be clear, as with the steadily narrowing limit of supportable population the reproductive obligation of sex lessens, its unabated emotional compulsions tend to assume the proportions of a terrible—if ecstatic—enamlement. Already this appears in the current saturation of our art and literature with aspects of the struggle to rid ourselves, by rationalization, of this most ancient type of befuddlement. It is suggested in the querulous resort of certain of our intelligentsia to Europe, where achievement is not yet cleared of the mingled odor of amorousness and alcohol with which for five thousand years it has been penetrated. Under competent social scrutiny the confused and increasingly unsatisfactory handling of what are called sex problems is shown more and more to be involved with artificially induced extra-biological states of sex attraction. Inevitably with the shrinkage of the reproductive obligation these extra-biologic states will be found to be of diminishing interest and effectiveness.

With our characteristically American sentimentality in respect to sex, it is natural that the instinctive urge to reduce the emotional obfuscations of amorousness to something like their biologic proportions would be indirect and more or less unacknowledged. The numerically popular success of the movement toward prohibition, though it draws a considerable quota of the experientially convinced, quite certainly draws other numbers motivated by the instinct to seek relief from urges that exceed their function, by destroying artificial excitement. And for at least five thousand years extra-biologic amorousness has been so identified with alcohol that our popular phraseology scarcely takes account of one without the other. It is not inevitable that such general and instinctive movements as this one for the riddance of alcohol should be altogether wise in their procedure or even widely intelligent. It is normal to all mass movement that the individual assent or resistance to any deep-seated urge should appear so variably motivated. There are no doubt numbers of the adherents of prohibition whose subconscious recompense is the satisfaction they take in the deprivations of other people; just as there are ardent protagonists who under the slogan of personal liberty are masking a love of drunkenness—alcoholic or amorous—for its own sake. Nor does it affect the essentials of the problem one way or another that much of the practical resistance to the Volstead Act is mere adolescent protest against regulatory discipline, the as yet unsocialized need of doing what we like because we like it.

The variety and incongruity of the reasons for end against are only further evidences of the power of deep-seated social urges to transcend all our logic and intelligence.

To any one who will take the pains to uncover the early phases of the prohibition movement, as revealed in the pamphlets, public pronouncements, and programs of that time, it will be plain that its biologic derivation was then much more nearly conscious than it is now. This also follows the law of the emergence of wars, the generative causes of which tend, as the reality of war approaches, to disappear under a cloud of incidental emotionalism. That Frances Willard herself was perfectly clear as to the complete implication of all our hopes of social betterment in the removal of the one great source of moral and intellectual befuddlement, I think there can be no doubt. In the effort to avoid or uproot whatever blurs the edge of reality—drink, or lust, or war, or moral enthusiasm—all of which are more or less interchangeable as individual motivation, it is natural that drink should be the first to be objectively attacked. It presents a visible measure of economic convenience as a hand-hold, and strategically undermines the others. With the elimination of alcohol amorousness loses much of its enticement, and it is quite possible that the waning popularity of war is partly owed to its diminished opportunity for indulging the confusant appetites for drink and lust. That the effort to eliminate the first three occasions of emotional obfuscation should be the occasion of an accession of the last, most insidious intoxication, is perhaps the worst thing that can be said of it. For any moral enthusiasm invariably gives rise to counter-enthusiasms of immorality, against which the first frequently arrests itself, sometimes to the degree of temporary defeat. As this appears to be the present state of the prohibition movement, falling over itself in a too rapid progress toward its goal, this would seem to be the moment for both sides to abate their mutual fury of attack in a mutual recognition of the nature of the urge in which the movement takes its rise. It might prove in the end as doubtful an advantage to escape too soon as to hug too long, and on mistaken premises, a traditional release and incitement. One feels certain that a completely rationalized society would waste no more time in argument, but assign drinking privileges in conformity with demonstrable inability to perform a biologic function or achieve a preferred emotional release without it. But then ours is not, possibly never has had a genuine desire to be, a completely rationalized society.

The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain

By LANGSTON HUGHES

ONE of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.

But let us look at the immediate background of this young poet. His family is of what I suppose one would call the Negro middle class; people who are by no means rich yet never uncomfortable nor hungry—smug, contented, respectable folk, members of the Baptist church. The father goes to work every morning. He is a chief steward at a large white club. The mother sometimes does fancy sewing or supervises parties for the rich families of the town. The children go to a mixed school. In the home they read white papers and magazines. And the mother often
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says “Don’t be like niggers” when the children are bad. A frequent phrase from the father is, “Look how well a white man does things.” And so the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all the virtues. It holds of “I want to be white” runs silently through their minds. This young poet’s home is, I believe, a fairly typical home of the colored middle class. One sees immediately how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home to be a poet. He is never taught to see that beauty. He is taught rather not to see it, or if he does, to be ashamed of it when it is not according to Caucasian patterns.

For racial culture the home of a self-styled “high-class” Negro has nothing better to offer. Instead there will perhaps be more aping of things white than in a less cultured or less wealthy home. The father is perhaps a doctor, lawyer, landowner, or politician. The mother may be a social worker, or a teacher, or she may do nothing and have a maid. Father is often dark but he has usually married the lightest woman he could find. The family attend a fashionable church where few really colored faces are to be found. And they themselves draw a color line. In the North they go to white theaters and white movies. And in the South they have at least two cars and a house “like white folks.” Nordic manners, Nordic faces, Nordic hair, Nordic art (if any), and an Episcopal heaven. A very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people.

