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Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's *Negro*

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Edited by Alan Warren Friedman
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BECCKETT
in
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The Translations for
Nancy Cunard's NEGRO
(1934)

EDITED BY ALAN WARREN FRIEDMAN

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Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Acknowledgments ix
Introduction xi

Foreword to *Negro* (1933): Nancy Cunard 1

**Translations by Samuel Beckett**

“The Best Negro Jazz Orchestras,” Robert Goffin 4

“Armstrong,” Ernst Moerman 11

“Hot Jazz,” Robert Goffin 13

“Summary of the History of Hayti,” Jenner Bastien 17

“A Note on Haytian Culture,” Ludovic Morin Lacombe 27

“The King of Gonaives,” Jacques Boulenger 29

“The Child in Guadeloupe,” E. Flavia-Léopold 34

“Black and White in Brazil,” Benjamin Péret 41

“Sambo without Tears,” Georges Sadoul 49


“Races and Nations,” Léon Pierre-Quint 60

“The Negress in the Brothel,” René Crevel 69

“A Short Historical Survey of Madagascar,” J.J. Rabearivelo 74

“The Ancient Bronzes of Black Africa,” Charles Ratton 82

“Essay on Styles in the Statuary of the Congo,” Henri Lavachery 90

“Magic and Initiation among the Peoples of Ubanghi-Shari,” B.P. Feuilloley 99

“‘Primitive’ Life and Mentality,” Raymond Michelet 108
“A Negro Empire: Belgium,” E. Stiers 149
“French Imperialism at Work in Madagascar,” Georges Citerne and Francis Jourdain 159

APPENDIX 1

Negro: An Anthology (1934): Contents 162

APPENDIX 2

Contributors to Negro Whose Work Beckett Translated 169

APPENDIX 3

Extant French Originals of the Beckett Translations:
(a) René Crevel, “La Négresse des Bordels” 173
(b) B[ernard] P. Feuilloley, “La magie et l’initiation chez les peuples de l’Oubanghi-Shari” 177
(c) Henri Lavachery, “Essai sur les styles dans la statuaire du Congo” 179
(d) Ernst Moerman, “Armstrong,” 186
(e) Benjamin Péret, “Noirs sur blancs. Introduction. (Fragment)” 187
(f) Léon Pierre-Quint, “ Races et Nations” 192
(g) Georges Sadoul, “Le Nègre à l’Usage des Enfants” 199

Index 204
Illustrations

Nancy Cunard (c. 1931) xii
Nancy Cunard (1923) xiii
Nancy Cunard and Henry Crowder at the Hours Press (1930) xiv
Nancy Cunard with her Hours Press books (spring 1930) xv
Nancy Cunard in Lamothe-Fénelon (August 1963) xxiii
Louis Armstrong 10
Jenner Bastien 17
The Citadelle above Milot in Hayti 18
The royal Palace of Sans-Soucis in the early 19th century; ruins of the palace at present 23
La Ferrière—King Christophe’s Citadel in Hayti 24
Toussaint L’Ouverture 25
Ludovic Morin Lacombe 27
E. Flavia-Leopold 34
Brazilian Negroes dancing the Maxixe 47
“In his natural state the Negro is an assassin” 49
“The Negro is a drunkard”; “The Negro is a sloth”; “The Negro is a buffoon” 50
“The Negro is a soldier”; “The Negro is a cop” 51
“The Negro is a slave”; “The white man is kind to the Negro”; “But the white colonial will always be superior to the Negro” 52
“Children of every colour battle against capitalism side by side”; “How the white colonist treats the Negro child”; “The white child defends the Negro child”; “From the ‘American Daily Worker’” 55
Colonial Negro tailor in a small factory in France 58
J. J. Rabéarivelo 74
Sakalave warrior, Madagascar 76
Sakalave woman, Madagascar  78
Memorial post, Sakalave, Madagascar  79
A grave with carved wooden posts, S.W. Madagascar  81
Bronze warrior, 16th century, Benin, Nigeria  84
Mortuary figure of the Bakuni, Loango, French Congo  86
Snuffbox of the Badjok tribe, Belgian Congo  87
Ritual Altar for the ceremonies of initiation  103
Sâ-yâ-mâli’s hut; Sâ-yâ-mâli the magician  106
Dinka place of sacrifice, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan  116
Luo magician, Uganda  129
Uncaptioned drawings  131
Didinga girls arriving at a dance, N. Uganda  140
Blast furnace at Ufipa, Tanganyka  144
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For Jane Marcus
Introduction

Samuel Beckett’s most extensive publication (more than 63,000 words) consists of nineteen translations he did for Nancy Cunard’s *Negro: An Anthology* (1934). Both *Negro* and Beckett’s work for it are little known and less valued, perhaps because Cunard has, until recently, been culturally and historically marginalized or ignored, while Beckett has been constructed as either an apolitical (post)modernist, the literary man in exile (like Joyce), or a recovering Irishman reclaimed for nationalist purposes, rather than a willing participant in *Negro*’s racial, political, and aesthetic agenda. In the prevailing view, Beckett’s contribution was nothing special: “They are solid, impersonal translations, undistinguished by any individual touch. Nothing in them would draw attention to Beckett as translator.” And his motivation was, supposedly, strictly pecuniary: “the translations done for Nancy Cunard’s 1934 *Negro anthology* . . . [were] to generate income and, in retrospect, disparaging remarks by the translator.” Beckett critics who acknowledge these translations at all usually adhere to this view.

Yet such judgments are more asserted than earned, and questionable at best: citing the 1970 Federman and Fletcher *Bibliography* of Beckett as their source, neither Deirdre Bair nor Roger Little seems to have spent much time examining *Negro*. Yet whatever its failings may be, I would argue that *Negro* is an extraordinary achievement and Beckett’s contribution to it are substantial in quality as well as quantity. Beckett, in fact, contributed more than anyone except Cunard herself and her then-lover Raymond Michelet, Cunard’s “comrade and collaborator in chief,” who wrote several major essays, provided an “Ethnographical Map of Negro Africa,” and drew pictures of Congo masks. W.J. McCormack, one of the few critics to offer any serious analysis of Beckett’s translations, notes that “[n]o other translator contributed more than five pieces (these from Spanish),” and that Beckett translated all but a few of the French contributions: “Work on and in the *Negro Anthology* constitutes his largest prose work, and hence his largest publication of any kind” (McCormack 76). Since the question of whether and how much Beckett was paid seems impossible to answer with certitude (see below), it might be well to consider other explanations for his *Negro* work and to ask why it should be taken seriously. Four possible answers suggest themselves: Beckett’s lifelong interest in translation, his deep and abiding friendship with Nancy
Nancy Cunard. Painting by John Banting (c. 1931).
Cunard, his support for the causes she espoused, and his own political (especially racial) values and commitments. All of these may have played a greater role than money.

Nancy Cunard (1896–1965) was a political, social, and literary phenomenon—but she has been virtually written out of cultural history, marginalized by being transmuted into an iconic figure. She is depicted fictively in, for example, Michael Arlen’s *The Green Hat*; Aldous Huxley’s *Antic Hay, Those Barren Leaves*, and *Point Counterpoint*; Richard Aldington’s story “Now Lies She There”; and perhaps James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. And she is famously represented in sculpture by Brancusi, and paintings and photographs by Cecil Beaton, Wyndham Lewis, and Man Ray, among many others. Born into privilege and comfort, Cunard was the great-granddaughter of the founder of the Cunard shipping fortune, and the daughter and heir of Sir Bache Cunard, although some suggest that she was, as she would have preferred, the product of an affair that her mother, the American-born socialite Lady Emerald Cunard, had with the writer George Moore.

Always uneasy with her mother’s social world, Cunard fled her class and wealth as soon as she could, eloping with Sidney Fairbairn in 1916 (when she was twenty), the same year in which her first poems were published, in Edith Sitwell’s *Wheels: An Anthology of Verse*. The marriage lasted less than two years, after which she lived with a group of writers and artists she called a “Corrupt Coterie.” In 1920 she moved to Paris, where she flaunted a lifestyle that was both denounced as outrageous and hailed as a model of the “liberated woman.” She published several volumes of poetry, befriended many of the prominent modernists, and championed both the surrealist movement (providing it large financial support despite its misogyny) and the Communist Party. Considering herself an anarchist and a nonjoiner, she never formally became a party member, but in *Negro* she insisted that only Communism “throws down the barriers of race as finally as it wipes out class distinctions. The Communist world-order is the solution of the race problem for the Negro.” (See
Cunard’s foreword reprinted below.) Hence, Negro’s goal of fostering racial justice and equality (the “Black” of my title) can be accomplished, Cunard maintains, only through Communism (the “Red”)—and a goal of the book’s publication was to raise funds for the French Communist Party. The two causes were inextricably linked in Cunard’s vision and in her work.

A sexually promiscuous and politically outspoken woman whom many viewed as dangerous (“a person in her own right, with more money and freedom of movement than seemed safe or appropriate” [Chisholm 105]), Cunard was “a poet, essayist, editor, journalist, war correspondent, memoirist, translator, avant-garde publisher, African art collector, and political activist,” and also “a tireless advocate, a progressive spirit, a charismatic dynamo, a woman who fascinated and frightened people with her passions” (S. Friedman 63). It is ironic then that, after having been villified and threatened by newspapers and hate mail during her lifetime as a radical and subversive, Cunard subsequently underwent the ignominy of becoming a cultural footnote, her political and publishing work largely ignored by critics and historians who refused to take it or her seriously.

But although her race, class, gender, and lifestyle were all “wrong,” Cunard’s achievements are genuine and substantial. She spent a lifetime deeply and actively committed to literary innovation, racial justice, and radical politics, complementary rather than discrete activities for her. Her important literary work began with her founding of the Hours Press, which she established not to make money but to promote experimental writing and her political causes, though it was one of the few financially successful little presses of her day. From 1928 to 1931 she published Richard Aldington, Robert Graves, George Moore, and Ezra Pound, as well as “surrealists, homosexuals and radicals from Louis Aragon to Laura Riding, Havelock Ellis to Brian Howard,” and Beckett’s Whoroscope (1930).
When she turned her attention to what proved to be her major work, *Negro: An Anthology*, Cunard realized that it was far too vast an undertaking for her press, and that its demands on her time meant she would have to make a choice—and so the Hours Press died after twenty-four publications, most of which were beautifully and painstakingly done, in less than four years.

While compiling *Negro* during the early 1930s, Cunard, in public action that accorded with her private life, also mounted an impassioned campaign—both rhetorical and fund-raising—in a controversy that many others avoided or down-played. The "Scottsboro boys," nine African-American teenagers, were imprisoned in Alabama in 1931 on trumped-up accusations of raping white women. Sentenced to death despite the lack of evidence against them, they were spared and eventually freed thanks largely to the public protest generated by those, including a very outspoken Cunard, who took up their cause. Because the Communist Party was strongly supportive and the NAACP seemed to her only tepidly engaged, Cunard in *Negro* exalted the former as the great champion of racial justice, while assailing the latter. Her long essay, "Scottsboro—and Other Scottsboros," which is included in *Negro*, argues with impressive force and intelligence that the worst thing about the horrific Scottsboro case is that it was not an "isolated instance of race terrorization" in America, but a "link in a whole system of oppression" that produces "murder and legal lynching" against the "Negro worker . . . by the white ruling class, simply because he is a worker and black." What was unusual was the outcry—and its success in saving the lives of the accused men.

Cunard’s commitment to justice also manifested itself in her war work, which began around the same time. For the Associated Negro Press (which served "some seventy newspapers"), she covered the debates at the League of Nations over the Ethiopian War, attacking the "suprahuman cynicism" of the Western powers. Serving as a freelance journalist (prima-
rily for the *Manchester Guardian*), she espoused the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War, presciently viewing it as a microcosm of Europe’s larger political struggles; assisted refugees interned near the Franco-Spanish border; and printed pamphlets of war-inspired poems: *Poets of the World Defend the Spanish People* (including Louis Aragon, Langston Hughes, Garcia Lorca, Pablo Neruda, Tristan Tzara, plus Auden’s “Spain”) and *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*.19 (Beckett contributed the briefest of entries to the latter work: “UPHEREPUBLIC!”)20 During the Second World War Cunard, “a daily cog in the war machinery,” as she self-deprecatingly called herself (*These Were the Hours* 201), did translations in England for the Free French and published the anthology *Poems for France* (1944; reissued 1947). She also wrote against colonialism for the *Barbados Observer* and *Ethiopian News*; worked to prevent the release from prison of Oswald Mosley, the British Fascist leader; and monitored the Fascist broadcasts of Ezra Pound, a one-time lover of hers who became a political enemy. Benstock, for one, praises Cunard’s war work highly: “no other writer of the expatriate group—male or female—responded as fully and as creatively as she did to the war against Fascism” (424).

Off and on between 1928 and 1935 Cunard lived and worked with Henry Crowder, “the most crucial relationship in Nancy’s life.... Through Crowder she became ... a woman who chose, deliberately, to cross the boundaries of convention, class and race in pursuit of a cause.” A black jazz pianist, singer, and composer from Georgia, Crowder became for her “a cause, a symbol, a weapon, a victim” (Chisholm 118). He “introduced her to the arts, music, ideas, and politics of the Harlem Renaissance and told her stories about the indignities and inequities of black life in the United States” (S. Friedman 65). Cunard juxtaposed Crowder to her racist mother, who strongly objected to her way of life; in retaliation, Cunard savagely denounced her in a pamphlet about racial injustice and inequality, *Black Man and White Ladyship*. Unsurprisingly, the final break with her mother (“la rupture bientôt définitive de Nancy avec ses origines”21) resulted from her spitefully sending the pamphlet as a Christmas greeting to Lady Cunard’s rich and powerful friends.22 In his memoir, *As Wonderful As All That?* Crowder represents himself as preferring peace to confrontation and as seeking rather than fleeing a comfortable life; he calls the printing and distributing of the pamphlet “a most idiotic thing to do .... Why she ever wrote that atrocious piece is more than I know” (*As Wonderful* 119). Nonetheless, *Negro*, largely inspired by Crowder’s stories and teachings, was dedicated to “my first Negro friend.” And when he died Cunard wrote of her debt to him: “Henry made me. I thank him.”23

Crowder’s memoir is the most intimate and extended portrait we have of Cunard, though it is very much a partial document in both senses
of that word, with an overt agenda to serve as an exemplum and warning: “It is my hope that the experiences which I have gone through may be of some value to colored men who become enamored with white women” (*As Wonderful As All That?* 19). Written in 1935–36, shortly after their final breakup, and in collaboration with Hugo Speck, an American journalist, *As Wonderful As All That?* was not published until 1987, having been lost, found, and then altered to an unknown extent. Its editor says that “[t]he text published here is the full text of the manuscript . . . with only minor editing,” but he provides no specifics beyond saying that “the title of the book and the chapter headings were selected by the editor.” Jane Marcus, however, reads the memoir as a “slander on the reputation of Nancy Cunard,” and suggests that it may be the work of several hands and part of a plot to “discredit Nancy’s Left politics” (“Bonding and Bondage” 62n5). Certainly, the memoir’s bitter tone contrasts strikingly with correspondence between Crowder and Cunard. In an early letter to her, Crowder sounds very different: “You say you are one of the toilers of the world, and that you must get back to your printing. . . . How I love you for wanting and trying to [do] something of a tangible nature.” And long after the end of their relationship, Crowder, addressing her as “Dearest Nancy,” writes that her “very nice post card . . . pleasantly reminded [him] of days gone by”; that his “pleasure and delight [at her sending him her recent book] was unbounded”; that he is “indeed profoundly impressed by what I have already read and shall read on to the end with eagerness that I know will be fully rewarded”; that “[i]t really has been a wonderful experience for me to have met and known you, and to have been associated with you during the years.” He then writes, “If I can be of any assistance to you in any way whatever, please let me know. It will be a privilege and a pleasure to serve you.” And after urging her, “Please write when you can spare the time from your busy life,” he signs off with “As Always, Lovingly, *Henry.*”25 All of this contrasts sharply in tone and substance with *As Wonderful As All That?*

Upon first meeting Cunard, Crowder was struck by her looks and style: “. . . the intense though impressive eagerness of her attitude. . . . Everything about her even down to small mannerisms demonstrated high breeding and graciousness. . . . [S]he did make a very striking appearance that compelled attention” (*As Wonderful* 63). The memoir suggests that their tempestuous affair, perhaps more obsessive than loving, brought out the worst in both of them. Crowder describes Cunard as cavalier and inconsiderate; expansive to a fault; overtly unfaithful; always restless for something, somewhere, someone new; often drunk or throwing temper tantrums; and almost invariably irresponsible. Crowder was alternately compelled and repulsed by her, living off her (while insisting that he should
work for his keep, as he did at the Hours Press), scandalized more by his own lapdog behavior than by her flaunting of her many affairs. Giving scant attention to Cunard’s intellectual and cultural life and to her being “a very hard worker” (Gordon 46), the memoir anticipates later critical antipathy by paying her only backhanded compliments and expressing skepticism about Negro: “I hardly thought her the right person to produce such a work and obtain the best results” (As Wonderful 116). According to the memoir, Crowder remained critical of what her labors produced: “The book to my way of thinking does not justify the effort put into the making of it for the very good reason that she did not know what she was doing. . . . The thought and plan were brilliant, but they were very badly executed” (As Wonderful 118). Though Crowder offers no basis for this judgment, Vincent Cronin speculates that Black Man and White Ladyship did Cunard’s cause great harm: it “flaunted her association with Crowder in the worst possible taste. This outburst of hatred shocked her former lover, Louis Aragon, and Andre Breton too. They questioned the motives behind her concern about racial discrimination and this weakened the impact, three years later, of her big important anthology” (144). Such doubts may similarly concern those, like African-Americans generally, who continue to ignore or trivialize Negro.

