

Weekly Forum

Views and Reviews

THE FUTURE OF OUR CULTURE

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(From The Journal of Negro Education)

(Continued from Last Week)

It fortifies my soul to know
That though I vary truth is so
That howsoever I stray or range,
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change
I steadier step when I recall
That if I slip Thou dost not fall.

That is always the dependence
and sure footing of the cultured
heart. The man of culture is not
to be surprised, or stampeded, or
hurried. He can be neither frus-
trated nor defeated. The outward
victory and future goals do not
make his motivation. "Behold his
reward is with him," says Isaiah,
"and his work before him." What
he craves above all else is that he
shall be calm and right and faith-
ful in his place.

One lesson, nature, let me learn
of thee,

One lesson which in every wind is
blown,

One lesson of two duties kept at
one,

Though the loud world proclaim
their enmity—

Of toil unsevered from tranquility,
Of labor which in lasting fruit out-
grows

Far noisier schemes, accomplished
in repose,

Too great for haste, too high for
rivalry.

Yes, while on earth a thousand dis-
cords ring,

Man's senseless uproar mingling
with his toil.

Still do thy quiet ministers move
on,

Their glorious tasks in silence per-
fecting.

Still working, blaming still our
vain turmoil.

Laborers that shall not fail when
man is gone.

That is Matthew Arnold seeing
things under the form of eternity,
calm and wise and able to stand
against whirlwind of fire.

Some Besetments Culture

Must Meet

Now I think it important to con-
sider some of these besetments of
the spirit against which the man
of culture in our day must be pre-
pared to stand up, if need be even
alone. I choose two as of the high-
est urgency at this moment. The
first of these is the mass impact
of the whole disordered world upon
us. The second is the attitude of
mind we are called upon to sustain
towards our fellow man in the
midst of universal human conflict.
In both cases the man of genuine
culture, we are assured, may still
be calm and sure of his way, be-
cause the best thought and feeling
of all the centuries light his path.
But my own deeper concern is with
these young men and women,
children of a disadvantaged race,
who leave the preserves of this un-
iversity. How shall they stand?
With what thoughts, what feelings,
what dreams? What have they in
particular to inspire them and keep
them up?

Consider first this impact of the
whole disordered world. How shall
we resist the temptation to discour-
agement, and even to despair, when
we look upon the behaviour of
contemporary civilization as illus-
trated at this hour by government?
What would be Emerson's judge-
ment today? All the Great Powers,
without exception, are in the grip
of fear and suspicion, all groping
for some security which they do
not find, all choosing what the best
thought and feeling of the ages long
ago denounced as the way to dis-
aster. War and rumors of war and
the mad race for armament pre-
empt the international scene. "Things
are in the saddle, and ride man-
kind." Nations are measuring their
strength by land, by armies, by
volume of trade, by credit, by forts
and towers higher than those of
Babel and by no end of cunning
machines. All look forward avow-
edly to an early day, a year hence,
or two years, or five perhaps, when
they will be at each other's throats
in a mass destruction that will
wash the world again in human
blood. "Not by might nor power,
but by my spirit," says the prophet
for the Lord. But who cares? Who
among the captains and dictators
is exalting human personality at its
best as the supreme end of living?
Who loves children so sincerely as
to build about them now any sure
protection against the wrath that
should not come? What is Sarah
Cleghorn saying to America or a-
bout our civilization when it is
possible for her to write anywhere
within our borders this quatrain:
The golf links lie so near the mill
That almost every day
The laboring children can look out
And see the men at play

And around the mill is the Black
Legion and back of the Legion the
approval of a militant fascism
which completely renounces the
worth or necessity of the individual
man. The outward color of this
world is not roseate. We see
through a glass darkly. On all
sides we are compelled to witness
a gloomy procession of the old trag-
edies that have cursed mankind
from time immemorial.

We wonder that statesmen do
not court fame by trying something
new something that might succeed
in a new field of social adventure.
But they court only the old trage-
dies, and offer pretexts that were
archaic before the pyramids were
built. They denounce the prophets
and follow Machiavelli. They stand
for civilization, not culture. When
the unconscionable Mussolini tram-
ples Ethiopia under his heel, he
gives the world assurance that he
is advancing civilization. That is
precisely the assurance which
Philip of Macedon gave when he
conquered Olynthus, humbled
Athens and left the brilliant and
debauched Alexander to stride the
world. The bread lines in our
land, and the millions who make
up the relief rolls in all of the
great nations at this moment, go
down for their causes to the same
economic perversions that underlay
the refusal of the masses to work
in imperial Rome. The govern-
ment had to feed them and keep
them amused and pacified by the
extravaganzas of the circus. This
is all very old. What new thing
is there under the sun? Surely
not machines, not political corrup-
tion, not racial hatreds, not over-
weening national greed, not war.
These are ancient miscarriages of
human nature. When shall we see
them as they are, turn from them
utterly, and proclaim the divinity
of man?

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)