

BLACK MAMMIES

By CHANDLER OWEN

ONE writer has said: "*The existence of monuments is justified on but two grounds—as works of art and that for which they stand.*" We do not agree with his first proposition. We do not believe a mere work of art justifies a monument. We think that a monument ought to be erected to some idea or ideal and that that ideal should be portrayed through a work of art. In other words, art should be made the hand-maiden of truth and justice.

To illustrate: At the present time the Ku Klux Klan is planning to erect in Atlanta a monument which will probably be one of the greatest works of art in America. They have secured the services of sculptors of world-wide reputation. Yet the monument they erect will necessarily be condemned by the sober opinion of the present and the future, on account of the vicious principles which the statue will be designed to commemorate.

The Daughters of the Confederacy (Jefferson Davis Chapter No. 1650) have asked Congress to grant them permission to erect a statue in Washington in memory of the "Black Mammies." They want to bring back memories of the slave days when *black mammies* toiled in the cotton fields, cleaned the houses, cared for the children, nursed them at their bosoms. They want to bring back what (to them) Bert Williams would call "*those wonderful days*" days when the pay for Negro Labor was the "cruel lash of arrogant idleness upon the naked back of patient toil." They want a memorial of the Southern white's good times gone. To the Southern bourgeois these memories are like the photo of a choice and fond friend who has passed away. Though we cannot bring back the friend, we may often look upon and kiss the picture.

Now we don't want any "mammy" statues anywhere. We want the children of this generation to abhor and forget those days when the white madam had leisure and the black mammy had labor when the white lady lolled and the black mistress toiled. We want to orient ourselves—turn our faces from the dark and discouraging past, and direct it toward a bright and hopeful future.

In fact, people erect monuments for things of which they are fond, and in order to perpetuate the ideas for the future. And that is just what these Daughters of the Confederacy are doing. The "black mammies" made it *soft* for them and they made it *hard* for the "black mammies." They are justified in wanting the "black mammies" to return, but we Negroes are justified in fighting to say that these "black mammies" will be like Poe's Raven "*never*

more." What one person desires to memorialize, another person may want to forget. For instance: you will not find in Alabama, Florida or Georgia, the statues of Grant or Lincoln; nor will you find in Boston the statues of Jeff Davis, Stonewall Jackson or Robert E. Lee. It would be quite impossible to find in Paris a statue of Hindenburg or Ludendorff, nor would you find in Berlin a monument erected to Foch or Sir Douglas Haig. Why? Because in these respective cases the persons referred to had used their power to injure their opponents.

The writer favors having some statues and monuments erected in this country. We favor one erected to the 200,000 Negro soldiers who fought to wipe out slavery and to unfurl the flag of freedom and let it float like a cloud over this land. We favor a statue to these men who helped to save the Union, who indeed were a great factor in crushing out the iniquitous viper—slavery—which vitiated the entire American atmosphere with its venomous and poisonous breath. We favor a monument to the runaway slaves who had the courage to dash for freedom.

We favor erecting a monument to the New Negro, who is carving a new monument in the hearts of our people. We favor the erection of a monument to the Negroes of Washington, Chicago, Longview, Texas, Knoxville, Tenn., Tulsa, Okla., and Philadelphia, who rose in their might and said to the authorities: "*If you cannot protect us, we will protect ourselves—if you cannot uphold the law, we will maintain constituted authority.*" We favor erecting a monument to the Negro artists and poets, the Negro inventors and discoverers, the Negro scholars and thinkers, who have gone without food, clothing and shelter, in order to lay upon the altar of progress the Negro's meed of achievement. We favor a monument to the Negro women who have risen above insult, assault, debauchery, prostitution and abuse, to which these unfortunate "*black mammies*" were subjected. Yes, we favor erecting a monument to these women, who have almost wiped out this chasm of caste, who have broken the cordon of chains and are now trying to throw them off.

Let this "mammy" statue go. Let it fade away. Let it be buried in that blissful oblivion to which the brave sons of this nation have consigned it; and when it rises again, let its white shaft point like a lofty mountain peak to a New Negro mother, no longer a "*white man's woman*," no longer the sex-enslaved "*black mammy*" of Dixie—but the apotheosis of triumphant Negro womanhood!