Yet the Crowder memoir does praise the production of Negro as “an extraordinary example of persistence in the face of tremendous odds, the greatest of which was ignorance,” while stressing, as Cunard herself does, that he had done much to help her overcome her ignorance:

she was interested and eager to learn. I told her of Negro writers; told her where she could get books on and by them. Gradually, she began to build up her library with Negro books. She took a yearly subscription to The Crisis, a magazine published by Negroes in New York, and in which she published “Concerning ‘Does anyone know any Negroes?’” (September 1931). American Negro papers also made their appearance. (As Wonderful 83)

Since Crowder was alternately ashamed and afraid to be seen with Cunard (especially in America), she made her trips to New York and the West Indies without him, meeting and corresponding with many of the people who later contributed to Negro. She was a tireless crusader, an obsessive researcher and correspondent, persistent with people, and a fast learner.

Negro: An Anthology—part plea for racial justice, part history of black suffering, part demonstration of extraordinary black achievement against enormous odds—is the great, multifarious centerpiece of Cunard’s
life's work. In a circular sent out in April 1931, she both announced the project and appealed for contributions:

There will be at least four separate sections:

1. The contemporary Negro in America, S. America, West Indies, Europe. (Writers, painters, musicians and other artists and personalities.) With photographs.

2. Musical section. Last-century and modern American Negro compositions. (Spirituals, Jazz, Blues, etc.)—Reproduced. As much African tribal music as obtainable—Reproduced. This section is in charge of the composer George Antheil.


4. Political and sociological, (the colonial system, Liberia, etc. by French, English and American writers—the French translated beside the original text. Accounts of lynchings, persecutions and race prejudice.

The book also to contain—Poems by Negroes, Poems addressed to them. A list of museums containing African art. Reproductions of Colored Advertisements. . . .

I want outspoken criticism, comment and comparison from the Negro on the present-day civilisations of Europe, America, South America, the West Indies, African Colonies, etc.—where conditions are best for Colored people—individual documents, letters, photographs from those that have travelled and can judge of the attitude of diverse countries and races.²⁷

The final product, though omitting the French originals of translated work, comes remarkably close to fulfilling this manifesto.

Cunard was firm about what Negro was not: “this book is not a literary anthology but a very large symposium indeed with a definite and clearly defined intent: to throw light on the appalling way the entire colour ‘question’ is handled.”²⁸ Conceived as “no less than a comprehensive history of the cultural, social, political, and artistic achievements of the black people of the world,”²⁹ Negro is, as one of its contributors called it, “une véritable encyclopédie de la question nègre.”³⁰ A remarkable tome weighing nearly eight pounds, Negro contains 855 pages with more than 200 written entries by some 150 contributors, including essays by Harold Acton, Theodore Dreiser, W.E.B. DuBois, Michael Gold, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, George Padmore,³¹ and William Carlos
INTRODUCTION

Williams (his embarrassing "The Colored Girls of Passenack"), and poems by Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Louis Zukofsky. A virtual ethnography of 1930s racial, historic, artistic, political, and economic culture, *Negro* is divided into seven sections: "America" (the longest section, about one-third of the book), "Negro Stars," "Music," "Poetry," "West Indies and South America," "Europe," and "Africa" (the second longest section, about twenty pages shorter than "America"). The anthology begins with Cunard's prefatory racial and political statement of purpose: to record "the struggles and achievements, the persecutions and the revolts against them of the Negro peoples" and to demonstrate that the "Communist world-order is the solution of the race problem for the Negro." (See foreword below.) This agenda also finds expression in the hundreds of illustrations of contributors and subjects: at the end of the contents pages, Cunard writes: "It will be noted that some only of the articles carry the author's photograph. These are the writings of Negroes or of those of Negro descent." Only blacks are pictured. (Appendix 1 reproduces *Negro's* table of contents.)

With the exception of a facsimile edition in 1969, the only reprinting of *Negro* since 1934 is Hugh Ford's 460-page abridged version (1970, 1996). Largely retaining Cunard's divisions and proportions, Ford reconfigures and provides appropriate titles for the seven subsections of "America" that he carves out of her eleven. After Langston Hughes's prefatory poem, "I, Too" (a "dark" response to Whitman's "I Hear America Singing"), Ford's sections include "Slavery," "Patterns of Negro Life and Expression," "Negro History and Literature," "Negro Education and Law," "Accounts of Racial Injustice," "Negroes and Communism," and "Scottsboro Case." He also makes "Negro Sculpture and Ethnology," one of her "Africa" subsections, into a main section. Ford's criteria for inclusion in the abridged *Negro*, he says, are quality and continuing significance: "the historical importance of the piece; its value as commentary on contemporary racial developments; its particular relevancy to racial problems in the United States; its availability . . . ; and its quality as writing of a general interest" (xxix). Without singling them out for discussion, he includes eight of the nineteen works that, he comments, Beckett "translated into impeccable English" (xxi). I include all nineteen here, reprinted in the order of their original appearance in *Negro*.

Among the highlights of Cunard's "America" section are Lincoln's "Proclamation of Emancipation" ("annotated"); essays on the history of blacks in America (including DuBois's "Black America"), Nat Turner's rebellion, lynchings and chain gangs, the Ku Klux Klan, black leaders like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and "Three Great Negro Women"—Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman; ar-
articles on the relationship of racism and communism, including “Marxism and the American Negro” and “Blacks Turn Red”; reprints from such controversial newspapers as the Daily Worker, the Harlem Liberator, and the Negro Worker. Cunard herself wrote “Harlem Reviewed” (a mostly upbeat account of her visit to Harlem that ends: “Up with an all-Communist Harlem in an all-Communist United States!”); “A Reactionary Negro Organisation” (an attack on the NAACP for its bourgeois liberal attitude and on the conservative DuBois, whose essay immediately follows); “The American Moron and the American of Sense” (excerpts from letters, mostly hostile, she received after newspaper attacks on her, “led by Hearst’s yellow sheets,” for her stay in Harlem while she collected materials for Negro); and “Scottsboro—and Other Scottsboros” (her impassioned analysis of the Scottsboro case). Cunard also includes a glossary she compiled, “Some Negro Slang,” and interweaves editorial commentary on many of the contributions, stating, for example, her “profoundest and uttermost disagreement” with John Frederick Matheus’s praise of DuBois and The Crisis, the newspaper he edited. In addition to the musical score for “Creed (to the Memory of SACCO and VANZETTI),” Crowder contributed, “Where Color Prejudice Is Not a Creed” and “Hitting Back,” which juxtapose Europe and America in terms of racial attitudes. Europe, where “color prejudice . . . is never, as in America, a religion or a creed” (“Where Color”), should be toured by American Negroes, he urges, who will find it relatively inexpensive, educational, and pleasurable, as he did. America, on the other hand, is a place defined by racial prejudice and violence, although Crowder is always victorious in the anecdotes he recounts, outfighting or outsmarting his white antagonists (“Hitting Back”).

“Negro Stars” concerns success stories—“The Best Negro Jazz Orchestras,” theater and film, Harlem dancing, Louis Armstrong, Josephine Baker, and the black boxer Bob Scanlon—while “Music” both explores ways that music is intrinsic to American, Creole, West Indian, and African culture (“The Musical Genius of the American Negro”; “Is the African Musical?”) and reproduces numerous scores collected from indigenous peoples. “Poetry,” the shortest section, contains “By Negro Poets” (including Bontemps, Cullen, and Hughes), “West Indian Poetry,” and “Poetry by White Poets on Negro Themes” (including Alfred Kreymborg, Louis Zukofsky, and Cunard’s “Southern Sheriff,” in which she assumes the thoroughly nasty persona of naked racism until the final lines, presumably spoken in her own voice: “That is the Southern justice, / Not lynch-mobs, but part of the Law speaking”).34

“West Indies and South America,” “Europe,” and “Africa” offer a melange of historical, political, and cultural essays on African and Afri-
can-diasporic labor and living conditions, imperialism, race relations, religion and ritual, ethnology and folklore, language, proverbs, and riddles. She includes pictorial essays on West African sculpture, Congo sculpture, and Congo masks, plus a list of museums containing African art. Cunard contributes “Jamaica, the Negro Island” (a detailed history of slavery, the antislavery struggle, emancipation, and continuing racial and economic domination by the British and the United Fruit Co., much of it observed first hand) and “Colour Bar” (about British racial discrimination, with government support, in public accommodations).

Beckett’s friendship with Cunard began with a contest the Hours Press ran in 1930 for the best poem under one hundred lines on the subject of time: Beckett’s hastily written, last-minute entry, Whoroscope, which won the £10 prize and Cunard’s enthusiastic response, became his first separately published work. Cunard writes that the name on the submission meant nothing to her at the time (These Were the Hours Ill), but the relationship developed quickly, becoming one that inspired great loyalty on both their parts as well as a long and warm, if broken, correspondence. Cunard visited Beckett frequently and brought him presents when he was recuperating from a stabbing assault in 1938; in the 1950s Beckett, at her request, signed copies of Whoroscope for Cunard and returned them to her (presumably for the money—”which she certainly needed” [Chisholm 306]—that they would bring). The gap of nearly two decades in their relationship ended when, after seeing a London production of Waiting for Godot in 1955, Cunard wrote to Beckett praising it. Beckett responded with delight, and subsequently sent her, in addition to the signed Whoroscopes, copies of Godot, inscribed “for Nancy with love from Samuel Paris April 1956,” and of Poems in English, inscribed “for Nancy with love from Sam Paris July 1963.” Anticipating her new work, he asked to be put on the subscription list for her books on African ivories (5 April 1956) and on George Moore (23 September 1956). After another hiatus, he responded to her request: “Of course you may use WHOROSCOPE in your book on the Hours Press” (17 July 1963). In appreciation, she wrote “For Sam: Dec 15, 1963,” an elegiac poem about writing and striving, in which, she says, “You gave” (HRHRC).

Beckett’s letters to Cunard during the 1950s and 1960s are full of details about his ongoing work, both new writing and productions. He assures her, “I still have Negro snug on my shelves” (5 April 1956), and he conveys an excitement he knew she would share: “Godot reopening Broadway November with an ALL NEGRO CAST! That’s my best news” (23 September 1956). His letters were invariably signed with “Love,” “Much love,” or even “Much love, dear Nancy” (5 April 1956). The friendship remained deep and lasting until Cunard, “an anorexic alco-
holic,” died in 1965. Beckett had had Godot’s Lucky invoke Cunard’s name six times in his crazed monologue; but it was in the year of Cunard’s terrible death that, coincidentally or not, Beckett began to create his gallery of attenuated female sufferers, dying or dead of attrition or inanition, in such works as Come and Go (1965), Eh Joe (1965), Not I (1972), Footfalls (1976), and Rockaby (1981). Taken together, they represent, among other things, a Beckettean homage to Cunard.

In the only reference he makes to Beckett, Crowder says that it was years prior to Negro, and hence shortly after they first met, that Cunard told him she had given Beckett “quite a large sum of money. Naturally I was surprised because he was a very recent acquaintance. When I inquired why she gave it to him she stated it was because he seemed to be in need; that she felt like doing it” (As Wonderful 76). This generosity of Cunard’s, rather than contracted wages, could help to explain Beckett’s subsequent contribution to Negro, but the question of payment for Negro contributors remains a vexed one. Citing Beckett’s letter of 9 October 1931 to Thomas MacGreevy, James Knowlson, aligning himself with Bair and Little in this matter, says that Beckett “was paid twenty-five pounds” for his translations. McCormack maintains that, as Cunard
was rich and generous, she could have assisted Beckett (as Crowder says
she did earlier) without requiring anything in return ("Samuel Beckett"
75), though she was certainly keen to have him do the translations. Marcus
argues that Cunard paid none of her contributors because she had little
money left when she was compiling Negro (presumably the result of being
cut off by her mother and because the Great Depression had hit), and she
financed its publication with fortuitous settlements from libel lawsuits she
filed against newspapers that attacked her relationship to “people of color”
("Bonding and Bondage" 60, 62n5), a coincidence that Cunard proclaimed
“Poetic justice!” Ford concurs with Marcus, writing that Beckett was
among those Cunard persuaded “to contribute selections [to Negro] as
part of an effort to focus attention on the Negro dilemma” (foreword to
Cunard, These Were the Hours xii), and adding that several potential “con­
tributors balked when they learned that Nancy did not intend to pay for
material” (Negro xxi). Those closest to her at the time of her making Ne­
gro attest to her impoverished state. Georges Sadoul writes, “Nancy Cunard
n’était plus elle-même dans une situation très aisée.” Chauffeur, cook,
maid, and gardener all had to go, and she was forced to sell valuable furni­
ture inherited from her father in order to live. Raymond Michelet, who
worked closest with Cunard to produce Negro, concurs: “qu’il s’agit de
collaborations bénévoles, et non rétribuées!”

Most notable among those who balked was Claude McKay, who had
been “very excited about [her] book” and thought it might serve as “the
rallying-point for a strong new expression.” McKay’s withdrawal from
the project may have been partly because of hostility to it (from the Yellow
Press, hate mail, and British and American intelligence), but his letters to
Cunard detail his unhappiness at learning that no payment would be forth­
coming. Responding to McKay, Cunard insists “that collaborations to
this anthology were ALL voluntary, and that it was quite impossible to
envisage any payment... [H]ad I thought you expected payment I would
have immediately told you this was impossible... Again, I must repeat: if
collaborators had had to be paid it would have been out of the question to
take on this work.” Holding firm, Cunard herself wrote the pieces that
replaced the ones McKay withdrew.

What else was going on for Beckett at the time of his Negro trans­
lations? Beckett produced them during a period of personal and profes­
sional difficulty: he was increasingly alienated from Ireland, his mother,
and academic life at Trinity College Dublin (he famously said “he could
not bear teaching to others what he did not know himself”). His father
died suddenly in 1933, and Beckett underwent Kleinian psychoanalysis.
Sickly at times, often at loose ends and indolent, he claimed, “I can’t
write anything at all, can’t imagine even the shape of a sentence, nor take
notes.” Yet in these years, as Knowlson puts it, “much was happening to him intellectually” (113). He was working productively much of this time, and in many genres. He wrote criticism (essays on Joyce [1929] and Proust [1931]); poetry, including Whoroscope and “From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore: For Henry Crowder to Sing”;51 fiction (More Pricks Than Kicks [1934] and Dream of Fair to middling Women, published posthumously in 1992); parody (Le Kid52 and Le Concentrisme, a biographical lecture on a nonexistent French poet, Jean du Chas, who became a character in Dream); and other translations (including surrealist poetry by André Breton and Paul Eluard into English and, with others, the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” section of Joyce’s Finnegans Wake into French).53

“Exhilarated by the use of several languages,” Beckett increasingly pursued the deepening interest that led, after World War II, to his writing his novels and plays in French. In Dream of Fair to middling Women, Beckett includes an untranslated letter in French (19–22), and then writes of that language’s appeal:

the writing of, say, Racine or Malherbe, perpendicular, diamanté, is pitted, is it not, and sprigged with sparkles; the flints and pebbles are there, no end of humble tags and commonplaces. They have no style, they write without style, do they not, they give you the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margaret. Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want. (Dream 48)

The notion of writing “without style” is the often-cited explanation for why Beckett came to write in French, though he has also said, “It was more exciting for me—writing in French.”55

Yet Beckett’s switch to French as his medium of composition may have also been a political act, a gesture of solidarity with the people he had fought and suffered with during the war.56 Beckett’s politics, which are underexplored terrain, were long viewed as confined to obscure work for the French Resistance, helping the Irish Red Cross establish a hospital at St. Lô in Normandy after the war,57 and dedicating Catastrophe (1982) to Vaclav Havel, then an imprisoned dissident in Czechoslovakia.58 Certainly, Beckett displayed little interest in partisan politics (especially Irish), since he lacked faith that nationalism could improve the world. But his commitment to French freedom and his antipathy toward Hitler were genuine and deep, if based more on loyalty to friends than on an abstract cause: “I was fighting against the Germans, who were making life hell for my friends, and not for the French nation” (qtd in Gordon 140). In the most difficult circumstance, he embraced the country that had received
him in exile: “I preferred France in war to Ireland in peace” (Shenker 2). His work for the French Resistance was sufficiently valued to earn him the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française for “his effectiveness as an information source in an important intelligence network.”