But then there are the low-down folks, the so-called common element, and they are the majority—may the Lord be praised! The people who have their nip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or the community, or too well fed, or too learned to watch the lazy world go round. They live on Seventh Street in Washington or State Street in Chicago and they do not particularly care whether they are like white folks or anybody else. Their joy runs, bang! into ecstasy. Their religion soars to a shout. Work maybe a little today, rest a little tomorrow. Play awhile. Sing awhile. O, let’s dance! These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. Whereas the better-class Negro would tell the artist what to do, the people at least let him alone when he does appear. And they are not ashamed of him—if they know he exists at all. And they accept what beauty is their own without question.

Certainly there is, for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced among his own group would put upon him, a great field of unused material ready for his art. Without going outside his race, and even among the better classes with their “white” culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro and undertones, surely, and especially for literature and the drama, there is an inexhaustible supply of themes at hand.

To these the Negro artist can give his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often, as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears. But let us look again at the mountain.

A prominent Negro clubwoman in Philadelphia paid eleven dollars to hear Raquel Meller sing Andalusian popular songs. But she told me a few weeks before she would not think of going to hear “that woman,” Clara Smith, a great black artist, sing Negro folk songs. And many an upper-class Negro church, even now, would not dream of employing a spiritual in its services. The drab melodies in white folks’ hymnbooks are much to be preferred. “We want to worship the Lord correctly and quietly. We don’t believe in ‘shouting.’ Let’s be dull like the Nordics,” they say, in effect.

The road for the serious black artist, then, who would produce a racial art is most certainly rocky and the mountain is high. Until recently he received almost no encouragement for his work from either white or colored people. The fine novels of Chestnut go out of print with neither race noticing their passing. The quaint charm and humor of Dunbar’s dialect verse brought to his in his day, largely the same kind of encouragement one would give a side-show freak (A colored man writing poetry! How odd!) or a clown (How amusing!).

The present vogue in things Negro, although it may do as much harm as good for the budding colored artist, has at least done this: it has brought him forcibly to the attention of his own people among whom for so long, unless the other race had noticed him beforehand, he was a prophet with little honor. I understand that Charles Gilpin acted for years in Negro theaters without any special acclaim from his own, but when Broadway gave him eight curtain calls, Negroes, too, began to beat a tin pan in his honor. I know a young colored writer, a manual worker by day, who had been writing well for the colored magazines for some years, but it was not until he recently broke into the white publications and his first book was accepted by a prominent New York publisher that the “best” Negroes in his city took the trouble to discover that he lived there. Then almost immediately they decided to give a grand dinner for him. But the society ladies were careful to whisper to his mother that perhaps he’d better not come. They were not sure she would have an evening gown.

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. “O, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are,” say the Negroes. “Be stereotyped, don’t go too far, don’t shatter our illusions about you, don’t amuse us too seriously. We will pay you,” say the whites. Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write “Cane.” The colored people did not praise it. The white people did not buy it. Most of the colored people who did read “Cane” hate it. They are afraid of it. Although the critics gave it good reviews the public remained indifferent. Yet (excepting the work of DuBois) “Cane” contains the finest prose written by a Negro in America. And like the singing of Robeson, it is truly racial.

But in spite of the Nordicized Negro intelligentsia and the desires of some white editors we have an honest American Negro literature already with us. Now I await the rise of the Negro theater. Our folk music, having achieved world-wide fame, offers itself to the genius of the great in-
The Color Question in South Africa

BY RUTH S. ALEXANDER

[The color problem in South Africa has been made more acute by the policy of the present Government, which frankly favors repression of both the native and the Indian inhabitants. The Government aims to diminish, ultimately to eliminate, the Indian population; it has proposed a measure restricting the areas in which Indians may live, thus establishing virtual ghettos; taking away the right to buy or lease land except in narrowly limited districts in Natal; and creating other limitations on the rights of people already living under heavy restrictions.]

Cape Town, May 1

On April 23, in a quiet and rather tense House, the Minister of the Interior, Dr. Malan, announced that, owing to a formula which had been agreed upon between his own Government and that of India, the Asiatic bill would be postponed, pending a round-table conference to discuss the whole Asiatic problem in South Africa. The crux of that formula—oh, blessed word—is the sentence which states:

The Government of the Union have impressed on the Government of India that public opinion in South Africa will not view with favor any settlement which does not hold out a reasonable prospect of safeguarding the maintenance of Western standards of life by just and legitimate means.

General Smuts, for the Opposition, gave the Government his rather lugubrious blessing, and the House agreed formally and unanimously to the postponement. The time and place of the conference have not yet been announced, but the oppressive bill, in any event, cannot come before Parliament until next year.

On this result of their visit the Government of India deputation, consisting of Mr. Paddison, an Englishman; two Indian members of the Council of State; and the Indian secretary of the deputation, Mr. Bajpai, have every reason to congratulate themselves. That their tact, their knowledge, and their unfailing courtesy under conditions calculated to try that courtesy to the uttermost were important elements in bringing it about cannot be doubted. In view of the feeling in South Africa on what General Smuts called "this very great and difficult question," the Government, in consenting to the round-table conference, has