

## The New Negro

*The New Negro: an Interpretation.* Edited by Alain Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni. 446 pages. \$5.

*The Weary Blues*, by Langston Hughes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 109 pages. \$2.

IN a very able final chapter of this book called *The Negro Mind Reaches Out*, W. E. DuBois—of the out-reaching and caustic mind—recalls that twenty-five years ago a conference of friends of the Negro met at Lake Mohonk to discuss his problems *without a single Negro present*. That even later, great magazines published symposiums on the Negro Problem *without inviting a single Negro to participate*. How different the situation today. In March 1925, *The Survey-Graphic* published a Harlem number which aroused extraordinary interest among white Americans who do not keep up with Negro progress through such papers as *Crisis* and *Opportunity*; for it revealed beyond a doubt that the American Negro has a voice and can speak for himself. That *Survey* number, generously enlarged and revised, is the nucleus of *The New Negro*. The significance of the volume is not only that it presents for the first time a self-conscious and comprehensive formulation and a selection from the contributions of the American Negro, but that it presents these contributions creatively, as the flowering of a race spirit which is at last recognizing its power to enrich human and American life. The scattered Negro groups of the world are still largely inchoate and inexpressive, but those one hundred and fifty millions, with their voiceless woes, are finding slowly, as DuBois says, "a thoughtful leadership in the United States"—in New York, in Harlem, among such publicists, editors, story tellers, poets, musicians, educators as speak for themselves and their race in these pages.

The sociologist, the philanthropist and the race leader are not unaware of the new Negro, says Alain Locke, the editor, but they are at a loss to account for him, because he "cannot be swathed in their formulae." The old Negro was a creature of moral debate, a stock figure in fiction, a formula—something to be "kept down," "helped up," "a social bogey" or a social burden. The thinking Negro has almost shared the same attitude. "His shadow has been more real to him than his personality"—a telling phrase. But while the minds of black and white have burrowed into the trenches of the Civil War and what followed, the Negro population has actually shifted. It has migrated northward, midwestward, eastward, and cityward to the great centres of industry so that the "problem" is no longer exclusively or even predominantly Southern, but a part of the social problem of an industrial democracy.

"With each successive wave the movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and more democratic chance"—a deliberate flight "from countryside to city," "from mediæval America to modern."

The most striking result is Harlem, where we have the largest Negro community in the world and the first concentration of all the diverse elements of Negro life from every clime, class and profession; Harlem where a Negro newspaper carrying news material in English, French and Spanish from every part of America, the West Indies and Africa, has maintained itself for over five years. The bond between American Negroes heretofore has been a common condition; in Harlem, this Negro Zion, they

are arriving at group expression and self-determination. "It is—or promises at least to be—a race capital." This deep feeling of race is at present the mainspring of Negro life. The new group psychology resents the consideration of the Negro as a social ward or minor; as "the sick man of American Democracy." It demands less charity and more justice; less help and more understanding. The great social and æsthetic gain is the "releasing of the talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression."

Locke's chapter and two others on Negro Art and Negro Literature introduces a series of selections from Young Negro poetry, fiction and drama. Here in fiction we have—amongst others less known—Rudolph Fisher, Jean Toomer, Eric Walcott; in poetry—again amongst others—Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes; in drama Willis Richardson. These selections from the Negro literature which have suddenly come to fame in the last three years are markedly different both from the instinctive folk art of the early days and from the rhetorical and imitative Negro works of the Reconstruction period. "Our poets have now stopped speaking for the Negro—they speak as Negroes." They "no longer have the hard choice between an over-assertive and an appealing attitude." They are objective; they stand firmly on their spiritual feet, yet they also speak from an almost "classic" background of common experience to which a tragic social pressure has given a deep intensity.

This matter of common background of feeling is one of the points—the great point as illustrated here—where the young Negro realist "puts it over" on the young white realist. The new Negro generation is realistic, even expressionistic. It has, like all young America, replaced moralism and idealism with satire and irony. But, in contrast to what one might call the *Mercurial* or *Main Street School*, it is not so hard-boiled, literal and metallic that it cannot also be simple, sensuous and passionate, to an almost biblical degree; that it cannot also indulge its nostalgia for color, rhythm, warmth and beauty. The charm of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, which is the outstanding artistic performance of the young Negro in prose, is that he has joined to the bitter objective truths of the Georgia earth and expressed through his style a kind of folk music, folk ecstasy. So Langston Hughes, that youngest and freest and perhaps most happily gifted of Negro poetic adventurers, whose volume *The Weary Blues* followed hard on the selected poems in *The New Negro* is colloquial, casual, yet fervent and lyrical in the manner of his race.

It's an earth song,

A body song;

A spring song,

I have been waiting long for this spring song.