The year the war finally ended, 1945, proved a watershed for Beckett: he worked to reclaim St. Lô from its status as “The Capital of the Ruins”; he experienced what he called his “revelation” that transformed his writing (and that, in ironic replay, Krapp self-mockingly calls “[t]he vision at last”); and he became a French writer, thus inaugurating the period of extraordinary creativity that Beckett referred to as “one great spurt of enthusiasm” and that produced Waiting for Godot, the trilogy (Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable), Eleutheria, and numerous short works of fiction. The “revelation” inspired Beckett to break with what had gone before, what he called “my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel.” He was acutely aware of, and eager to escape, the burden of Joyce’s influence: “I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.” So writing in French was also partly inspired by a desire to break with Joyce’s continuing strong presence. George Steiner explicitly links the two motivations, suggesting that, in the aftermath of the war’s “great terrors and massacres,” Joyce “was no longer exemplary” because “the slightest eloquence becomes unbearable” after words have “proved so distant from the facts of the inhuman.” Hence Beckett’s vision of nothingness, and his need to find a way of expressing it, required a radical break with the past: “To voice that ‘nothingness,’ one switches languages” (Steiner 92).

Beckett’s postwar writings, as Lois Gordon argues, grew out of his experiences and writings both prior to and during the war, so that continuity and rupture contend for primacy in his later years. Just as Beckett’s writing in French seems, at least in part, a political gesture, so too was his contribution to Cunard’s antiracist enterprise years earlier. The writer of “The Capital of the Ruins” (1946) also signed the United Nations-sponsored Manifesto by Nobel Prize Laureates against Hunger and Under-development (24 June 1981), an appeal for relief of those suffering from hunger and privation. As Knowlson writes, “He was deeply committed to human rights; he firmly and totally opposed apartheid and was hostile from an early age to all forms of racism; he supported human rights movements throughout the world, including Amnesty International and Oxfam; he supported the freedom movement in Eastern Europe” (21). In the
early 1930s the same writer was a staunch supporter of the *Negro* project, which, only superficially, seems highly unlikely for Beckett.

Cunard and Beckett were drawn together, then, by a number of factors. For one thing, they shared aesthetic taste, as her excitement over *Whoroscope* demonstrated, and commitment to a project that made little distinction between the aesthetic and the political. Cunard, for one, saw them as inextricably linked: having been drawn to the surrealists through her affair with Louis Aragon (1924), she stayed to praise their integrity and agenda: “The Surréalist painters and writers—with their hatred of oppression, their respect for the achievements of all races, their sound ethnographical knowledge—have drawn inspiration from Negro Africa, either directly or indirectly. They are in harmony with its symbolism, its often highly developed abstract work, almost as abstract as their own.”63 And most of the surrealists took what seemed the logical next step: joining the Communist Party. Patricia Clements writes of Cunard that *Negro* “turned an early surrealist interest in African art to precise political purpose. . . . Born to privilege and official art, she moved to the opposing avant-garde, then systematically politicized her idea of art” (190–91). Beckett similarly “shared in the thrilling atmosphere of experiment and innovation that surrounded Surrealism” (Knowlson 113), which, as Ford makes explicit, linked him to radical politics (introduction to *Negro* xxii), though not directly to Communism. Knowlson revealingly says that art and politics are two of the three areas in which he thinks his biography makes its most important contribution (21). Beckett’s lifelong admiration for the painting of Jack B. Yeats, especially for its political (i.e., anti-Fascist) content, as in “Tinkers’ Encampment: The Blood of Abel” (1940), is illustrative of the linkage the two areas had for him.64 “The Surrealist Group in Paris” that produced “Murderous Humanitarianism” wrote that their protest against French imperialism and their “declaration in Revolution first and always” was a response “to the appeal of the Communist party” (see below p. 56). Coincidentally or not, most of the writers Beckett translated for Cunard were surrealists, politically active supporters of left-wing causes, and Communist Party members (see appendix 2).

Without actually discussing how much (or even whether) Beckett was paid for his *Negro* translations, Chisholm writes, “He was glad of the work, though the content of the articles he worked on did not mean a great deal to him.” She then adds, however, that “he was impressed by Nancy’s devotion to so good a cause” (205). But Beckett was sympathetic as well as impressed. As McCormack argues, *Negro* “is the only evidence of Beckett’s taking on such commissions in the 1930s—apart from a few isolated poems—and surely other less ideologically distinctive opportunities to make a few bob must have presented themselves” (75).
Beckett appears to have felt a moral and intellectual commitment to this great collectivist work, which flaunted its political agenda—antiracist, democratic, and communist—during a time when the Great Depression made economics rather than the rise of Fascism the major public issue. Whatever the explanation, Beckett’s large-scale involvement seems motivated by more than friendship, gratitude, or wages. As McCormack puts it, Beckett’s “translations for Nancy Cunard’s *Negro Anthology* . . . logically preface his decision to stay in Paris when the Germans invaded, to assist the Resistance in whatever way he could.” McCormack also implies that the post-1945 work has a significant political agenda: citing Adorno, he suggests that Beckett’s growing depiction of bodily failings and fragments, as well as of dead characters, reenacts his wartime experience.65

What can be said of the quality of Beckett’s translations?66 Beckett’s primary task was the faithful rendering of the original French texts; he may, secondarily, also have signed on to furthering *Negro*’s political, historic, and cultural agenda. Yet even this early in his career and within these parameters, Beckett was not a producer of what Bair dismisses as “undistinguished” work. Edward Titus, editor of the little magazine, *This Quarter*, offered a “special acknowledgement” of Beckett’s translations of surrealist poetry, work that was “characterizable only in superlatives.” In consequence, Titus included Beckett’s story “Dante and the Lobster” in the magazine’s next (and final) issue (Ford, *Published in Paris* 166). Also in 1932, Beckett translated Arthur Rimbaud’s poem *Le Bateau ivre* (as *Drunken Boat*), a translation that Knowlson praises as having “that rare virtue, among verse translations, of being able to stand on its own merits as a poem, independently of the original . . . ; [it is] a genuine and admirable poem in its own right” (16–17). Beckett’s self-translations have long been acknowledged as work of unique achievement; his translations of others are similarly distinguished.

Discussing Beckett’s translations for *Negro*, McCormack especially applauds the “distinctive Irish idiom” that Beckett imparts to the opening of the only poem he translates, Ernst Moerman’s “Armstrong”:

> suddenly in the midst of a game of lotto with his sisters
> Armstrong let a roar out of him that he had the raw meat
> red wet flesh for Louis. . . .

A comparison of Moerman’s poem (see appendix 3) and Beckett’s translation, in fact, nicely demonstrates how unfettered the performer was by Moerman’s original, producing a new work that is even more surreal and jazzlike. For example, “la viande crue” is not integral to the passage it precedes: “Il s’en fit des lèvres et depuis ce jour, / Sa trompette à la
nostalgie de leur premier baiser.” In Beckett’s version, on the other hand, “the raw meat” controls the subsequent metaphoric strategy:

. . . he had the raw meat
red wet flesh for Louis
and he up and he sliced him two rumplips
since when his trumpet bubbles
their fust buss

And “their fust buss” is far slangier, “jazzier” in its oddity, than “leur premier baiser.” The same sort of transformation occurs throughout the poem, for example between the relatively staid “Armstrong, petit père Mississippi [sic]” and Beckett’s “Louis lil’ ole fader Mississippi.”

This poem, indeed the entire “Music” section as well as “Negro Stars,” contrasts strikingly with the bulk of _Negro_ by downplaying victimization and extolling black achievement, specifically the improvisational, surreal quality of jazz, “the most potent force in music at the present time” (Goffin, “Hot Jazz”). Emphasizing the analogy between surrealism and jazz, Goffin in “Hot Jazz” praises “humble Negro musicians” for what they accomplished, supposedly by instinct “unaided by the control of that critical intelligence that was to prove such an asset to the later initiators” in other arts, like Breton and Aragon in poetry and Chirico and Ernst in painting. “Hot jazz” ("le jazz hot") is jazz taken to its limits, enacting “a creative principle” by abandoning the melodic theme for an imaginative structure that then incorporates that theme into a process culminating in “incomparable harmonies.” The result is “a finished musical creation which is as much the work of the performer as of the composer,” a description applicable not only to Beckett’s translations but to _Negro_ as a whole.

“Hot Jazz,” Beckett’s translation of Goffin’s essay rhapsodizes, emerges from and expresses the history of an entire people:

The Negro slaves, transplanted from their scorching Africa
to the marvellous but inhospitable countries of North America,
treasured as their last possession that prodigious sense of rhythm
which their traditional dances and their tom-toms beating in
the equatorial night had made so ineradicably part of them . . .
. Instinctive and unhappy . . . they soon began to express their
emotions in song[. . . they all sang their abominable captivity
and the brutal domination of their masters.

The songs of the slaves became riffs, “moving expressions, biblical cries of
INTRODUCTION

celestial yearning, pastoral laments; [improvisations] upon a given rhythmic theme with changes of tone, combinations of voices and unexpected counterpoints. . . . Little by little this habit of improvisation was extended to the brasses and it became customary for groups of musicians to meet and improvise on the themes of spirituals or simply on a given rhythm, each performer weaving his own melody” (Goffin, “Hot Jazz,” Negro 378). Thus, experience inspired the survival techniques that became performance; performance, in turn, helped to transform the political and social environment.

Beckett’s translation of Goffin’s “The Best Negro Jazz Orchestras” proclaims jazz’s power and significance:

It is the Negroes, children of the sun, who have restored to America something of her old radiance, pouring forth a music . . . which has done more to further friendly relations between blacks and whites than all the laws and edicts ever issued.

Jazz is the supreme link between this lovable people and its ideal. . . . The Negroes, with their syncopated music, stimulating art and sensitive spontaneity in whatever they do, are founding a great cultural tradition in America.

In Europe too.

The essay then performs a Wallace Stevens-like evocation of its subject: “Oh you musicians of my life, prophets of my youth, splendid Negroes informed with fire, how shall I ever express my love for your saxophones writhing like orchids, your blazing trombones with their hairpin vents, your voices fragrant with all the breezes of home remembered and the breath of the bayous, your rhythm as inexorable as tom-toms beating in an African nostalgia!” (Negro 291). Even as it flirts with stereotype and cliché concerning race, rhythm, and primitivism, the expressive appeal here conveys a sense of the diasporic longing for home and a people’s need to find creative expression for that longing. And Beckett’s translation retains and elaborates the rich quality of the original.

Quoting with pleasure the first paragraph of Jacques Boulenger’s Haitian essay, “The King of Gonaives” (see p. 29 below), McCormack praises Beckett’s “masterly handling of grammatical tense, ironic cliché, and Conradian delayed decoding” in the superb depiction of the demise of Haiti’s dictator, William Sam (“Beckett and Negro” 83–84), “terminating his career as mincemeat.” There is also something both Conradian and surreal, jazzlike, about Beckett’s meat metaphors (perhaps echoes of Heart of Darkness’s helmsman, whose body Marlow keeps from his cannibal crew) in Louis Armstrong’s “raw meat / red wet flesh” and his
“two rumplips” that perform great feats of jazz. Beckett further plays on this “melodic theme,” retaining in his translation of “The Negress in the Brothel” Crevel’s image of lust as “pyrogenous, smelling of roast pork.” Jazz—like Goffin’s essay and Moerman’s poem, like *Negro* as a whole, and like Beckett’s translations—both is and does complex cultural work.

But the essays Beckett translates are not all of a piece, and his style adapts accordingly. He captures, for example, the scholarly tone of Ratton’s “The Ancient Bronzes of Black Africa,” Lavachery’s “Essay on Styles in the Statuary of the Congo,” and Feuilloley’s “Magic and Initiation among the Peoples of Ubangi-Shari”; Bastien’s scarcely repressed rage over slavery and oppression in “Summary of the History of Hayti”; the anticolonialist fury of the Surrealist Group in “Murderous Humanitarianism” and Citerne and Jourdain in “French Imperialism at Work in Madagascar”; Stiers’s faux astonishment in “A Negro Empire: Belgium”; Sadoul’s broad sarcasm in “Sambo without Tears”; Crevel’s assault on French hypocrisy in “The Negress in the Brothel”; and so on. The survival of the French originals included in appendix 3 affords opportunity for fuller consideration of Beckett’s work, but even cursory analysis reveals them to be quite other than “solid, impersonal translations, undistinguished by any individual touch,” as Bair calls them.

For all the reasons discussed above, it is remarkable that *Negro* has largely disappeared as a cultural and historic document. Exploring the vast chasm between what she views as Cunard’s extraordinary contributions to many of the twentieth-century’s great cultural and political movements (modernism, surrealism, ethnographical anthropology, communism, antiracism, anti-Fascism) and her elision from the historical documents, Marcus finds Cunard “left out altogether . . . missing . . . barely mentioned . . . marginalized . . . erased . . . listed on the fringe . . . reduced to a footnote . . . demonized or left out . . . summarily cut” (37). *Negro* received few reviews when it appeared in 1934; subsequently, it has been rarely available, rarely discussed, rarely even cited.

Yet, as Michelet puts it, the creation of *Negro* was an act of homage and exhortation on a vast and substantial scale: “It was a question of erecting a monument [to black culture]—of denouncing fallacious arguments about the benefits of civilization so generously brought to the blacks—and of saying to the blacks themselves that they would have to find a compromise between the ancient, almost moribund civilizations that could be regenerated and the European style of life.” For many commentators, the ironic and often despairing quality of Beckett’s writings suggests an apolitical agenda, an acceptance of the unimprovability of the human condition. Yet Beckett’s contribution to *Negro* represents a commitment to cultural and individual equality and worth that he did
not shy from demonstrating throughout his life both in personal relationships and in his depictions—which valorized those so depicted without ennobling their suffering—of the downtrodden, infirm, and hapless: “My people seem to be falling to bits. . . . My characters have nothing.”72 Hence my attempt here is not only to recuperate Beckett’s contribution to *Negro*, but also to help situate that singular document within the arc of his extraordinary corpus and its own racial, political, cultural, and aesthetic context and achievement.

**NOTES**

3. Reevaluating “Beckett before Godot,” Pilling, for example, makes no mention of *Negro*.
4. Cunard’s inscription to Michelet, 14 February 1934, in his copy of *Negro*. In her unpublished “A Note on the Author” (“London. Sept 1944”), Cunard calls Michelet “my principal contributor” (University of Texas, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; hereafter HRHRC).
5. See, for example, Friedman, Rossman, and Sherzer, *Beckett Translating*.
6. Benstock suggests that this is generally true of the intellectual women of Paris during 1900-40 (*Women of the Left Bank* 388).
7. Hemingway, who knew Cunard, was at pains to deny the charge that Brett Ashley was based on Iris March in *The Green Hat* (*Letters* 16 November 1926, 224). Chisholm discusses the differences between March and Cunard (68-73).
8. Chisholm discusses Huxley’s infatuation with Cunard and his literary representations of her (74–82).
10. Clements offers an excellent discussion of the “transmutation” of Cunard, “a woman seeking to enter history[,] into the represented feminine” (188).
11. “If I were his daughter,” Cunard writes, “it seems to me I should become quite a different personality and a much more contented one” (GM 124). Moore and Maud Cunard first met and became lovers in 1895, the year before Nancy was born; he adored her from their first meeting and for the rest of his life. Maud reciprocated Moore’s love, until she fell for Sir Thomas Beecham in 1910, although she refused to marry him because he could not afford the lifestyle she desired. Her husband provided her with great wealth and social status, but was not otherwise much of a factor in her life. Nancy Cunard always called Moore “her first friend,” and his works were the first and last she published at the Hours Press. According to David Garnett, “[Moore] and Nancy were so extraordinarily alike in features and colouring that it seemed probable to me that she was his daughter” (“Nancy Cunard,” in Ford, ed., *Nancy Cunard* 27).
12. Cunard contributed the title poem and six others. In private conversation, Jane Marcus has suggested to me that Cunard, rather than Sitwell, was the editor of Wheels.

