to buy property, the black area is likely to spread.

Outwardly Harlem is little more colourful than any other part of New York. The dull brownstone houses were there before the negroes came, and they may be there when some other race succeeds the coloured folk as the coloured folk succeeded Italians and Jews. But inwardly Harlem is a splash of light in a city of greys. Prosperous New Yorkers know it as the centre of the liveliest cabarets and night clubs in the city, where jazz blares and dark-skinned girls dance. Behind that façade is the life of the new negro intelligentsia. For New York's negroes are no servant class. The negro women still do laundry-work and service in an overwhelming proportion, though they are beginning to flow into the clothing industry; their men have won a measure of industrial emancipation. Despite the increase of negro population there were fewer negro elevator boys and teamsters in 1920 than in 1910, and no more janitors. But whereas the 1910 census reported no negro clothing workers, in 1920 more than 6,000 were counted. There were 5,387 negro longshoremen in that year, all organised in trade unions; there were 737 carpenters—a significant jump in ten years from 263, and 490 of them were union members. Textile workers, musicians, and stationary firemen each counted more than a thousand coloured men. This industrial diversification is significant; it means that in New York there is no such danger of race riot as in some of the mid-Western cities where negroes have been imported by the thousand in gangs, all put to the same kind of work, usually displacing white men who had proved insufficiently docile. It also means that the New York negro is going into business for himself, and that Harlem has its bourgeoisie and its intelligentsia.

With this goes a heightened race consciousness. The negro of the Northern centres has reached a point where he will endure no sort of tutelage, where he stands proudly on his own feet. The novelists and poets who have spoken so remarkably out of the heart of the negro race in these last years are ceasing to plead for their race; they express it. And here in Harlem they find an exceptional seed-bed for their art. Negro peasants from the Southern cotton-field arrive here, bewildered, to leap into the heart of the most complex urban civilisation. Where men of different skin would have lost contact with these, the negro poet and artist is kept close to this drama of his own race. The "Survey Graphic," devoted to Harlem, prints a group of studies of the faces of negro artists—beautiful, vivid faces; and a group of negro poems. Countee Cullen sings:

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun, a scarlet sea,
Jungle star and jungle track,
Strong bronzed men and regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove and banyan tree,
What is Africa to me?

But he concludes:

In an old remembered way
Rain works on me night and day.

Langston Hughes gives an interpretation of jazz, a product of negro art

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed dancers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.

Jazz did not originate in Harlem, but many of the best-known jazz tunes and "The Charleston," that consummation of jazz dancing, have developed there. Jazz is, at root, the product of the itinerant coloured musicians who used to wander up and down the Mississippi, improvising songs and rhythms based upon the chanties of the dock labourers and railroad gangs. W. C. Handy, a negro with a knowledge of music, built upon such songs the first jazz classic, "Memphis Blues," and Jasbo Brown, a reckless musician of a negro cabaret in Chicago, who blew his own moods upon his extravagant instrument while hilarious with gin, gave his own name to the

form. And this negro art, so condemned at first by the *litterati*, has something which roots so deep in the universal popular consciousness that it may be said to be the one form of American art which has carried around the world.

What will this amazing race do next? One ponders long over that question in America. A hint of one answer that is seldom frankly expressed is given by Walter F. White. White is a blue-eyed, fair-haired young man who happens to have in his veins that drop of negro blood which, in the United States, makes him count as a negro. He would pass as a white man anywhere but for his own soul. He has never renounced his race, but in times of storm and stress, when no man known to be a negro could have learned the facts, he has gone South, not mentioned the fact that he had negro blood, and has probed lynchings and race riots to the bottom. Others have not Walter White's loyalty to the drop of black blood. He tells of one of the prominent surgeons of New York City whose fees often run into four figures, who now moves in New York society by virtue of his wealth and professional standing. He began life as a coloured boy in the South, but grew tired of the proscribed life. He came north, met with success, and married a white woman—who knew of his race. There are many figures in New York life who carry such secrets in their breasts. That is the outside fringe of Harlem.