

THE BOOKSHELF

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World of Make Believe

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

By MARY WHITE OVINGTON

In this book 20 plays are gathered together, all dealing with Race 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 writers, Willis Richardson, Eulalie Spence, John Matheus and others. The book ends with a chronology of the theater and a bibliography of drama. And if these two editors, one Oxford and the other Harvard, lack at time in accuracy—for example, Ellen Terry is described as playing with Ira Aldridge in 1833—they have made a most readable volume and one typical of present-day Race drama.

It is hard on the dramatist 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 "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 Douglass 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 to be anything else—the plays by the Race a little less given to picturing a thwarted race than the plays by whites. Altogether a fine group.

The book leads one to reminiscence. The Washington Square Players, precursors of the Theater guild, saw the value of Race 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 Jonas' "The Victim," a powerful picture of the quadroon with her white and Race 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 Race themes have been in demand, not Belasco's vulgar but entertaining play of "Lulu Belle," until today New York's greatest theater is crowded night after night while a Race 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?

"Ebony and Topaz" Is Released by Opportunity

Big things in literature are expected during 1928, as a high mark has been set by Opportunity's first annual volume of "Ebony and Topaz," a collection of material by prominent writers and artists.

From the opening pages with their foreword by L. Hollingsworth Wood and the introduction by Charles S. Johnson, the editor, the book is one growing and exciting revelation. Arthur Huff Fauset lends off with a story, "Jumby," that confirms the tributes paid him when he wrote

"Symphoniesque"; Paul Green in "On the Road One Day, Lord," illustrated by Aaron Douglas, gives a starkly beautiful, albeit tragic, sketch of prison life.

Lulu Peterkin offers a note of explanation on the Gullah language, that quaintly beautiful form of speech employed in her books and now being imitated nightly in the dramatic version of "Porgy." John Matheus in "General Drums" tells a weird story with his usual magic; Guy B. Johnson of the University of North Carolina offers some sidelights on that most mythical, yet vivid character, John Henry, who "died with his hammer in his hand." Zora Neale Hurston emerges from a long literary silence with "The First One," a play having for its hero that legendary progenitor of the Race, Ham. Dorothy Scarborough in "New Light on an Old Song" tells of a striking similarity between "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and a real present day African chant. "Le Perla Negra," by Edna Worthley Underwood, is an opulent story as striking as its chief character.

Dorothy R. Peterson has translated "The Negro of the Jazz Band," a sketch chronicling the strange reversal of a man who masqueraded in order better to find happiness. Arthur A. Schomburg, who traveled to Spain last summer to trace vestiges of Race influences in Spanish life, has an article on "Juan Latino, Magister Latinus"; Alain Locke explains and defends "Our Little Renaissance"; Ellsworth Faris traces "The Natural History of Race Prejudice"; Eugene Kinckle Jones makes "Some Observations on the American Race Problem"; "The Changing Status of the Mulatto" is defined by E. B. Reuter to illustrations by Richard Bruce; William Pickens makes lively and devastating comments on "Suffrage"; E. Franklin Frazier analyzes "Racial Self-Expression."

Theophilus Lewis marks down "The Negro Actor's Deficit"; George S. Schuyler unearths a new offering as "Our Greatest Gift to America"; T. Arnold Hill sees through "Phantom Color Lines"; John P. Davis tells a plain, unvarnished tale in "Verisimilitude"; Abram Harris surveys "The Prospects of Black Bourgeoisie"; W. P. Dabney introduces "Duncanson, an American Artist Whose Color Was Forgotten"; Ira DeA. Reid shows how "Mrs. Bailey Pays the Rent"; in "I" Brenda Ray Moryck reveals herself as a Race Woman; Allison Davis discovers "A Glorious Company"; in "And I Passed by" Joseph Marce Andrew tells how he failed to play the good Samaritan, and Gwendolyn Bennett proffers "Tokens." Charles Cullen supplies the cover and illustrates a hitherto little known poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning; there are facsimiles of Dunbar manuscripts and Wheatley poems.

And throughout the book the following poets sing: Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Anne Spencer, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Frank Horne, Blanche Taylor Dickinson, Angelina Grimke, Mae Cowdery, Jessie Fauset, Donald Jeffery Hayes, E. Merrill Root, Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Helene Johnson and others. Lincoln, Howard, Shaw, Tougaloo and Fisk contribute toward an interesting and prophetic array of undergraduates' verses.

All in all "Ebony and Topaz" is undoubtedly the most interesting symposium of racial material yet gathered.

"Ebony and Topaz" can be secured from Opportunity, 17 Madison Ave., New York city. The price is \$3.