

# THE BOOKSHELF

[The Bookshelf is for the benefit of those of our readers who are interested in things literary. If you are a book lover and like the idea of a literary club that meets through the Bookshelf column, you are welcome. You are urged to write in to this department any comments on current or past literature that you have in mind. If you see questions in this column you care to answer, by all means do so. If you have questions to ask pertaining to prose, poetry or fiction in modern or ancient literature, send them in. Address communications to Editor of Bookshelf, Chicago Defender.]

## Play Life

"Plays of Negro Life," selected and edited by Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory. Published by Harper & Brothers, 49 E. 33d St., New York city. Price \$5.

In this book 20 plays are gathered together, all dealing with Negro life. Among them are well known pieces of literature, Eugene O'Neill's "Emperor Jones," Ridgeley Torrence's "The Rider of Dreams," Paul Green's "In Abraham's Bosom," while rubbing elbows with these dramatists are a group of Negro writers, Willis Richardson, Eulalie Spence, John Matthews and others. The book ends with a chronology of the Negro theater and a bibliography of Negro drama. And if these two editors, one Oxford, the other Harvard, lack at times in accuracy—for example, Ellen Terry is described as playing with Ira Aldridge in 1933—they have made a most readable volume and one typical of present-day Negro drama.

It is hard on the dramatist, white or Colored, who finds his play in the pages between Eugene O'Neill's "The Dreamy Kid" and "The Emperor Jones." Who can compete with the driving power of this first of American dramatists? Nor is it easy to bear comparison with such delicate, half humorous, more than half pathetic plays as Paul Green's "The No 'Count Boy" and Ridgeley Torrence's "The Rider of Dreams." To me, the writers in this volume who fare best in such company are those who have been least ambitious in their themes. "Plumes" by Georgia Douglas Johnson, the plumes are those that wave at the funeral, and Eulalie Spence's gay bit of Harlem in "The Starter," are simple, true pictures. Willis Richardson's "Banjo" is in the volume, a play that acts very well, and Frank Wilson's "Sugar Cane." Wilson is now winning renown as an actor in "Porgy." Two of the plays are laid in Africa. There are 20 plays in all, the most of them gloomy—they could not be modern and be anything else—the plays by Negroes a little less given to picturing a thwarted race than the plays by whites. Altogether a fine group.

The books leads one to reminiscence. The Washington Square Players, precursors of the Theater Guild, saw the value of Negro material and used it once in a short play concerning the flight of a criminal and his capture. The Neighborhood playhouse besides producing, as Mr. Gregory notices, Angelina Grimke's "Rachel," gave "The Noose" by Tracy Mygatt. This was a straightforward bit of propaganda regarding a southern lynching with the church organ playing hymns while the murder went on. The Fortnightly Players gave Rosalie Jones' "The Victim," a powerful picture of the quadroom with her white and Colored lovers. One attempt was made in New York after another until success came at last at the Provincetown with Gilpin in "The Emperor Jones." Since then Negro themes have been in demand, note Belasco's vulgar but entertaining play of "Lulu Belle," until today New York's greatest theater is crowded night after night while a Negro company interprets Du Bose Heyward's poetic story of "Porgy" and his neighbors in Cat Fish Row. The climax has been reached. Or is it, perhaps, only the beginning?

Jim Tully, author of "Circus Parade," published by Albert & Charles Boni, New York, has just received the following letter from Dennis T. Moore of Waterbury, Conn., as a result of his eagerness to procure a copy of "Circus Parade" from the local library:

Dear Sir: I managed to beg a copy of "Beggars of Life" and steal a copy of "Jarnegan," but was unable by either procedure to obtain your Circus Parade," so turned to the library as a last resort. The inclosed is the result. Isn't it immense? Honestly, if the thing were not so damned ludicrous I'd bawl with rage. As it is, it's funny enough to deserve a place in Henry Mencken's "Americana."

What amazes me most of all is the fact that a copy of "Jurgens" and "Leaves of Grass" repose in this same library. Very truly yours,

DENNIS T. MOORE.

This is the inclosed report from the library on Mr. Moore's inquiries:

"Memorandum concerning Tully's 'Circus Parade.'—Tully's writings are not suitable for circulation from a public library except perhaps in a very large city. It is our understanding that this particular book is not unlike others in general character. It has already met with trouble in Boston, which, though not to be taken too seriously, does at least indicate that it is not a book which could be placed on open shelves for general circulation.

"Where book funds are decidedly limited, as they are in the Bronson library, it seems to be unwise to get books which cannot be placed on open shelves and which circulate as a rule only to two or three persons who happen to know we have them.

"LINDSEY BROWN,  
 "Librarian Stilas Bronson Library."

"The Story of Philosophy," by Will Durant, is now in its second 100,000. The book was released on May 29, 1926.

During the week just closed 9,135 copies of "The Story of Philosophy" were sold. The high mark for a daily total was achieved on Monday, Dec. 6, when orders for 5,600 copies were received at the office of the publishers, Simons & Schuster, Inc., 37 W. 57th St., New York.

These unprecedented sales figures—all the more significant for a \$5 book—strengthened the premier position of the book on the best seller list from coast to coast. In most of the large cities Will Durant's book not only headed the best sellers in the field of general literature, but definitely outsold even the leading fiction best sellers.