13. For the relationship of women generally, and Cunard in particular, to surrealism, see Chisholm, Nancy Cunard 150. See also Benstock 216–17 and 380–81.


16. Marcus, "Bonding and Bondage" 60. See also Cunard, These Were the Hours; Chisholm 138; and Benstock 389–95.

19. Along with 126 pro-Republican statements, the pamphlet includes five that support Franco, and sixteen (including those by Eliot and Pound) that were "neutral." See Benstock 418–24.

20. Cunard, Authors Take Sides 6. Bair offers no support for her assertion that Beckett’s response was facetious (258). Beckett’s reply, which Federman and Fletcher enigmatically call “lapidary” (96), may be shorthand for Liam O’Flaherty’s similar “Long live the Republic in Spain and all over the earth” (11). Joyce refused to contribute “because it is ‘politics’” (Cunard, “Thoughts about James Joyce” [HRHRC]).


22. Like Negro, Black Man and White Ladyship has been largely ignored, and when it does surface it is usually distorted: reproduced in Ford’s Nancy Cunard and Susan Friedman’s “Nancy Cunard,” for example, it is drastically (and unrevealingly) abridged. What is silently omitted, as Marcus puts it, are Cunard’s “discussion of English homophobia and her relating of American lynchings to male concern with ‘white womanhood’” (“Bonding and Bondage” 42). Maureen Moynagh’s forthcoming edition, Nancy Cunard: Essays on Race, contains the complete Black Man and White Ladyship.


26. See These Were the Hours 26.


32. Ford silently omits this statement from his abridged edition.
33. The eight Beckett translations Ford includes are Goffin's "The Best Negro Jazz Orchestras" and "Hot Jazz", Moerman's "Louis Armstrong. Poem"; Lacombe's "A Note on Haytian Culture"; Boulenger's "The King of Gonaives"; Sadoul's "Sambo without Tears"; "Murderous Humanitarianism," by "the Surrealist Group in Paris"; and Crevel's "The Negress in the Brothel." Including "Murderous Humanitarianism" in his homage to Nelson Mandela, Prison of His Days (33-36), McCormack suggests that "[t]he recovery of this piece should prompt a reconsideration of the precise political milieu which Beckett encountered when he began what has turned out to be a life-time's sojourn in France" (viii).

34. In Winter 1934, she wrote a responsive poem, "Haywood Patterson in Jail (One of the Nine Scottsboro Boys)," from Patterson's point of view: "White boss justice rotten all thru" (HRHRC).

35. Characteristically, Beckett immediately spent the money on dinner for friends. Lawrence Harvey, who analyzes the poem at great length (3-66), argues that it is hard to overestimate its importance for Beckett's career (3). Cunard describes Whoroscope's creation in connection with her relationship to Beckett (These Were the Hours 109-18); Beckett recalls its composition in a letter to her dated 26 January 1959 (HRHRC).

36. He subsequently read the Moore book "in an evening with great absorption and pleasure" (Beckett to Cunard, 7 November 1956 [HRHRC]).

37. These inscribed books and correspondence are all in the HRHRC.


39. Both Chisholm (335) and Marcus (in private conversation) see Cunard as a source for Beckett's later female characters.

40. £100 according to Chisholm 152.

41. Knowlson 137. Beckett writes: "Did I tell you I was translating Surrealistes inédits for Nancy's nigger book. I've done one by René Crevel(I). 'La Negresse du Bordel.' Miserable rubbish. I'll have about 11 more to do. About 8 pages each. I asked her £25 for the whole job. Is that too much? Tzara next" (Beckett Archive, Trinity College Dublin). The letter is unreliable: its language and tone are at odds with what we know of Beckett from other evidence, and he did far more translating for Negro than this suggests, but not Tzara. The anticipated £25 was probably not forthcoming either since, as Cunard insists in her correspondence with Claude McKay and as Michelet attests, none of the contributors were paid.


45. McKay to Cunard, 1 December 1931 (HRHRC).

46. McKay to Cunard, 20 August 1932 (HRHRC).

47. Cunard's FBI file shows that she was under surveillance as a subversive, and McKay's letters both express his enthusiasm for Negro and indicate that he was "being watched and his house being destroyed by intelligence agents" (see Marcus, "Bonding and Bondage" 62n5).

48. Of course these explanations are not mutually exclusive: McKay writes to Cunard of both police harassment (which he links with the theft of his French
INTRODUCTION XXXV

carte d'identité and British passport) and about the downturn in his financial situation (31 August 1932); subsequent letters refer increasingly to his "difficult pecuniary situation" (16 December 1932 [HRHRC]). In his letter of 12 January 1933, McKay tells Cunard that he sent his contribution on the tenth, and then writes: "now that I finished I want to know if you pay for articles and if so when? before or after publication? for living as precariously as I do I cannot afford to write for nothing, even for a special kind of anthology as yours. You didn't mention in your announcement whether the articles were to be paid for or not." After first saying he would "leave this matter to your good judgment" (25 January 1933), McKay angrily refused permission to publish his essay. The explanation seems to be miscommunication: McKay assumed he would be paid, fell on financial hard times during this period, and so insisted on the payment that Cunard had never promised or implied to pay.

50. Beckett to MacGreevy, 8 November 1936 (HRHRC). This sentiment typifies Beckett’s attitude during much of the period of the Negro translations.
51. Written at Cunard’s request for Henry Crowder to set to music, “From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore” was published in Henry Music. “The shining whore’ is Rahab of Jericho, and the ‘only poet’ is Dante” (Federman and Fletcher 7; Knowlson 120). Harvey concurs, though also suggesting “a fusion between the narrator Dante and the poet Beckett” in the last line (306). In addition, the poem seems a play on Whoroscope, while perhaps both foregrounding and mocking the popular view of Cunard. Crowder told Beckett that the poem was “very very bootiful” and “very very fine indeed” (Beckett to Mary Manning Howe, 14 November 1936; qtd in Knowlson 120).
52. Le Cid (from Corneille’s Le Cid and Chaplin’s movie The Kid) has long been considered to be by Beckett or coauthored with Georges Pelorson (e.g., Mercier 75; Brater, Why Beckett 28; Gordon 84). Knowlson, however, maintains that it was entirely by Pelorson, “with very little help and advice from Beckett . . . The play remains of interest, however, as one of Beckett’s earliest practical incursions into drama in which he played, as far as we know, his only acting part” (125).
53. See works cited below.
54. German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin, as well as French (O’Brien, foreword, Dream of Fair to middling Women xiv, xv).
56. See, for example, McCormack; O’Brien; Knowlson 322–25.
57. O’Brien details Beckett’s work at St. Lô (315–42).
58. See Bair 342–45.
59. See Bair’s narrative of Beckett’s wartime activities (302–20, 333–34); also Gordon 140–85 and Knowlson 278–308.
60. This was the title of a script Beckett wrote on the spirit and suffering of the French during and after the war. It was broadcast on Radio Éireann on 10 June 1946 and published in Calder, As No Other Dare Fail 73–76; reprinted in Beckett’s Complete Short Prose 275–78.
XXXVI INTRODUCTION


62. In conversation with Knowlson 319. See also O'Brien 81–83 and Shenker.

63. Cunard, “A Note on the Author” (HRHRC). The surrealists also emphasize this linkage; see “Murderous Humanitarianism” pp. 56–59 below.

64. McCormack discusses Beckett’s admiration for Yeats generally, and specifically this painting (“Communicating with Prisoners,” in *Prison of His Days* 89–90). Fletcher discusses Beckett’s use of surrealist poetic techniques: “metric anarchy, the precedence of the imagery over the sense, lines of greatly varying length,” syntactical incoherence, associated imagery, and “hermetic symbolism” (25). Gordon emphasizes Beckett’s personal and philosophical linkage with the surrealists, specifically their interest in dreams, the unconscious, paradox, chance, and coincidence (42–45). Other features include automatic writing, myth creation, and the “marvellous.”

65. McCormack, *Prison of His Days* 90–91; see Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*.”

66. Actually, a fair amount, though perhaps less than one would like. In *These Were the Hours*, Cunard poignantly details “the monumental pillage going on at my home” in Normandy where the Hours Press, though long quiescent, was treated as a threat by the Germans, and the half-open ruin as an opportunity for “lovers and defecators.” Among all that had gone were “the mass of letters to do with the Hours” and “at least three-quarters of the material I used in *Negro*” (199–205), including most of what Beckett translated. Several originals did survive, however, and they are included as appendix 3; appendix 2 identifies the writers Beckett translated.

67. This range, which I consider a strength, troubles Michael North, who writes: “what is most remarkable about *Negro* is how little connection there is between the outrage about the Scottsboro Boys and the relish expressed for black popular art” (191).

68. Chisholm makes this same point, praising Goffin’s jazz article, in Beckett’s translation, as “ornate and romantic, an abrupt change from the dry dogmas of the would-be Negro vice president [James Ford]” (216).

69. *Negro* I. “The Negress in the Brothel,” which was omitted from the table of contents and tipped in at the last minute to evade British censorship, appears between 580 and 581 as I–III.

70. Many have used material from *Negro* with little or no acknowledgment of its source. Angelyn Mitchell’s *Within the Circle*, which concerns the canon of African American literary criticism and reproduces many of its key essays, typically ignores Cunard’s *Negro* in its introduction, bibliography, and index; the anthology is acknowledged only once: as source for Zora Neale Hurston’s essay, “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (79). The Norton Anthology of *African American Literature* makes no mention of *Negro* except to list it in a chronology (2619). Like many others, however, it highly praises Alain Locke’s earlier anthology, *The New Negro* (1925), as “virtually the central text of the Harlem Renaissance” (960), which is especially interesting given that Locke, on the publication of *Negro*, wrote to Cunard: “I congratulate you,—almost enviously, on the finest anthology in every sense of the word ever compiled on the Negro” (14 April 1934 [HRHRC]).
71. Quoted in Chisholm 204–05.
72. Quoted in Shenker.

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XXXVIII INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION XXXIX


Foreword to *NEGRO* (1933)

by Nancy Cunard

It was necessary to make this book—and I think in this manner, an Anthology of some 150 voices of both races—for the recording of the struggles and achievements, the persecutions and the revolts against them, of the Negro peoples.

The book is composed of seven parts. The reader finds first in this panorama the full violence of the oppression of the 14 million Negroes in America and the upsurge of their demands for mere justice, that is to say their full and equal rights alongside of their white fellow-citizens. At no other time in the history of America have there been so many lynchings as in the past 2 years, so many “legal” murders, police killings and persecutions of coloured people. The Scottsboro frame-up is more than an attempt to electrocute 9 innocent black Alabamians—it is part of the effort to force into the dumbest and most terrorised form of subjection all Negro workers who dare aspire to live otherwise than as virtual slaves. Forty-eight lynchings of Negroes in 1933—crowned by the broadcast sanction of and encouragement to lynching from the Governor of the State of California.

The spirit and determination in the Negro to break through the mountain of tyranny heaped on him is manifested in his rapid evolution, since Emancipation in 1863, of his own cultural organisations, as is shown in every sphere of activity—literature, education, business, the law, the press, the theatre, etc.

A brief outline of the history of the black race has been given. Amongst many other subjects are writings on literature, education, social conditions and personal contacts. Zora Neale Hurston has contributed some studies which portray the background of Negro folk-imagimation, the poetic and rhythmic intensity of their religious expression, the sole emotional outlet that was permitted in slavery days.

But the Negro is no longer preoccupied solely by religion. Progressive members of the race are aware that they must fight every way they can to advance and to maintain whatsoever they have already achieved against inconceivable opposition. There are certain sections of the Negro bourgeoisie which hold that justice will come to them from some eventual liberality in the white man. But the more vital of the Negro race have realised that it is Communism alone which throws down the barriers of
race as finally as it wipes out class distinctions. The Communist world-order is the solution of the race problem for the Negro. James Ford, Negro worker and intellectual, was nominated by the Communist Party as candidate for Vice-President of U.S.A. in 1932.

What shall I say of the miraculous *Theatrical* and *Musical Negro* firmament? That here are only the pictures and descriptions of all too few; that it is high time a separate book were made to do justice to a people so utterly rich in natural grace and beauty, a people who have produced the diverse genius of the spirituals and blues, the superb Negro choirs of America, the syncopation and tap-dancing, the dramatic and musical excellence of several first-rate actors and singers, the as yet in our white hemisphere almost unknown and unrecorded splendour of African rhythms.

There is no laughter in any of the *Poetry* here, for facts have made it, and the reflector of life a poet is supposed to be is, in the case of the coloured poet, doubly sensitive. Perforce he carries the burden of his race, it is mostly his theme. Sterling Brown is the most racial of the poets, his subject and his tone are as fine as a saga. Langston Hughes is the revolutionary voice of liberation.

In the *West Indies* and *South America* the prevailing though "subtler" forms of prejudice have been studied, and this mainly by coloured writers. The myth that latins have no prejudice can no longer stand. As a Cuban author says: in America they would like to kill off the black man—here they intend to absorb him, though the so-called opprobrium of a dark skin exists. Here too the intensity of the Negro's struggle against economic discrimination is a constantly recurring subject.

From the beginning of the Anti-Slavery struggle to the present-day official and social obstructions of the Colour-bar there have been voices to protest against the infamous treatment of coloured people. There have been honest defenders, admirers of the Negro on an exactly equal footing. The writings in the *European* section are mainly on this theme. And it is shown how Soviet Russia, encompassing some 130 different racial groups, has once and for all solved the "problem" of races, turning instilled conflicts into co-operation, wiping out the false concept of "inferiority." To-day in Russia alone is the Negro a free man, a 100 per cent. equal.

What is *Africa*? A continent in the iron grip of its several imperialist oppressors. To some of these empire's sons the Africans are not more than "niggers," black man-power whom it is fit to dispossess of everything. At one time labelled en bloc "cannibals," "savages," who have never produced anything, etc., it is now the fashion to say that the white man is in Africa for the black man's *good*. Reader, had you never heard of
or seen any African sculpture I think the reproductions in this part would suggest to you that the Negro has a superb and individual sense of form and equal genius in his execution. The writings of Michelet and Feuilloley will demonstrate that the African has an adequate enough soul (somewhat different from your own though it be), and had also (though that too was different from yours) a social organisation perfectly adapted to the conditions of his own continent. The studies by George Padmore, and others, of the economic, inter-racial, social and political systems implanted by the different imperialist masters assuredly throw an arc-light strong enough on the irrefutable truth. The truth is that Africa is tragedy.

"The White Man is killing Africa"

I have ended the book with this—I cannot say: I have ended it on this note, for the chord of oppression, struggle and protest rings, trumpet-like or muffled, but always insistent throughout. In this present day it is not possible to write otherwise of the Negro, and to write with truth.

Nancy Cunard
The Best Negro Jazz Orchestras

by Robert Goffin

From the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Harlem to ‘Frisco, the fertile musical territories of the States are studded with the tumultuous capitals of fashionable jazz. There are certainly more good orchestras than there are states, which means that it is very difficult to be familiar with them all, at least as far as I am concerned, who have never been able to identify all the stars of the American flag.

The conscientious explorer must arrange to spend some time in the provincial towns and small villages if he wants to make himself acquainted with genuine local flavours and with the strange and passionate quality of the numerous orchestras whose function is to maintain the fever of their patrons at high pitch.

It is the Negroes, children of the sun, who have restored to America something of her old radiance, pouring forth a music whose charm is never wasted on the people that matter, and which has done more to further friendly relations between blacks and whites than all the laws and edicts ever issued.

Jazz is the supreme link between this lovable people and its ideal. At the present time black and coloured musicians participate on equal terms, like chess-men, in a disinterested collaboration. The Negroes, with their syncopated music, stimulating art and sensitive spontaneity in whatever they do, are founding a great cultural tradition in America.

In Europe too there are some vigilant spirits susceptible to the syncopated magic of the new Negro music and anxious to lose no syllable of the oracle as evoked at will from the spinning and flashing of the discs beneath the needle.

