

## THE NEGRO'S GIFTS

By Mary White Ovington

**T**HIS is one of the most beautiful books that we are likely to have the pleasure of handling and fondling this year. Opening easily, with large, clear type, distinguished illustrations, a captivating cover, it invites us from the start. The contributors are fortunate who come to us in such attractive dress.

"The New Negro" is a compilation, a series of gifts that the colored man brings to America today. Fiction, poetry, drama, art, history, music, these succeed one another to end with Du Bois's summing up of the Negro problem throughout the world. While based on the Harlem number of "The Survey Graphic", the book is not a magazine. It is as if some one writer with a well ordered mind had the skill to present the facts and arguments and illustrations wholly through quotations from his sources — a difficult and very clever thing to do.

After an interesting historical sketch of the Negro in literature by Braithwaite, the New Negro speaks. We have two hundred pages of vivid stories and poems led off by Rudolph Fisher's "City of Refuge", first published in "The Atlantic". The prose as one goes on varies in style from the somewhat ponderous heaping of phrase on phrase of John Matheus to the modern staccato of Jean Toomer. Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes are here at their best, and here is James Weldon Johnson's "Creation", the artist putting in modern form the magnificent imagery of the illiterate Negro preacher. The drama is represented by a short play dealing with the relations between Negro and poor white. We have a page or two of music and articles on the spirituals and jazz. The illustra-

tions, with the exception of eight futurist drawings by Aaron Douglas, are by whites. Winold Reiss contributes the bulk of them, striking portraits of Negro men and women.

When we have gone through these five hundred pages we are sure of at least one thing — the New Negro bears little likeness to the colored man who is portrayed today on the stage and in the white man's fiction, the verbose, goodnatured, Cohen-Cobb variety. Nor does he bear any likeness to the black man who dominated fiction some twenty years ago, the Dixon-Page type. That Negro with a veneer of education was always trying to get into the world of white society and either attempted to marry or, defeated in this, to rape, a white woman. Neither the conventional black clown nor the black villain appears in this book.

What, then, is the New Negro? Read and see. You will find him, perhaps to your disappointment, very like his white neighbor. He has education, sometimes wealth. He has developed a distinct middle class, business men whose "lives are as free from the Negro's native love of leisure and enjoyment of life as Franklin's life". His professional men, of whom he has many, are trained in American colleges in American ways. He is a good sport — there should have been a chapter on the Negro athlete — and in his societies he follows the white man. The book abounds in African illustrations but back of the writing is English culture. "Of African culture" Melville Herskovits, one of the few white contributors, says, "there is not a trace. Even the spirituals are an expression of the Negro playing through the typical religious patterns of the white man." Countee Cullen may describe his creeping delight in the

African jungle but the savage is in all of us. The New Negro is centuries removed from the cultural life from which he was torn, and, moreover, he is of mixed race. He returns to Africa as any foreigner would return to it. At least there is nothing in this book to make us think otherwise. But while he "plays through our patterns" his touch is just different enough to give us deep pleasure.

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." But why a problem, at least in America, one thinks on closing this book. A race that in such a short space of time takes a dignified, sometimes a commanding, place in the civilization into which it has comparatively recently been thrust, is really no problem whatever. Only the indolent or the jealous make it so.

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The New Negro. Edited by Alain Locke.  
Albert and Charles Boni.