Chapters on the spirituals and on jazz, on Negro folk stories and ancestral arts complete Part I. Part II deals with *The New Negro in a New World*. Here we have suggestive chapters by leading educators like Robert R. Moton, by white students of the Negro like Paul Kellogg, by Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*, and James Weldon Johnson, one of the most notable prophets of the Negro generation that has discarded the harsh philosophy of race hatred. The volume as a whole, thoughtful and "solid" though it is, sounds a sort of processional, brilliant and vibrant note; even DuBois raises a flag of hope. And as we see the leaders marching by in Weinold Reiss's presentation, those I have named and the others like Paul Robeson, Elise McDougald and many more,



we feel like cheering. For we realize that American Negroes are indeed rich in gifts and origins, though here they have pooled their gifts and made their basic origin a key to the future. The book may well be an historical landmark: in the year 1925-26 certain things began to happen on the American stage, in American music, in American literature, which had been only foreshadowed before. In the year 1925-26 there appeared a book of propaganda of a higher sort which to the open-minded white man, especially the white artist, was a revelation and a hope. Just where the hope will lead the next Negro anthology will perhaps tell—to the place where marginal interpretation is not necessary? Race is here the basis of renaissance. But Melville J. Herskovits, an anthropological commentator, says that the proudest boast of the Negro writer is that he writes of humans, not of Negroes.

ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT.

## Woodrow Wilson

*The Political Education of Woodrow Wilson, by James Kerney. New York: The Century Company. 503 pages. \$4.*

A GOOD journalist has many of the qualifications needed by a good biographer. He is of necessity realistic in his thinking, if not always in his writing. He meets all sorts and conditions of people. He knows their substance—their grand ambitions and their petty designs. He has few delusions. He combines some of the tearful sympathy of the family doctor with the merciless chill of the expert diagnostician. Frequently deceived, lied to and lied about, he is always looking right and left for dangerous pitfalls. Finally, the exigencies of his craft compel him to write the language of life—the vernacular. Mr. James Kerney, editor and publisher of the Trenton Evening Times, is unquestionably an able journalist and he has written a story of Woodrow Wilson's public life, which all persons surfeited by adulation and malignity will read with delight and genuine profit. Besides being prepared by training, temper and trade for the task, Mr. Kerney had the peculiar advantage of knowing the late President intimately during his public career.

The opening chapters draw a picture of Doctor Wilson before his appearance upon the political stage. In those days, says Mr. Kerney, "Wilson was known to entertain liberal views in excise matters, he was opposed to the radicals and he favored party organizations. . . . Wilson, too, was a conservative of a very safe kind. Wilson had been preaching against the 'foolishness' of woman-suffrage and saying a kind word for political organizations as well as corporations." He had declared that the attempts at federal regulation of corporations were based on a "false

professor, once entrenched in power, repudiated the who picked him, made himself master of the scene in a short time turned into "a two-fisted radical." from a few months dedicated to the New Jersey project of "radical" legislation—a direct primary law and the corporation bills—Mr. Wilson devoted his term as Governor to the business of winning the Presidency. While on campaign, he encountered opposition to his new radicalism and was compelled to take in sail to avoid an upset. Friends in Virginia grew alarmed over his advocacy of the initiative, referendum and recall in the West, so he wrote them a letter for local consumption, saying "where opinion already controls, where there is no actual, genuine representative government, as I believe is in Virginia and in the South in general, they are necessary. Each state must judge for itself." According to Mr. Kerney, Governor Wilson was "reluctant to render, but heeded the advice of his managers and again returned to advocacy of the measures." In a hesitant, confused democracy, the Presidential candidate to pick his way with the customary caution.

Having described the great combination of "passion and chance" which lifted Governor Wilson to the goal of ambition, Mr. Kerney reviews the appointments and policies of the President, throwing a new and intimate light upon all the significant episodes. The campaign for re-election, the war plunge, war politics, the peace battle and the closing days are brought under scrutiny, discussed fully and illuminated by the revelations of first-hand knowledge. Nothing is omitted. The affair of Grayson, "the Affair of the Boudoir," the troubles with Page, the controversy over Roosevelt's project for a grand personal assault on the Hindenburg line, General Wood's ambitions, C. P. Pershing's qualities and deeds, the Hon. W. C. Rorer's whiskers, Clemenceau's policies and tempers and everything else in the crowded drama receive consideration. All the batteries of opinion that thundered at the back of the President are unmasked. If Morgan's partners and take a hand in directing economic contacts abroad, domestic radicals insist on being heard about the other side of the business. After telling the President that successful criminals go unwhipped by the law," Mr. Kerney's Record calls his attention to the fact that "our courts send to prison for long terms poor, weak socialists who have been driven into intemperate speech." This varied aspects. "The first loan of two hundred million advanced [to England] by this government was gratefully turned over to the Morgan House on account of President Wilson declared that he had a great respect for reckless enthusiasm for "human liberty." If, however, the President made adjustments upon occasion, he was "a fierce and unlovely side," a fighting passion