Oh you musicians of my life, prophets of my youth, splendid Negroes informed with fire, how shall I ever express my love for your saxophones writhing like orchids, your blazing trombones with their hairpin vents, your voices fragrant with all the breezes of home remembered and the breath of the bayous, your rhythm as inexorable as tom-toms beating in an African nostalgia!

The first ambassador of syncopated music to visit Europe was Louis Armstrong.

I went to London to hear this colossus of jazz. His name is up ev-
everywhere in enormous letters, all the local musicians are in a ferment, the demented scales of his nostalgia are evoked in every conversation.

I hurried off to Victoria Station on the chance of seeing him. I waited for half-an-hour in a tumult of home-comings, screaming porters, rainbow-labelled luggage and the terrifying gravity of Cook’s undertakers.

I see a man laden with flowers—but I’ve wasted my breath, they are not for Armstrong. Then a Schubert-skulled tourist, but he is only a clerk and thinks that Armstrong is a celebrated lawyer; then an inexcusably beautiful woman looking boomerangs for all she is worth, and assimilating me to a universe of adorers; then a gentleman in a blue suit, flowing blue tie and beaver; his equatorial complexion and wet eyes decide me:

“Are you waiting for Armstrong?”

“Yessir, that’s me.”

Immediately he starts clapping me on the shoulder, calls me dipper and sucker-mouth, his rough voice crackles with petulance, his eyes go on fire with laughter like a child’s, his mouth opens on the whitest of teeth.

He does not know who I am, but that does not matter. He assumes I am some sort of musician or manager or pugilist, a good pal anyhow whoever I am. When I give him my book he dances with pleasure, takes me in his arms, overloads me with cigarettes, threatens to have a shave in my honour. We fly about London in a taxi. Beside the driver there is a kind of metal drum beating the rhythm of the shillings—and what a rhythm!

We arrive at a restaurant; I look at him beside me, he is simple, naive, jovial, sly, malicious, his mouth is a maw of laughter. His rosy-palmed hand beats a tattoo on the table or seizes me by the arm or plays on the imaginary pistons of a fork.

He is firmly established before his sugared baked beans and he is happy because his thoughts are of New Orleans, of Charlie Alexander his pianist, and the Southern cooking whose praises he sings in *When It’s Sleepy Time Down South*; and perhaps also of me whom he is beginning to like.

There is a first rehearsal at six o’clock at the Studio in Poland Street, where the ten coloured musicians recruited in Paris are ready and waiting. I scrutinise him more closely: he is smaller than he appears in his photographs but his trumpet is bigger; he talks and gags with the ten musicians; continual use of the mouth-piece has put a tuck in his lips; he produces a few vertiginous notes, sees that his players are where he wants them, executes a pirouette, snatches off his coat and opens a huge trunk packed with bundles of music labelled: “Louis Armstrong and his Victor Recording Orchestra.”

The tempest of *Rocking Chair* breaks loose and Louis plays, conducting with his eyes, sudden jerks of his hands, capers and contortions of
his whole body, as though he wanted to terrify the three saxophonists who find themselves called on for a “hot” ensemble. Then he sings softly, facing his public, his eyes lowered, his hands behind him splayed like a valve before the impact of the rhythm; he twists his mouth, mumbles his words, interpellates the pianist, lifts his leg and rocks with laughter.

After Rocking Chair he gives us Sunny Side of the Street, Confessing, You Rascal You, When It’s Sleepy Time Down South, Them There Eyes, and finally Chinatown, which explodes like a bomb.

In action Armstrong is like a boxer, the bell goes and he attacks at once. His face drips like a heavy-weight’s, steam rises from his lips; he holds his trumpet in a handkerchief, passes into a kind of excruciating catalepsy and emerges Armstrong the sky-scraper, rockets aloft into the stratosphere, blows like one possessed and foams at the mouth; the notes rise in a wauling and the whole right side of his neck swells as though it must burst; then, summoning up all the air in his body for another effect, he inflates his throat till it looks like a goitre.

Soon he is lost in the rhythm, he is master of the rhythm, he is the rhythm, the force and energy of the music, so that the audience rises to its feet, sways and dances and laughs with Armstrong and tries to embrace him.

The players themselves seem electrified before their stands; they gesticulate and play as functions of Armstrong; a gesture of his hand and they stop—another, and they resume.

I was present at the first performance, in a tense and overheated hall. Armstrong was laughing, sure of his triumph. The vast hall of the Palladium was too small for his thunderbolts, the trumpeters broke their instruments on their way out.

I dedicated my book On the Frontiers of Jazz to Louis Armstrong because he is the king of rhythm. Apropos of this dedication, Henry Prunières, the French musical critic, expressed himself in the following terms: “Robert Goffin thinks that Armstrong is the greatest of them all; I myself admire him profoundly, but I consider him very inferior to Duke Ellington.”

I do not think it is possible to compare an individual with an orchestra. Armstrong is the quintessential expression of “hot,” the genius of improvisation; Duke Ellington represents the phenomenal achievement of the man-orchestra, he is the genius of cohesion, the leader of the finest ensemble in the world.

What words can express the sublime accomplishment of Duke Ellington? For years, with incomparable courage and temerity, he strove to enrich his race with a truly personal music. Now little more remains for him to do. Before we can realize the full extent of this amazing perfor-
performance we must go back to his early records and listen to the quality of balance, attack and cohesive power peculiar to his unparalleled production.

I consider Duke Ellington as the most extraordinary phenomenon in the whole development of jazz. He took wing in a first period of enthusiasm, in common with other executants, for the undiluted spirits of "hot"; these early performers played in a kind of inspired trance, they were accumulators of musical energy and transmitted the flow of syncopation without comment. This technique of production has been rationalised by Ellington, who has never ceased to cultivate, along with the essential "hot," the problems of arrangement and presentation. He realised that most of the best Negro orchestras had sublime flights of individual improvisation above the inferior level of a too much improvised ensemble, and it was this disproportion that he proposed to remedy.

The music of Duke Ellington tends away from the instinctive "hot" towards a style whose organisation is miraculous. This unique conductor has gradually placed intuitive music under control. Never doubting the importance of his undertaking he has realised, in his glorification of jazz, the greatest achievement of his time.

Reference to his less recent records leaves us with no doubts regarding the quality of jazz as presented by Duke Ellington—brilliant, carefully graduated and proportioned, its rhythmic element scrupulously cultivated, the ensembles of brass full of original initiative, the arrangements fresh and stimulating. Such is the personal achievement of Duke Ellington, to which must be added an extraordinary gift for exploiting the "hot" personality of his players. Thus the greater part of his magnificent *Tiger Rag* is devoted to a clarinet explosion from Barmey Bigard, and a long passage in *Don't Mean a Thing* to a vertiginous solo by Johnny Hodge.

Duke Ellington strengthens his position daily. I have heard his latest records: *Sheik of Araby, Moon over Dixie, Jazz Cocktail, and Stars*, and there is no doubt that this great conductor is pursuing his work in accordance with its initial conception. His realisations are emancipating themselves more and more from dance music and undiluted "hot" and tending to become concert music of the most definite description, full of a rare creative sense, a fertile initiative and an incomparable originality, analogous to that of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, but more complete, because it is only under Duke Ellington that composition and execution coincide.

Ladies and gentlemen—the orchestra of Duke Ellington. It will bring jazz and Negro music to all those who are in love with the classical tradition, it will satisfy the cultivated aspirations of all those who up till now have been disappointed.

Not far below these peaks of Negro jazz we find others whose achievements are beyond all praise; I refer to the orchestras of Fletcher Henderson,
Don Redman and Baron Lee; nor should we forget the celebrated Cotton Pickers, Luis Russell, Cab Calloway, Chick Webb, King Oliver, Bennie Carter, Noble Sissle, Sam Wooding, Earl Hines, Jimmie Noe, whose vitality makes the petulance of white orchestras sound a very poor thing indeed, with the sole exceptions of the Casa-Loma and Red MacKenzie bands.

It is impossible to consider in detail these orchestras and many others. They have all a well-developed personality, a sure sense of "hot," an originally organised rhythmic structure and executants of the first order.

Worthy of special recommendation, however, are the achievements of Fletcher Henderson, whose *Radio Rhythm* and *House of David Blues* are on a very high level indeed. Their imaginative organisation is extremely powerful and bound together with the musical inspirations of such virtuosi as Hawkins, who is the greatest saxophonist in the world today.

Then there is the orchestra of Don Redman, who for so long was leader of the Cotton Pickers. His records are remarkable for their precision of gradation, inexorable rhythm and that instinctive propriety of atmosphere which imparts to such numbers as *Shacking the Africa* and *Chant of Weeds* an indescribable quality of beauty and nostalgia. Nor can I refrain from mentioning Baron Lee and his Mills Blue Rhythm Boys, whose highly personal performances are notable for the exquisite excursions of the pianist Edgar Hayes, the tenor Cass MacCord, and the trumpeter Anderson.

Some critic whose name I forget, speaking of the above-mentioned orchestras, described them as the "Big Five" and asserted their unquestionable superiority over all their rivals.

Space will not allow of my dealing with the endless cohort of satellites that attends these major planets, but I cannot conclude this study without naming the four musicians who have left an indelible mark on jazz, so much so that jazz would not be what it is but for the inspired contributions of these creators. First and foremost we have Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke (the latter a white man of Jewish extraction), whose powerful and original treatment of passages for trumpet have revolutionised the entire technique and theory of that instrument; then Hawkins, who more than any other has influenced saxophone playing, and it may be asserted that but for him even the finest exponents of that instrument would be incapable of evoking that atmosphere of instinctive power which is his alone and which we recognise in them as coming direct from him. And the fourth is of course Earl Hines, who a few years ago was an archangel of the pianoforte, astonishing all those who heard his records, and whose influence on pianoforte technique has been widespread and profound.

That is an approximate balance-sheet whose assets are sadly under-
stated but which, I trust, is sufficiently informative to encourage all those
who take an interest in the subject to explore for themselves and in greater
detail this magnificent Negro music.

Jazz is abundantly and gloriously alive. All honour to those who,
with nothing but their instinct to serve them, gave America this music of
which she will one day be proud. And may these few lines be the first act of
homage from a son of Europe to a race whose prodigies, north and south
of the Line, are without number.
Louis Armstrong. The world’s greatest trumpeter and a superb musician; the orchestra leader whose renderings of jazz are unique.
suddenly in the midst of a game of lotto with his sisters
Armstrong let a roar out of him that he had the raw meat
red wet flesh for Louis
and he up and he sliced him two rumplips
since when his trumpet bubbles
their fust buss

poppies burn on the black earth
he weds the flood he lulls her

some of these days muffled in ooze
down down down down
pang of white in my hair

after you’re gone
Narcissus lean and slippered

you’re driving me crazy and the trumpet
is Ole Bull it chassés aghast
out of the throes of morning
down the giddy catgut
and confessing and my woe slavers
the black music it can’t be easy
it threshes the old heart into a spin
into a blaze

Louis lil’ ole fader Mississippi
his voice gushes into the lake
the rain spouts back into heaven
his arrows from afar they fizz through the wild horses
they fang you and me
then they fly home

flurry of lightning in the earth
sockets for his rootbound song
nights of Harlem scored with his nails
snow black slush when his heart rises

his she-notes they have more tentacles than the sea
they woo me they close my eyes
they suck me out of the world
Hot Jazz

by ROBERT GOFFIN

Not so long ago André Coeuroy wrote: “improvised jazz is the most potent force in music at the present time; long may it remain so.”

What then exactly is this force that has received the sanction of some of our greatest modern musicians and yet is so little known to others, such as Henry Malherbe, the critic of the *Temps*, that they cannot distinguish it from a counterpoint out of the *Tales of Hoffmann*, and assume in their simplicity that Maurice Yvain, Yves Alix and Christine are the masters of jazz in France? And how is it possible to associate the discernment of the one with the flounderings of the other?

It is scarcely necessary to repeat that jazz is Afro-American music, developed in the U.S.A. during the war, and attaining its maximum of expression during the period 1920–1930. In my book *On the Frontiers of Jazz* I have dealt at sufficient length with the various musical, technical and sentimental elements of jazz to make any recapitulation of them here unnecessary. They are common knowledge by now.

Let us therefore confine ourselves to hot jazz, otherwise known as improvised jazz, a type of music that was in existence long before it was formally tabulated. The epithet “hot” is applied to any passage “in which the executant or executants abandon the melodic theme and develop an imaginative structure on the basis of that theme and incorporated with it.”

To write the history of this “hot” it would be necessary to trace the whole evolution of jazz in general. For we find its formulæ, common enough to-day, present at every stage of the development of syncopated music. It may be said that jazz would have died a natural death long ago but for this “hot” which has always been its unfailing stimulation, its purest mode of utterance, and to all intents and purposes its raison d’être.

The Negro slaves, transplanted from their scorching Africa to the marvellous but inhospitable countries of North America, treasured as their last possession that prodigious sense of rhythm which their traditional dances and their tom-toms beating in the equatorial night had made so ineradicably part of them. Instinctive and unhappy, highly endowed with the most complete, because the most simple, poetical faculties, they soon began to express their emotions in song; labourers in the cotton plantations, dockers slaving in New Orleans, young Negresses herded together
in the markets, fugitives hounded down by mastiffs, they all sang their abominable captivity and the brutal domination of their masters.

The African rhythm had not been lost; they clothed it with simple sentiment, moving expressions of love, biblical cries of celestial yearning, pastoral laments; and thus the Negroes came quite naturally to improvise upon a given rhythmic theme with changes of tone, combinations of voices and unexpected counterpoints—an improvisation that was to culminate in the incomparable harmonies that have bewitched the whole of Europe. Little by little this habit of improvisation was extended to the brasses and it became customary for groups of musicians to meet and improvise on the themes of spirituals or simply on a given rhythm, each performer weaving his own melody.

Through the cake-walk, rag-time and blues Negro music proceeded towards that jazz which was soon to assume such important dimensions and absorb the forms which had gone before it.

“At this time jazz still belonged to the black musicians with their ancient traditions of invention and their unique faculty for improvisation and embellishment according to the dictates of their ingenuous hearts. They were the first teachers of the genuine lovers of jazz, while others in whom the commercial instinct was more highly developed ignored this necessary contact and transposed jazz airs in a way quite foreign to the Negro tradition.”

This explains the upgrowth of a school of melodic jazz, exploited for a time with great success by Paul Whiteman, Jack Hylton and other famous leaders, who industrialised jazz to such an extent that nothing remained but a weak dilution devoid of all real musical character.

Melodic jazz has contributed nothing to music and will only be remembered for its unspeakable insipidness; whereas hot jazz is a creative principle which can scarcely fail to affect the music of the future in the most original and unexpected directions.

Hot jazz has already exploded the automatism of musical composition as practised before the war, when the composer wrote a melody, or a score, on the understanding that its realisation should only vary in accordance with the interpretative ability of successive executants, who generally showed but little initiative in their reading of the work and could only express their own personality in their treatment of detail. It is obvious that the music of Beethoven and Debussy is played to-day exactly as it was when composed, and as it still will be a century hence.

The most extraordinary achievement of hot jazz has been the disassociation of interpretation from the “stenographical” execution of the work, resulting in a finished musical creation which is as much the work of the performer as of the composer. Up to the time of jazz it is safe to say that
the performer was no more than the faithful representative of the composer, an actor whose function was to transmit the least phrase and stimulus of his text. But hot jazz has no patience with stimuli by proxy and requires more of its executants, insisting that each should have ample scope for independence and spontaneity of expression. The task of the performer is to realise, in whatever terms he sees fit, the possibilities of syncopation latent in the generally simple theme written by the composer. He is no longer a conscientious actor reciting his part, but one improvising on the idea or impression of the moment in the Italian Comedia dell'Arte tradition.

The admirable achievement of the first orchestras was an unconscious one, ignored at the time and not fully appreciated till twenty years later. We must turn back to these primitive orchestras and listen humbly to the musical inventions of these untrained Negroes before we can realise the brilliant audacity of these musicians who devoted themselves with enthusiasm and in the face of the most fatuous opposition to this new field, later to become the monopoly of the intelligent and cultivated section of the new generation. From this moment every black orchestra played "hot," with occasional discordant abuse of wawas, washboards and drums, which soon calmed down.

At that time only very few whites were able to appreciate the sublime grandeur of this music of the heart. We must not forget the first white orchestras to play "hot" in an America rotten with colour prejudice; they laid the foundations of a solidarity and a mutual esteem whose benefits came too late for the majority of those most apt to enjoy them. The Cotton Pickers, New Orleans Rhythm Kings, California Ramblers and Original Dixieland will all have an honoured place in the eventual Pantheon of syncopated music.

