

BOOKS

By BEN BURNS —

Slavery Saga

"FIRE BELL IN THE NIGHT" By
 Constance Robertson. Henry Holt &
 Co. \$2.75.

UPSTATE New York is the hal-
 lowed ground where the his-
 toric Underground Railroad flour-
 ished in the exciting days and nights
 before the War Between the States.
 It is here that the greatest heroes of
 the Negro people—Frederick Doug-
 lass and Harriet Tubman—carried
 through with courage their amazing
 struggle for liberty.

It is altogether fitting that Con-
 stance Robertson's dramatic novel
 on the lives and loves of the stal-
 wart Abolitionists of the ante-bel-
 lum era should be written against
 the setting of the New England
 countryside where thousands of Ne-
 gro slaves got their first breath of
 freedom in the New World.

"Fire Bell in the Night" is a
 colorful tribute to many men and
 women, white and black, who joined
 hands in one of the most amazing
 episodes in American history. It
 is the story of the heroes of history
 who banded together to defy the
 law and make our democracy at
 least a partial reality for black
 Americans.

The saga of the Abolitionist move-
 ment might have been a stodgy,
 plodding work in the hands of less
 skilled author than Miss Robertson.
 But "Fire Bell in the Night" is a
 thrilling tale of love and hate, of
 bold and daring adventure.

Love Story

IT IS the story of fiery Mahala
 North, who with her father ran one
 of the stations on the Underground
 Railroad. With strong convictions
 born out of her twin brother's death
 on a dangerous mission in the fight
 against slavery, Mahala becomes
 embroiled in the furious struggle
 over the Negro issue. Mahala's role
 in this battle is wonderfully drama-
 tized in the contrast with her lover,
 John Palfrey, a standoffish status
 quo leader who supports the Fugitive
 Slave law because of his fear
 that the issue will split the Union.
 Dallas Ord, a mild-mannered South-
 erner who is also active in Abolitionist
 movement, completes the
 love triangle that finds expression
 in the political turmoil of those try-
 ing days.

While Miss Robertson is primarily
 concerned with a fine presentation
 of white Abolitionists, she does a
 splendid portrayal of the Negro
 leaders. Frederick Douglass, giant
 of his people, is truly a majestic
 man to whom all look for brilliant
 leadership. Rev. J. W. Loguen, a
 Negro minister who was one of the
 outstanding figures in the Syracuse
 branch of the Underground Rail-
 road, is a remarkable character
 whose bravery and daring brought
 thousands of slaves through from
 the South.

Throughout her work Miss Rob-
 ertson who is a native-born Cana-
 dian but grew up in New York state,
 shows she has carefully done a vast
 amount of research and actually
 gotten first hand accounts of the
 Underground Railroad. But her pre-
 cise handling of the story does not
 in any way detract from the dra-
 matic qualities. She makes history
 live again—history that started the
 Negro people on freedom road.

New Works

THE DISPATCHES from the Ne-
 gro book front continue to be en-
 couraging.

Publication date for Richard
 Wright's "American Hunger" has
 now definitely been set for August
 23 by Harper and Bros. Wright's
 new opus is billed as an autobiog-
 raphy and Dorothy Cantfield, who
 enjoyed a first reading, calls it "the
 honest, dreadful, heart-breaking
 story of a Negro childhood and
 youth."

Howard Odum, whose "Race and
 Rumors of Race" drew widespread
 comment not too long ago, has done
 another work called "The Way of
 the South: A Biography of South
 United States" (Macmillan). This
 is due on October 31 and is quite
 an extensive work, encompassing
 the entire picture of race relations
 in Dixie.

Two promising novels have been
 added to the book lists. They are
 "Black Dawn" by Theda Kenyon,
 another literary study of Negro-
 white relations in the Reconstruc-
 tion era (Julian Messner) and "Es-
 cape the Thunder" by Lonnie Cole-
 man, a modern work by a new
 Southern author (Dutton).

After a long and bitter battle,
 "What the Negro Wants" is finally
 to be published by the University
 of North Carolina Press on Aug-
 ust 26.

The book which was edited by
 Rayford Logan of Howard univer-
 sity has been an on-again-off-again
 proposition for more than six
 months. It seems that the director
 of the Southern university press
 got a wee bit frightened when he
 read the volume's contents and
 backed out on publication of the
 book. He told Logan the Negro was
 asking too much.

The result was a threat to sue
 by Logan. The publisher changed
 his mind, but stalled a mighty long
 time before finally proceeding with
 the job.

This book includes articles or
 chapters by Leslie Pinckney Hill, W.
 E. B. DuBois, Willard S. Townsend,
 Charles H. Wesley, Frederick D.
 Patterson, Doxey A. Wilkerson,
 Gordon B. Hancock, Mary McLeod
 Bethune, George S. Schuyler, Lang-
 ston Hughes, Roy Wilkins, A. Philip
 Randolph, Sterling A. Brown, Ray-
 ford W. Logan, and Ira De A. Reid.

"The Marching Blacks" is the title
 of the new book which the Rev. A.
 Clayton Powell, Abyssinian Baptist
 church pastor and congressional
 candidate, is working on. It is to
 be a study of what the Negro
 wants and Dial Press will do the
 publishing.

Katherine Dunham's autobiog-
 raphy, which she has been doing dur-
 ing intermissions from her movie
 work and her Broadway success,
 "Tropical Revue," has been sched-
 uled for publication by Henry Holt
 and Co.

And Broadway too is on the up-
 surge as far as the Negro. Lillian
 Smith has definitely confirmed
 that she is at work on a dramatiza-
 tion of "Strange Fruit," which sev-
 eral producers are eyeing. Gilbert
 Miller is meanwhile looking for
 some playwright who will adapt
 "Canape-Vert," the prize-winning
 Haitian novel, for the stage.

Two final items. Winchell says
 Lillian Smith's best seller "Strange
 Fruit" will top 750,000 before it's
 through; coming attraction next
 week is a belated review of that de-
 bated novel on passing, "Colcorton"
 by Edith Pope (Scribners).