

JAMES EDWARD McCALL

James Edward McCall was born in Montgomery, Ala., September 2, 1880. He attended the primary and secondary schools of that city and was graduated from the Alabama Normal School in 1900. The following September, he enrolled at Howard Medical College, Washington, D. C. However, at the close of his freshmen year, McCall was forced to abandon his medical education, following an attack of typhoid fever which led to total blindness.

Eager to continue his education, McCall entered Albion College, Albion, Michigan, in 1905, from which he was graduated in June, 1907. While a student at Albion, he was assisted by sighted readers.

For a few years after leaving Albion, McCall worked for newspapers in Montgomery. He married in 1914, and his wife collaborated with him in his journalistic endeavors. They assisted in publishing in Montgomery a Negro weekly, *The Emancipator*, from 1917 to 1920. This was during the latter part of World War I, when race riots occurred in the South.

In 1920, the McCalls moved to Detroit, Michigan with their two small daughters. Not long after locating in the Motor City, they joined the staff of the *Detroit Independent*, of which the late W. J. Robinson was publisher. It was during this period that the New Negro rebirth of thought and progressive attitude was spreading into a definite pattern. It was this which inspired the blind poet to write his famous poem, "The New Negro," which was widely publicized. Countee Cullen, assistant editor of *Opportunity* magazine, commented on this poem, as follows:

"It is a prophetic utterance, and I feel and hope that this rising generation of ours will consider it as such."

The New Negro

He scans the world with calm and fearless eyes,
Conscious within of powers long since forgot;
At every step, new man-made barriers rise
To bar his progress—but he heeds them not.
He stands erect, though tempests round him crash,
Though thunder bursts and billows surge and roll;
He laughs and forges on, while lightning flash
Along the rocky pathway to his goal.
Impassive as a Sphinx, he stares ahead—
Foresees new empires rise and old ones fall;
While caste-made nations lust for blood to shed,
He sees God's finger writing on the wall.
With soul awakened, wise and strong he stands,
Holding his destiny within his hands.

My Barrier

Between me and my dreams there lies
A wall of granite, gray and grim;
So tall it seems to touch the skies,
And make the light from heaven dim.
In youth I sought to scale its height,
To pierce the wall with iron will;
But though I strove with all my might,
The barrier barred and mocked me still.

With naked hands I smote in rage
Upon the granite, all in vain,
As a trapped eagle beats its cage,
With helpless wings that bleed and pain.
My eyes were blind with unshed tears,
And bitter anguish gnawed my heart;
But wisdom came with passing years,
And brought me back my dreams of art.

At last, I see in the rugged stone,
Angelic forms and visions fair;
And dreams of beauty, all my own,
Which destiny has hidden there.
Within the barrier now I see
A quarry stored with granite fine,
From which my dreams with skill
may be
Chiseled into forms divine.

With singing heart and loving hand,
I carve them forth, dream after dream;
The solid granite yields like sand,
And eyes of angels from it beam.
Upon the rocky barrier wall,
Which towers from earth to heaven above,
I carve a mystic stairway tall,
And climb it with the dreams I love.

Rival Roses

Upon the parlor table
Sits a fragile china vase,
In which there is a flaming rose
Of rarest charm and grace.

My lady, fair and slender,
Beside the table stands,
The lovely rose arranging
With deft, artistic hands.

It is a radiant picture,
Bewitching to behold—
The red rose and my lady,
In the sun's soft rays of gold.

The red rose on the table
Is charming, heaven knows!
But my lady in her beauty
Is lovelier than the rose.

A Prayer

I do not seek a place in the sun,
To sit aloof with eagle ken:
But give me a place in the hearts of men,
With love for all and hate for none.
Give me the strength my course to run,
And the power to serve with tongue and pen.
Grant me this, oh God, and then,
Peace and sleep when the days are done.

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