Already a definite tradition is taking form in the domain of hot jazz and a codification is being gradually developed; such discerning critics as Panassié, Prunières, Coeuroy and Sordet concern themselves with the manifestations of hot jazz and keep its development under the strictest observation and control. We are now so familiar with hot jazz, thanks to the countless records made of different orchestras, that we can distinguish the unmistakable note of its lyricism even in the most florid of its vulgarisations.

The talent and genius of certain composers and performers have received their proper recognition. A number of jazz orchestras have conquered the unanimous approval of the public. Finally certain individuals have enriched jazz with contributions of so personal a nature as cannot fail to delight all those who take an interest in the subject, and it is to them that we owe all that is best in modern jazz.
There are many orchestras in both Europe and America whose musical perfection has elicited the admiration of such competent judges as Ravel, Darius Milhaud and Stravinsky, and in these orchestras some exponents of “hot” whose style, to my mind, has had an enormous influence on the development of jazz in general. Special reference must be made to Louis Armstrong, whom I consider as the supreme genius of jazz. This extraordinary man has not only revolutionised the treatment of brass instruments but also modified almost every branch of musical technique as practised today. Nor should we forget that colossus of jazz, the late Bix Beiderbecke, the pianist Earl Hines and the tenor saxophonist Hawkins. There are hundreds of others hardly less important than these four and no less deserving of honour for not being mentioned by name.

Before I conclude this essay I would like to draw attention to the analogy between the acceptance of “hot” and the favour enjoyed throughout Europe by the *Surréaliste* movement. Is it not remarkable that new modes both of sentiment and its exteriorisation should have been discovered independently? What Breton and Aragon did for poetry in 1920, Chirico and Ernst for painting, had been instinctively accomplished as early as 1910 by humble Negro musicians, unaided by the control of that critical intelligence that was to prove such an asset to the later initiators.

Finally, it may be mentioned that hot jazz is regarded to-day by all the intelligent and cultivated youth of Europe as its staple musical nourishment. As Dominique Sordet says, many young men have derived an almost religious enthusiasm from the contact of this superabundant source of lyricism. For them hot jazz is almost the only form of music that has any meaning for their disrupted generation, and it is my fervent hope that America will not disregard this extraordinary element in its sentimental life and one which is surely of more importance than sky-scrapers and Fordism.
Summary of the History of Hayti

by Jenner Bastien

Christopher Columbus discovered Hayti on December 6, 1492, and anchored in the magnificent bay of the St. Nicolas Mole, to the north-west of the island. He immediately established communications with the natives and even became friendly with the cacique, Guacanagaric. The island, at that time, was divided into five cacicats or kingdoms and had a population of about two millions. After getting into touch with these people whom he called Indians—believing that he had discovered India—Columbus returned to Spain, where he received a royal welcome. Before leaving Hayti, on January 11, 1493, he had easily obtained a concession of land on which he built a fortress, the “Nativity.” Here he left about thirty Spaniards to whom he gave wise instructions. But once the great navigator had left, his comrades began to maltreat the Indians and to steal all their gold. They even explored the interior of the island to rob the unfortunate natives of their possessions. A spirited cacique, Caonabo, resolved to avenge his people and, one night, invaded the Nativity and razed the fortress to the ground.

Columbus returned to Hayti on November 22, 1493, and landed with fifteen hundred men, mostly the lowest type of adventurer. Through them the misfortunes of the natives began. For these unscrupulous men, wishing to become rich at once without effort, insisted on being given gangs of Indians to work for them without pay. Thus slavery began in the country. Columbus was weak enough to agree, and the unfortunate Indians, already decimated in several severe fights with the Spaniards, perished in thousands from the hardships of the unaccustomed working in the mines. It was then that a bishop, Las-Casas, suggested the substitution of Africans imported from Africa, who, being hardier, would suffer less from the exactations of such masters. This was the definitive sanction of slavery in the New World.
The great Citadelle above Milot in Hayti. Built by King Christophe in the early 19th century as a refuge for his people against attack by the French, and now in ruins.

By the beginning of the 17th century the cruelty of the Spaniards had wiped out practically all the Indians. On the other hand the colonists were looking towards new countries where gold was found in large quantities; they gradually abandoned the island in favour of Mexico, Peru, the Argentine. At this period, French adventurers, bold pirates, began to fight the first occupants, until Spain, by the treaty of Ryswick in 1697, yielded to France a third of the western part of Hayti. From the date of the French occupation the island was called San Domingo instead of Hispaniola, as Columbus had called the country. The colony developed rapidly. It must be admitted that the French showed greater energy and resource than the Spaniards. The government of San Domingo was entrusted to two officials: the Governor and the Intendant. The former was responsible for the defence of the territory, the latter was in charge of the civil administration. The cultivation of the sugar cane ensured the prosperity of the colony. The coffee of San Domingo had a considerable vogue in France and made fortunes for the colonists. Indigo, cocoa and valuable timber were exported on a large scale. In short, the annual turnover reached the sum of 350,000,000 francs, or about 70,000,000 dollars. Despite all their activity, the colonists could not have grown so rich in so short a time if they had not abused their power over that huge human herd—the slaves.

Colonial society was divided into three classes: the whites, the freed-
men, the slaves. Among the whites there were the great whites, that is to say, the high officials, the big planters and the important business-men; the little whites, who consisted of all the subordinate officials, those employed on the big plantations and the workmen. The class of freed-men consisted of blacks and mulattoes who had purchased their freedom or obtained it through the generosity of their masters. The slave class included the mass of blacks imported from Africa. For more than two centuries these wretches had to suffer the maltreatment of inhuman masters. It is almost impossible to imagine the cruel tortures which those poor blacks underwent. It must not be thought that slavery had so degraded them that they had forgotten that they were men with wills of their own. Eleven years after the discovery of Hayti, the Spaniards did not see the arrival of Negroes in the island without alarm.

It was claimed that they perverted the Indians and inclined them to rebel. In 1679, during the French occupation, there was a rising of Negro slaves at Port-de-Paix. Under the leadership of one of their number, Padrejean, they had decided to exterminate all the whites. They were conquered. In 1691, a conspiracy hatched by 200 Negroes was discovered in the west. More or less all over the country runaway slaves, the Maroons, took refuge in the mountains and attacked the colonists from time to time. In about 1730, one, named Polydor, worked such havoc and alarmed the colonists to such an extent that his death delivered them from a horrible nightmare. This was also true of Macandal, whose story is worth telling. This slave, whose name has become a legend and a synonym for “magician,” belonged to the plantation of Normand de Mezy at Limbé. He lost an arm as the result of an accident and was made herdsman. From that moment he dreamed of exterminating all the men of the white race, and to accomplish this, he did not do as others had done, he used neither iron nor fire. He resorted to the most terrible weapon, one which can mysteriously account for an entire population: poison. In an almost uncanny way he made himself feared by the Negroes, and recruited agents in every part of the colony. At the slightest sign, death seemed to fly through the country causing frightful havoc. The Government found it impossible to check the misdeeds of this slave, the more so because the agents set to pursue him rarely escaped prompt vengeance. One day the Negroes of the Dufresne plantation at Limbé prepared a great feast. The sound of the drum attracted Macandal, who even took part in the dance and drew attention to himself. He was recognised, and the owner of the plantation took the greatest precautions to keep him shut up in a hut. Though closely guarded, the runaway slave was able to escape into the savannah. The dogs barked and the alarm was raised. Macandal was re­taken and condemned to be burned alive. As he had several times boasted
that, if the whites caught him, he would escape by assuming different shapes, he declared that he would change into a fly to escape the flames. Tortured by the flames he made such violent efforts that he fell headlong from the wood-pile. The Negroes shouted: "Macandal is saved!" Terror reigned, and he had to be lashed to a plank and thrown back into the fire.

By a decree of March 28, 1790, the French National Assembly enfranchised the freed-men of San Domingo. The colonial authorities, supported by the important planters, refused to put this decree into execution. Two emancipated slaves, Ogé and Chavannes, determined to resort to force in order to establish their rights. From the Grande-Rivière-du-Nord they marched on the Cap. The rebels won the first encounter, but the white troops returned to the charge and scattered them without much difficulty. Ogé and Chavannes, who had taken refuge in Spanish territory, were handed over to the French authorities, and on February 25, 1791, they were put on the rack alive on the Place d'Armes at the Cap. So far from discouraging the freed-men, this reverse caused them to renew their efforts tenfold. On the plain of the Cul de Sac, led by the mulatto Beauvais and the Negro Lambert, they soundly defeated the colonists. Three hundred slaves had given valuable assistance. The general rising of the slaves was about to take place. In the night of August 22, 1791, all the slaves on the Northern plain, armed with pikes, cutlasses and knives, carried out a ghastly massacre of all the whites that they could find, regardless of sex or age. A widespread fire lasted several days and made their vengeance more gruesome still. Bouckman, Jean-François and Biassou were the leaders of the revolt. The colony was in a woeful state. On the one hand the freed-men were determined to have their rights as citizens, on the other the big planters were opposed to the policy of the capital; and the slaves were threatening to destroy everything. Commissaries were sent to San Domingo to restore order. They had a difficult task, and one of them, to avoid a disaster, was obliged to declare the freedom of all slaves (August 29, 1793). In their blind fury, the colonists appealed to the English, who immediately seized several vantage points. The Spaniards also wished to invade the French territory. The slaves even helped them. One of these, Toussaint l'Ouverture, now comes to the fore.

Toussaint was born on May 20, 1743, on the Breda plantation near the Cap. When the slave-revolt broke out he was serving under Jean-François. When he heard that France had sanctioned the freedom of all slaves, he deserted from the Spanish ranks and surrendered to General Laveaux, provisional Governor of the Colony. Thenceforth Toussaint became a valuable ally of the Government of San Domingo, so valuable, in fact, that the Spaniards were driven out. In 1798 the English occupied only the St. Nicolas Mole. After his first campaign Toussaint had an im-
important post in the Government. In 1797 he received the title of Command­
ner-in-Chief of the Army of San Domingo. In the south there was a com­
petent officer, a mulatto, André Rigaud, who, like Toussaint, pro­
tected French interests. When the enemies of the mother-country were driven from the colony, Rigaud saw in Toussaint an ambitious man who would sooner or later become master of San Domingo. Indeed, in order to counteract the influence of the heroic conqueror, France sent out General Hédouville as Governor-General. And yet Toussaint had refused to betray France. When the English, with their backs to the St. Nicolas Mole, tried to negotiate a capitulation with the Commander-in-Chief, they offered to recognise him as King of Hayti in return for the grant of certain commercial advantages to England. Toussaint refrained from accepting this proposal. General Hédouville soon noticed the secret rivalry which existed between Rigaud and Toussaint. Following a rising, the Governor-General returned with all speed to France; before leaving he urged the mulatto officer to refuse obedience to his chief. Civil war broke out and resulted in the departure of the best officers in the country for France. This delayed the establishment of independence. Among the exiles were Pétion and Boyer. Thus Toussaint became undisputed chief of the colony. He occupied the Spanish territory in the name of France and abolished slavery. Master of the whole island, Toussaint proved himself the cleverest administrator Hayti had ever known. The army was trained on European lines, education was broadcast, the revenues were skilfully administered, work on the land was compulsory. The peasants, who were no longer slaves, were nevertheless submitted to iron discipline. Toussaint, too intelligent a politician, hated neither the mulatto nor the white man. He appealed to all capable and honest men.

When peace had been declared in France, Bonaparte organised a great expedition against San Domingo: a fleet of 76 vessels, and 22,000 of the best troops in Europe. The First Consul’s brother-in-law, Leclerc, was in command of the expedition. His secret instructions were to re-impose slavery. In February 1802 the fleet anchored in the Cap roadstead. Christophe, who commanded at this point, was ordered to surrender within 24 hours. He replied to Leclerc that “he would only surrender the town of the Cap when it was reduced to ashes, and that even on the ashes he would still continue to fight.” He was as good as his word. Toussaint concentrated all his forces between the Gonaives and the Petite-Rivière. In spite of his soldiers’ magnificent defence of the Ravine-à-Couleuvre, victory lay with General Rochambeau. The principal officers in the black army had to surrender and Toussaint accepted Leclerc’s peace proposals. The ex-Commander-in-Chief of the Army of San Domingo retired to one of his plantations at Ennery. There he was secretly watched and,
fearing a conspiracy, his deportation was decided on. This was not easy, and he was only arrested by treacherous means. The French General Brunet invited him to take part in a conference regarding the administration of the colony. Although warned of the danger which threatened him, Toussaint kept the appointment. He was arrested and deported to France, where he was shut up in a damp cell in Fort de Joux in the Jura. The cold and privations of all kinds overcame this man of iron. He died in April 1803.

With Toussaint out of the way, a reign of terror began in San Domingo under Leclerc. According to him, this was the best way to dishearten the Negroes, while it robbed them of all hope of rebellion. A general disarmament of natives was also immediately begun. By these measures, Leclerc clearly showed his intention to restore slavery. He sought to separate black and mulattoes by proposing to Dessalines to exterminate his former enemies, the coloured men. The latter understood this trickery, and came to terms with Pétion, an influential mulatto in the south. In November 1802, blacks and mulattoes were united to wage war for independence. On May 18, 1803, the native officers assembled at Arcahaie and appointed Dessalines Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The national flag was created on this occasion: the white was torn out of the French tricolor and the blue was joined to the red. This meant: rupture between white and black and union between black and mulatto.

On Nov. 2, 1802, yellow fever, which was raging in the French ranks, carried off Leclerc. He appointed Rochambeau to succeed him. This man of great courage acted more savagely than a barbarian. The war was conducted actively; in a short time the native troops occupied the south and west. Rochambeau had to concentrate his army in the north, particularly at Haut-du-Cap, where he intrenched himself in the Vertières fort. On the morning of November 18, Dessalines, with the greater part of the native army, was opposite this important position. A black general, Capois, receives the order to occupy a position dominating Vertières. After several repulses, a cannon-ball knocks over his horse. Getting up, Capois still cries: "Forward!" Throughout Rochambeau's guard of honour cries of "Bravo" and the beating of a drum are heard; the order to cease fire is given and a French cavalry officer appears in the natives' camp: "General Rochambeau wishes to convey his admiration to the commanding officer who has just covered himself with glory." This said, the hussar withdraws and firing is resumed. Rochambeau had to capitulate.

By the end of November the native chiefs were sole masters of San Domingo. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines, on the Place d'Armes des Gonaïves, solemnly proclaimed the independence of the country, which resumed the name of Hayti, given to it by its first inhabitants. The as-
Above: The royal Palace of Sans-Soucis built by King Christophe of Hayti in the early 19th century (from an old print). Below: Ruins of the palace at present.
La Ferrière, King Christophe’s Great Citadel in Hayti. To guard against rebellion and the always-present fear of French invasion, Christophe began to build the Citadel in 1807. Its site was on the summit of Bonnet-à-l’Evêque, 2,500 feet above the sea, in the heart of a jungle. The vast quantities of building materials and guns had to be hauled into place by man-power alone. It was named after Felix Ferrier, said to be a mulatto engineer trained in France, who planned it and who is said to have been hurled to death from its walls by Christophe to preserve its secrets. The eastern face is the longest, commanding the vital approach. Its walls are 140 feet high, its main gun corridor 270 feet long and 30 feet wide. Below is the Grand Boucan, a sheer abyss 700 feet deep. On its eastern flank is a conduit to carry the sewage away down the mountain-side. A water supply was ensured by troughs constructed on parts of the roof. Many bronze guns on mahogany carriages are still in place, many being finely chased with coats-of-arms. Some were abandoned by the British after their failure here in 1798, others captured from enemy warships or salvaged from wrecks. American-marked flintlocks, relics of the Savannah expedition, with cannon balls, powder-barrels, etc., still lie in the magazines.

The Citadel contains luxurious royal quarters, barracks, for 10,000 men, a parade-ground, stables, a moat with drawbridges, storerooms and dungeons. Facing Cape Haitian, from which he could observe any attacking fleet, was Christophe’s Council Room. The ceiling is vaulted like a sounding-board, so that when pronouncing judgment his voice came to the victim with a thunderous effect. Christophe’s tomb, a rudely built brick sarcophagus, stands in the open outer court. Years ago it was rifled and no trace of his body remains. A smaller tomb nearby is that of his favourite son, who was killed by lightning.
Toussaint l'Ouverture, the black Napoleon.

