

# BOOK REVIEWS by GERTRUDE MARTIN

The coming of the new year is a good time for backward glances and for looking ahead. In literature, and especially in the field of literature by and about Negroes, neither prospect is too encouraging.

During 1952 Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man" was unquestionably the most outstanding novel written by a Negro. Actually, Mr. Ellison had little competition.

There was no major poetic work by a Negro poet in the past twelve months. Yet there are a number of promising young poets who have already demonstrated their ability; Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Robert Hayden among them.

In the non-fiction field there was a similar dearth of material. There were a few scholarly books of more limited appeal but no major work of general interest. The best known writers in the field of sociology and education have not published any books recently. This would include such names as Dr. Charles S. Johnson, Alain Locke, Allison Davis and E. Franklin Frazier.

Carl Rowan's book about his travels through the South probably received more attention than any other non-fiction work in 1952. For some reason, our review of the book never appeared but it was a good reportorial job which again focused attention on Dixie — without magnolias.

For some years now there have been these rather dreary summings-up here. There are probably a number of reasons why there has been such a noticeable decline in Negro literature recently.

But it would seem that to counteract the decrease in protest and problem literature there might be a comparable rise in books which have no particular racial theme. One might expect even more writers like Frank Yerby and the very able Willard Motley who do not restrict themselves to Negro characters.

At the same time one wonders what has happened to writers like Richard Wright, Ann Petry, Willard Savoy and others like them. At least one author whose last book appeared some years ago will have a book out early in 1953. That is Chester Himes whose "Cast The First Stone" will be published on January 19. Mr. Himes' earlier works are "If He Hollers Let Him Go" and "Lonely Crusade."

On the whole the prospect in general for Negro literature is not too bright for 1953. The flood of writing of some ten years ago has slowed to a trickle. The fact that economically and in civil rights the Negro's position has improved has much to do with this decrease. But the millenium has not yet been reached certainly, and in the meantime one might expect an ever broadening output.

It may well be that as the year advances there will be more books by authors whose names are not yet known and in sufficient quantity to make our rather gloomy predictions here untrue. We certainly hope so.