Assembled generals unanimously proclaimed Dessalines Governor for life of the Haytian state. Eight months later he was crowned Emperor. If Toussaint l'Ouverture was as clever a soldier as he was an able administrator, the same could not be said of Dessalines. It was a long time before he learned to sign his name, and the clever generals round him soon regretted having given him so much power. There was a conspiracy and Dessalines was assassinated on October 17, 1806. The Empire was abolished and two candidates aspired to the Presidency, Pétion and Christophe. The former, realising that his rival had the best chance of success, sought to reduce to nothing the authority of the President of the Republic. Christophe immediately marched against the capital, Port-au-Prince. This town put up a strong defence, and the black general retired to the north. There was a split; the south and west remained under Pétion, the north, north-west and Artibonite under Christophe. Shortly after his election as President, the latter had himself proclaimed King and established in the north an absolute monarchy on the lines of Louis XIV. In a short time he was able to surround himself with all the intelligent men in the country, and in collaboration with them, elaborated those plans which were to make Hayti one of the most prosperous nations. Indeed, he spared no
effort to reach his goal. Like another Peter the Great he sometimes resorted to the most barbarous methods to impose progress on his people. He resolutely withstood the least opposition to his ideas and, like Louis XIV’s, his court was magnificent and crowded with a nobility which he had himself created. Education was made available in every town, and he sent abroad for instructors to teach the Haytians arts and crafts.

On Christophe’s death in 1820, there was a single government under the presidency of Boyer. He remained in power for a quarter of a century and systematically allowed the gigantic work of the Monarch of the North to go to ruin. This narrow-minded President seemed unable to forget the hostility between blacks and mulattoes in Rigaud’s time. Whether by jealousy, hatred or inefficiency, he is in some sort responsible for Hayti’s misfortune; the more so because he governed the country for 25 years. After him it was almost a catastrophe; civil wars followed one another with rare intervals of peace, and the country was brutally occupied in July 1915 by the naval forces of the United States.
A Note on Haytian Culture

by Ludovic Morin Lacombe

Hayti has no civilisation of its own. At the time of its discovery in 1492, it was inhabited by the Caribs, who were exterminated by the Spaniards and replaced by Negroes imported from Africa.

After becoming a French colony in 1666, the island of Hayti severed itself from the mother country in 1804.

The middle class, called free, consisting of freed Negroes and mulattoes—which came into power after the tragic death of Jean Jacques Dessalines and the expulsion of the white element—had received, from father to son, a purely French education.

So that we are in the presence of a select class, with the skins of Africans and the brains of Europeans. This class hopes to lead the country more rapidly towards progress and civilisation by banning all that recalls the African civilisation. It sees nothing capable of raising the Haytian people morally, except europeanisation and christianisation. And so it exalts nationalism and the sentiment of the liberty of the Haytian people to impress them the more with a sense of their superiority over the other Negroes.

This ruling Haytian class, by this clumsy assimilation of European culture, ends by ignoring everything that concerns that Africa from which it is not always proud to be descended, and does this through its constant, servile imitation of Europeans, losing all originality of thought, of conception and of execution.

A few Haytian writers strove to act differently from the Europeans, although formed by them. They introduced into their writings a critical sense, an originality which proved that their minds were emancipated.

Louis Joseph Janvier has the best trained mind in Hayti. He is the author of Vieux Piquet, Les Détracteurs de la Race Noire, La République d’Haïti, Haïti aux Haïtiens, etc.

Oswald Durand is a Haytian national poet, the author of Choucoune,
the Haytian poem in Creole vernacular which savours most truly of the country.

Dr. Arthur Holly makes a constant study of the manifestations of Voodoo and the treatment of supernatural afflictions.

Candio is a Haytian singer in the Creole dialect.

Dr. Price Mars is the author of Ainsi parla l'Oncle.

These are men whose minds discard everything which departs from sound reason, drawing only on European culture for that which can be useful to their country and their race on practical grounds.

How many educated Haytians think as they do?

The younger generation of Haytians which received its baptism of fire during the North American intervention in 1915 is always protesting against this crass ignorance of matters African. It is represented by Jean Barau, Daniel Heurtelou, Jacques Roumain, Carl Brouard, Julio Jean-Pierre, who have no intention of allowing themselves to be stupefied by religion and integral civilisation.

The ex-slave class, consisting equally of blacks and mulattoes, has been less favoured as regards education. Having received nothing from the European, it is ready to retain implicitly the custom, morals and traditions of Africa. In it the recently landed African can find that African courtesy which astonishes the European colonial.

Let us conclude by stating baldly that Hayti is divided into two civilisations.

On the one hand, the African civilisation to which the Haytian peasants, the slaves of yesterday, remain faithful.

On the other, the European civilisation to which the Haytian elite, recently called the emancipated class, has adapted itself with much effort and with very little success.
The King of Gonaives

by Jacques Bouleneger

In 1915 the Republic of Hayti was presided over by one William Sam, who was so little appreciated as an administrator that steps were being taken to have him removed. Now it appears that William Sam, being alive to this, saw fit to execute no fewer than 200 hostages drawn from the most distinguished families throughout the country. He may have counted on the radical nature of this proceeding to reinstate him in the good graces of his fellow citizens, but the contrary was the case, and William Sam referred himself with all speed to the sanctuary of the French Legation. Here in due course there arrived some members of his flock to pay their addresses. Having saluted him with such heartiness as to break his two arms they threw him out of the window to the waiting populace, and William Sam terminated his career as mincemeat.

At this time France had such a full programme, what with fighting the good fight and one thing or another, that she simply could not spare the time to protest against the violation of her Legation; but the U.S.A., always on the spot and ready to oblige, intervened in her stead. It is common knowledge that the imperial spirit is altogether foreign to the U.S.A. They are merely impelled by a sense of duty and in the interests of liberty and law and order to add every now and then to their list of annexations. Being now constrained to take the view that law and order of the highly cultivated William Sam variety had been intolerably jeopardised by his assassins, they dispatched shiploads of marines to Hayti. They even entertained an anxiety to favour the adjoining state, the Republic of San Domingo, with a similar attention, and were only finally dissuaded by a storm of indignant opposition. It is to be borne in mind that all this happened seventeen years ago, and the Americans, notwithstanding the protests of the Haytians, are still in Hayti. The liberties of law and order are enforced by a dictator of their nomination and no measure is too coercive when it comes to imposing their language on the natives, who refuse to speak “English” and persist, in an extremity of pigheadedness, in preferring their own to American culture.

Among those marines who landed at Port-au-Prince in August 1915 was a certain Faustin Wirkus, a man whose integrity and natural curiosity distinguished him from his compatriots, and substituted for the fatuous
arrogance of their dealings with the natives a real anxiety to understand their position. He soon got to know and esteem them. He has related his experiences in *The White King of Gonaives*, a unique book of its kind in the sense that it constitutes what, to the best of my knowledge, is the first authentic account of this black peasantry as distinct from the native life in Port-au-Prince so frequently described. I hope to convince you that such an account has been long overdue.

I think I am correct in saying that Faustin Wirkus first stayed in Hayti from 1915 to 1917. During this period he, in common with his fellow marines, was chiefly engaged in dealing with the *cacos*, a name given to the nationalists who had risen against the U.S.A. and the administration of their catspaw, President Dartiguenave. Wirkus is not deterred by the official description of these "rebels" as cutthroats and desperadoes from asserting that their only crime was to have resisted a form of government imposed by foreigners. For this good soldier, who would never question an order, has no patience with diplomatic hush-hush: he puts down his facts as they appeared to him, and it is precisely this outspokenness that gives such pungency to his memoirs. An example of this is his account of how the gallant Codio, chief and moving spirit of the cacos, met his end. The collapse of the rising in Port-au-Prince had forced Codio to fly for his life. "A Haytian scout lured him to the marines' camp," no doubt on the strength of false promises, a manoeuvre formerly brought to a high pitch of perfection at the expense of the Redskins. "And that," concludes Wirkus, "was the end of him. His obituary notice was to the effect that: General Codio has met his death in an attempt to escape from the custody of a marine. Indeed, saving the respect of the professional pacifists, it was the only efficacious mode of procedure." Efficacious? Highly so.

Wirkus returned to Hayti at the end of April 1919 as a lieutenant in the native constabulary newly founded by the U.S.A. His instructions were to hound down the numerous bands of cacos who, not at all daunted by the summary execution of General Codio, had established themselves in the outlying country. These "rebels" were extremely courageous and had nothing to learn from the white men on this score, but were very poorly armed; moreover, their habit of closing their eyes and averting their heads every time they discharged their blunderbusses caused their fire to be very much less deadly than the pacific gestures of the Americans. Lieutenant Wirkus, after a little more than a year of this life, was so exhausted that he applied to be transferred, and was; in January 1920 he was appointed commanding officer of the sub-province of Arcahaie.

Here his main responsibility was the population of Carzal, where blue eyes and fair curly hair are by no means uncommon, and freckles actually flourish, and he avows frankly that he was all but brought to his
knees by the charms of a blonde Negress. But his virtue pulled him through. He now decided to recruit his spirits with a visit to a remote corner of his jurisdiction, the island of Gonaives, 40 miles distant from Hayti. The crossing, effected in decrepit sailing vessels, was the reverse of agreeable, and Wirkus calmly expresses the opinion that not one of the white officials sent to take up residence in the island had ever succeeded in penetrating “more than five miles into the interior.” As for “sanitary inspection,” he describes its results without indulgence. . . . To make a long story short, he found himself a stranger in an unfamiliar world.

He paid an official visit to the gaol. Among the prisoners was a woman accused of having been “wanting in respect towards the Republic of Hayti and the tribunals of Gonaives.” She was a Negress, short, squat and muscular, with the eyes of a hawk. She wore a spotlessly clean white gown, a madras about her shoulders, another round her head, and on her feet that ultimate luxury, a pair of shoes, “dazzling, black, patent-leather shoes”! She was engaged in enlightening the warders, in unequivocal terms, as to their mothers and grandmothers, and hence, by devolution, as to themselves, stamping furiously up and down before the other prisoners, who seemed dreadfully intimidated. She turned on the American officer: “She looked like a general’s wife who had just been reprimanded by a member of the FORCE.” And behold, it was the Queen Ti Memenne.

Some time later he went to pay her a visit. He found her in her village, supervising the baking of a cake of cassava. She came to meet him with outstretched hand; the Haytian of breeding shakes your hand on all occasions. “It is the queen,” said a voice in his ear. “What queen?” “The queen of all the Congo societies.” She apologised for her négligé, and hastened away to make herself decent. Meanwhile a maiden showed Wirkus to a hut where his camp-bed had already been installed and a wooden basin and jugs of water got ready. Scarcely had he completed his toilet when Ti Memenne appeared, now arrayed in a white gown and white cotton stockings, a red madras about her head, and on her feet a pair of sparkling shoes, with silver buckles. In the evening a great dance was held in his honour, to the sound of Haytian drums; the queen set him on a raised seat by her side.

He found all this very interesting and pleasant. But when he told his comrades about the queen of Gonaives they laughed and supposed him to be pulling their leg; their interests, according to Wirkus, not extending further than whisky and clairin, the local sack; and when he realised that the Haytians themselves were equally indifferent and uninformed his only thought was how he could get himself appointed to Gonaives. But he had to wait until April 1925 for his transfer. Shortly afterwards he was crowned
king of the island with all prescribed rites and formalities. And here a word of explanation becomes necessary.

Gonaives contained about 12,000 inhabitants, all farmers, and not a single landed-proprietor among them; the entire island belonged to the government, who leased it to a group of concessionaires and they in their turn subleased it to the peasants. These last, in pursuance of an ancient tradition, were grouped together in what were known as “Congo societies.” These societies operated in the following way:

Each member of the society was entitled to receive a day’s work from all his fellow-members. When each one had received his due the cycle recurred. Each society had its queen, and all the queens were subject to the supreme queen, Ti Memenne. Wirkus gives a truly charming picture of the respect with which this queen of queens was surrounded and of her patriarchal authority; reading, we seem to be back in the Homeric period. Every morning, at least during seed-time and harvest, the society met with drums and flags at the house of its queen. And all day long, to the sound of the drums as they marked the rhythm, the men laboured at tilling and building, the women cooked, the children ran on messages. In the evening there was a dance at the host’s expense, this time with the “majors,” professional musicians maintained by the society, beating the drums with palms and fingers in the complicated measures of their race.

On the Saturday evening there was a meeting at the queen’s house for more dancing and the dispensing of justice. The names of all latecomers, defaulters and shirkers were communicated by the chairman of committee; the charge then went before the president of the society, who reported it in due course to the queen. The sentence rested with her. All the week, until the Saturday, the accused had to wear a red armlet. All fines were lodged in the common fund, and if the offender could not pay in cash, his poultry, pigs or goats were confiscated to the requisite amount; but the services of the society were at his disposal for the following Monday, by way of compensation for his fine. Such was this black socialism, invented in all probability by some remote ancestry that had never heard of syndicalism and did not even know how often the Republic of Hayti might change hands.

They were bled white by the tax-collectors, who duly pocketed nine-tenths of their collections. Wirkus succeeded in remedying this lamentable state of affairs, and it was partly in grateful token of his good administration, partly by virtue of his christian name Faustin, which was that of a former king of Hayti, that Ti Memenne and her heiress apparent, Queen Julia, declared and crowned him king with all the picturesque ceremony of voodoo ritual, voodoo being the only form of religion practised on the island.
Faustin reigned until 1928. On the sixth of March of that year His Excellency the General Borno, together with General Russell, paid a visit to the island of Gonaives, and all the Congo societies, complete with sacred voodoo flags and drums, turned out to do honour to these illustrious personages. It appears that the president found this attention in the highest degree embarrassing, or so at least we are given to understand by the American lieutenant whose statements have been closely adhered to in this synopsis. As a consequence, strict injunctions were issued, on the occasion of a second visit some months later, to eschew all ceremony, and above all abstain from taking photographs without the express sanction of His Excellency or one of his aides-de-camp. "The official attitude of the president towards the cult of voodoo," adds Wirkus, "could never be reconciled with his personal behaviour nor with that of his familiares," and he quotes various incidents to justify the supposition that "the majority of responsible white officials in Hayti were humble and fervent adherents of voodoo."

In January 1929 Lieutenant Wirkus was transferred to the constabulary in Port-au-Prince, assuredly a very poor return for the services of a man who had greatly augmented the revenue from taxation in his island, organised a number of reforms in the interests of the community that did not cost the state a penny, and developed the cultivation of the soil and the breeding of stock. But he does not despair of returning to his kingdom one of these days: his subjects are waiting for him.
The Child in Guadeloupe

by E. Flavia-Léopold

A study of this kind must be approached without any kind of bias or prejudice. We must not encumber ourselves with any form of racial theory or preconception liable to invalidate our observations. We are all alive to the necessity of circumspection in the study of child-psychology. In the present case we must never lose sight of the fact that local conditions constitute a most important formative factor, whose action is all the more intense as we have to deal with a comparatively limited area, where causes subject to only very slight variation take effect with exceptional energy and fixity.

E. Flavia-Leopold

The history of the Antilles, like that of all America, is largely controlled by a single capital fact: the importation of a foreign race and its reduction to slavery in the interests of the white man. Slavery was abolished in 1848 by the Second Republic, but it would be surprising if the consequences of an institution which lasted for two centuries and laid the foundations of a national population and its economic life should disappear altogether in the short space of 80 years, and the more so when we consider two contributory circumstances: the remoteness of France and the power of the interests at stake, by which I mean the interests threatened by the abolition of slavery.

Finally, Guadeloupe is an island, and a small island, separated from France by a sea voyage of ten days, badly equipped economically, and as yet inadequately provided with roads; its natural resources are no doubt very rich, but they are to a great extent sterilised by a lack of agricultural method, and above all by the most deplorable social régime and property system.

Intellectual activity is greatly handicapped by the climate, the force of habit and routine, the scarcity and ineffectiveness of institutions capable of developing it, and the indifference of the prosperous class, whose chief concern is doing good business. The indigence of the labouring
class is carefully maintained by the powerful landed societies and wealthy private proprietors, and presents an almost insurmountable barrier to spiritual activity.

The curiosity of the child who lives in Pointe-à-Pitre or Basse Terre may be satisfied by the varied life of the streets, the coming and going of mails and traders, the novelty of encounter with figures from beyond the seas, and even sometimes, when his parents can afford it, by the delights of the cinema and the distant lands it brings before him; but this is not possible for a child living in Bouillante or Grands-Fonds de Sainte-Anne, and in Guadeloupe and its dependencies there are thousands of these little creatures who, at an age when the mind requires its richest nourishment, are obliged to grow up in wretchedness and isolation.

Consider the case of a child growing up in either a village, a commune, to use the local word, of three or four hundred hearths, or in a poor hamlet attached to an estate and composed of a score of dwellings, sometimes not so many. He lives in a miserable hut thatched with dried leaves of sugar-cane and walled with planks taken from old crates. The floor is of a piece with the rest. A curtain of flowered calico divides one of the two rooms (often the only room). On the table, spread with an ancient oilcloth, is laid the poor household-ware: a cracked soup-tureen, bowls, thick glasses, cups adorned with threads of gold and loud patterns. Chairs with the stuffing coming out, an old sofa and a rickety bed. A tarnished oval mirror hangs on the wall, which is plastered with multicoloured postcards, almanacs twenty years old, and fashion-plates. There are portraits of King George V, Marshal Joffre and President Loubet, portraits of the men who were reigning in the Europe of 1890. How the children admire their blond whiskers, their brilliant uniforms and decorations! And above these potentes, on a lowly bracket beside the cup where oil burns in her honour, stands the Virgin, mother of her divine Son, a poor little statue of the Virgin, queen of heaven, invoked when the father is sick or has been sacked by the administrator.

A foul dwelling, rank and insufficient food (vegetables, cassava meal, cod of the poorest quality), such is the common lot. Footwear is reserved for solemn occasions. Everybody, adults and children, goes about in rags, except on festal days. In the event of sickness, those who live in a commune where there is a doctor may consider themselves lucky; the less fortunate have to wait for the medical inspection, a nice piece of window-dressing. Moreover it is only the absolute paupers who are entitled to free medical treatment, and many of these are often reluctant to enter their names in the official register, even if it were always possible to do so, which it is not.

Winter is the happiest time for the child, for then he can eat as much
as he wants, the braid-tree gives abundantly of its pleasant fruit and there is no scarcity of mangoes. Also he can go and fish for crabs or gather wild raspberries and sell them to the townsfolk on holiday. He sees strange well-dressed people going about in motor-cars. Sometimes he is “adopted” by kindly folk for the duration of their visit, which means that he is almost happy for a few weeks.

What does he know of the world? What does he think about? What goes on beneath the unkempt mop of black hair protected by a straw hat or an old slouch rejected by its owner? Do not imagine for a moment that he is a primitive. If you question him he will answer you politely and with docility. His body is feeble and poorly nourished; his emaciation, yellow eyes and teeth fallen into premature decay give the lamentable measure of his anaemia. But he has a lively eye and a keen expression. His intelligence, uncultivated if not entirely neglected, is easily aroused.

I have studied and observed this child and found him naturally gifted, manifesting along with a desire for instruction a mythological view of the universe in which it is difficult to determine how much is due to his youth and how much the result of his heredity. He is passionately fond of the fairy-tales which a very abundant and suggestive oral tradition passes on from one generation to another. The Creole stories, which seem to have sprung from the ancient source common to all humanity, are masterpieces of humour, maliciousness and inventive skill. Full of banter and raillery, of admiration for the cunning and the strong and contempt for the braggart and empty words, full of dicta that reflect the practical wisdom of a people that will always prefer a bird in the hand to two in the bush, such are these Creole tales, strangely reminiscent of the French fabliaux in their provocative gaiety of narration, their out-spokenness and their philosophy of resignation. No one can understand the Creole mentality who has not seen a roomful of peasants hanging on the words of one of their story-tellers, bubbling over in a movement of appreciation, rocking with laughter, clapping each other on the thighs, taking up in chorus the couplets of Compère Zamba or Compère Lapin, pouring forth an inexhaustible flow of terrifying hilarity, and all this in the flicker of a decrepit lamp swaying in the evening breeze and an atmosphere laden with the scents of jasmin and dragon’s-blood. I have never heard the Arab story-tellers, but I can scarcely believe that they are more skilled in the art of narration than these admirable Creoles, some of whom are not more than twelve years old.

It is essential to remember that the language spoken by the children—except during school-hours—is not French, but Creole. This is the language of their parents, of their beliefs and traditions, of their oral literature, both spoken and sung, and is handed on from generation to
generation. It is devoid of grammar, easily handled, free from all complicated inflexions and constructions. Intolerant of abstraction, it is only at its ease when dealing with concrete things, with the elementary expression of sensation and the simplified but vigorous translation of emotion. It consists almost entirely of concise formulae and onomatopoeia, and is necessarily restricted by its inexperience, the vagueness of a groping intelligence, an infirmity of critical judgment and an inability to express general ideas. It is the language of a people fond of argument and no less fond of a fight, but fondest of all of life, and incurably good-humoured. The Creole is a product of circumstance and reflects the natural resources as well as the limitations of the conditions that have gone to form him. The child, whose traditional modes of thought no amount of schooling can ever Europeanise, stands at the threshold of western civilisation and knows nothing of its complexity. He cannot possibly apprehend the aspirations of a man who has been formed in a school of patient discipline; he is alone and irretrievable, he can never succeed in taking cognisance of his relation to the world, for the simple reason that he knows nothing of the world.

The catholic church is a tremendous influence in the country districts. The child is baptised, attends his catechism and makes his first communion. He respects the priest and admires the holy images. He does not always understand the injunctions of the catechism, but he believes in a God creator and orderer of the universe whose justice never fails. If one of his companions makes a fool of himself, if he bullies or tells a lie, he will automatically pronounce the classic formula: “God will punish you!” God dwells in the heaven of his own creation, whence he bends the wrath of his countenance upon all evil-doers.

In church the child assimilates a rudimentary cosmogony, rules of conduct, and a few aesthetic impressions. Unfortunately the white mythology as taught by the priest is contradicted at various points by the local mythology handed down to him by his parents.

It is difficult to say in what measure the superstitions prevalent in the Antilles are of Negro origin. In this black mythology the invisible universe is superimposed on the visible. There is no active principle of causality, the events of this world are not governed by fixed laws but by the capricious will of mysterious beings, ill-disposed for the most part. The only good spirits are God and the Saints. All the others are emanations of the devil. For this simple people the devil is just as real as he was in the Middle Ages. Some men are supposed to have seen him and to live in intimate relations with him. These men are described as engaged. The act of engagement involves rites and ceremonies, and these require great skill and composure on the part of the subject who is privileged, once the contract with the devil has been made, to turn himself into an animal, fly
up into the night-sky escorted by a flame, do evil to his enemies and to those of his friends. This last is found to pay very well. A rabbit seen out late at night, a dog that emerges from the undergrowth and runs across the road, may very well be *engagees* abroad on their rounds. The child knows that Jean-Baptiste the carpenter is able to cast terrible spells and cause his death without having to lay a finger on him, either by filling his belly with water, or planting the seed of a custard-apple tree in his foot, or in any other way that may happen to recommend itself to him, for the caster of spells is a very resourceful man. The child has learnt to *respect* him, in the French as well as the Creole sense of that word. And that is not all. Sometimes he is told by his parents that the body of Jules, *engaged with the devil*, has not been found, for poor Jules had not had time to *disengage* himself before he died, which he might have done by a full confession of all his sins and by throwing himself on the mercy of the church; or he is told that he must not twist the chair about on one leg, unless he wants to die the death, or that he must never omit to say “pardon” to the spirits every time he throws water out of the window. He will gradually come to know that a bathe in the sea about midnight on the first Friday of the month (the *open* bath) is a protection against bad luck, that an importunate visitor will take his leave if a broom is turned round in the next room or salt scattered under his chair. If he is not good he is threatened with *Zoulou* and told that the devil will come and carry him off. One of the children whom I questioned in Pointe-a-Pitre assured me that “a gentleman living nearby had carried off two children who had never been seen again.”

Hence terrors, dreams, and a mysticism of fear that feeds on the stories that the child is always hearing and also on his own imagination, which magnifies all the notions that it receives. Yet there are sceptics even among the youngest children, and I have heard more than one declare: “*Pas tini Zombi*” (There are no devils—Zombi being translated equally well by *ghosts*).

To these various superstitions must be added an element which is characteristic of all Creole peoples: fatalism. The child learns at an early age to look upon everything that happens as necessary. Are we to interpret this belief as the effect of centuries of resignation to a miserable lot which had to be accepted because it was irremediable?

Fatalism, catholicism and endless superstitions, all these elements co-exist in the mind of the child, who remains quite unconscious of all the contradictions inherent in these independent systems.

I found it very difficult to get any definite information as to the proportion of children admitted to the primary schools. In the absence of official statistics I had to content myself with the estimates of a few indi-
viduals competent to judge, and it was almost unanimously the opinion of all those whom I consulted that not more than a third of the entire child population enjoyed that privilege. This is a deplorably low proportion.

When people sink to a certain stage of destitution, even elementary education becomes a luxury and the need for it is scarcely felt. The father of a family who sends his children to the nearest village school receives no help from the administration except the loan of books. It frequently happens that the children have to cover long distances, sometimes as much as fifteen kilometres (nearly ten miles), before they arrive at school. They leave home in groups very early in the morning and return at evening, exhausted but happy. In the interval between the morning and afternoon classes they retire to a field and devour their frugal meal, consisting, in the case of the more fortunate, of a little cod, rice and cassava meal. Though a journey of fifteen kilometres is exceptional there are many very young children, boys and girls, who have to come eight and ten kilometres for their daily instruction. Many of them are so timid when they come to school first that it is almost impossible to approach them. Some scarcely know their own names. They nearly all have a very restricted vocabulary and always find French the most difficult of all the subjects they have to study. A class will often have a hundred pupils.

The characteristics of the average pupil as observed by an experienced mistress are: Sensitive to praise. Keen sense of justice. Never bears any malice. Suspicious. Considerate for the teacher. Not very curious. The least thing satisfies him.

In this last tendency, I think we must make allowance for a shyness which sometimes amounts almost to savagery. The child’s comparative lack of curiosity may perhaps further be explained by his total innocence of the complexity and variety of the world; even in the higher schools the teachers complain that the children never ask any questions, forgetting that it is not so much the spirit of curiosity that is absent as the opportunity for its being exercised. Furthermore, whatever curiosity they may feel is largely satisfied by books, which they consider as the depositories of truth and revelation of the most sacred and lofty description. Book-lust is common everywhere, in greater or less degree, but here the fact of the book coming from France seems to excite it yet more.

I have deliberately confined my remarks to the child of the people as being the one most worthy of our attention. Much could be written about children of a different station and their conditions, but such was not the purpose of this article. Surely it is obvious, even after such a rapid review of the subject, that the child in Guadeloupe is the victim of a social system whose cruel injustice has never been sufficiently ventilated. Already I hear the gaggle of good apostles protesting in their precious newspapers that
an inferior race deserves no better. May they stew in the juice of their own ignorance and contemptible self-conceit. But to those others who have not lost all sense of what is right I make bold to say that injustice, odious at any time, is particularly detestable when it weighs on the age of innocence.
Black and White in Brazil

by Benjamin Péret

In the U.S.A. the Negro is an object of repulsion; but in Brazil he is regarded as a kind of social syphilis, a disease that must be treated on the quiet for fear of quarantine.

And yet, if there be any country that can be said to owe its economic existence to the Negro, that country is Brazil. This is so true that any account of the Negro in Brazil would be no less than the history of the country itself.

As early as the second half of the 17th century we find the first importations of “ebony” from the Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria, Angola, etc., to supplement an Indian population that was insubordinate, difficult to capture, and harder yet to maintain in slavery.

From then till the abolition of slavery in 1889—that is to say, in the space of three centuries—no fewer than 30 million blacks, according to the most moderate estimates of Brazilian historians, were shipped to Brazil; and this represents only a small proportion of the total number of blacks embarked for Bahia, which was the capital of the country and its chief port. These same historians describe how the slave-ships left Africa labouring under their loads of Negroes packed together in the holds like slabs of meat in the modern refrigerators of Buenos Ayres. Receiving just the bare minimum of food and water calculated to keep them alive, they were allowed on deck only once a day, when the dead were thrown overboard. This daily act of hygiene was the only one indulged in throughout the voyage. Suicides and epidemics were so frequent that it was no rare occurrence for a ship to arrive empty at Bahia. And even the few survivors were in such a condition at the end of the voyage that they were incapable of work for a couple of months.

Then they were sold in the slave-markets, usually to the planters of sugar and tobacco, who more or less monopolised the entire productive activity of the country. Working from dawn to dusk under supervision of a feitor, a kind of warder whose duties were quite as onerous as those of the gangs men in the monstrous convict-settlements of Guiana, and which mainly consisted in flogging the workers into a frenzy of industry, they were shut up for the night in the senzala, where the majority slept in chains.
Underfed, worse treated than the beasts of burden whose office they performed, separated from their children, who according to the slave-code belonged to the boss and were sold as soon as they attained a marketable value, was it surprising that they deserted and rebelled?

Desertion was always very frequent, so much so that it became necessary to establish a special body of police to round up the fugitives. This force was under the command of capitães do matto (captains of the forest), whose cruelty has remained a byword in Brazil, and who preferred to kill fugitives rather than be at the pains of taking them alive. In the sanctuary of the virgin forest the escaped Negroes formed themselves into societies called quilombos, whose members had usually to take an oath never to surrender, under pain of being excluded from all quilombos in the future, and sometimes even under pain of death. The regional histories of Brazil contain innumerable references to these quilombos. But the most important of all was that of Palmares, in the present State of Pernambuco, which numbered several millions of black fugitives, and whose history, on account of its analogies with the rebellion of Spartacus, is worthy of being recorded.

The Palmares quilombo seems to have been founded shortly after the expulsion of the Dutch from Pernambuco, which province they had occupied for about half a century, more exactly, during the second third of the 17th century. This quilombo, having driven off the Portuguese on several occasions, soon acquired great prestige among the slaves of the district, who became more than ever eager to escape and throw in their lot with this main body when it became known that most of the other quilombos had flocked to its standard.

The members of this quilombo had constituted themselves as a republic under the political and religious leadership of a Zumbi or N’Zumbi (Bantu for leader). But in the ordinary way this leader enjoyed no special prerogative, being called on only when a situation requiring organised action arose—for example, on the occasion of combats and religious festivals. There was no such thing as private ownership. The crops and all that was taken fishing and hunting belonged to the society. What little we know of their domestic organisation leads us to suppose that the women were the wives of all and sundry; but since they were fewer than the men it is probable that their family life was based on some hybrid convention partaking of both group marriage and polyandry.

The Palmares quilombo held together for twenty years, increasing in numbers all this time. A regular army was needed to reduce it to submission. The blacks of Palmares struggled on to the bitter end, and many, following the example of their Zumbi, committed suicide rather than surrender. Only a few hundred escaped with their lives and these were brought back into slavery.
The risings of the slaves on the plantations were also very frequent, but were usually isolated wherever the outbreak occurred, on account of the difficulty of establishing communication between the blacks of the different plantations, which were often long distances apart. The first important risings that we find recorded are those of Bahia and Minas Geraes, at the end of the 18th century. They were of course ruthlessly suppressed. Then there was a whole series of risings from 1800 to 1835, all in Bahia, with the exception of two: one, not very important, in Rio de Janeiro, the other in the State of Maranhão. But this latter was not, as the others were, confined to the slaves alone. It was rather a kind of Brazilian jacquerie in which whites, Indians, Negroes and half-breeds of every description joined forces against the Portuguese oppressor.

Of all the risings of the slaves in Bahia the last was the most important, and the only one which could boast of a complete programme of political and social redress. The black Mussulman was the force behind all these risings: the Hausas at first, and then the Nagos. Strictly speaking, the Nagos were not pure black Mussulmans like the Hausas, but blacks who had come under Islamic influence and adopted that religion in the case of certain tribes. It is true that their ethnical characteristics are less clearly defined than those of the Hausas, who, before the European invasion, formed a people of strict determination living on the banks of the middle Niger, in the present English colony of Nigeria; whereas the Nagos are still to be found in the region of Lagos, Porto-Novo, etc. Their language is used as an auxiliary language by all the peoples of the region, not excepting the Hausas, from the Niger to the Ivory Coast. Thus in Brazil, it was customary to label as Nago every slave who spoke this language, irrespective of whether it was his native tongue or the “esperanto” that enabled him to communicate with the bulk of the other slaves.

During the night of January 6–7, 1835, the rising broke out simultaneously at different points of the town of Bahia. The insurgents, armed with pikes, axes, spades and mattocks, tried to rush the arsenal. Unfortunately the movement had been betrayed, and instead of the small guard they expected to find they were met with heavy fire. By dawn the rising had been extinguished. In the course of the subsequent investigation the ringleaders admitted that they had planned to massacre all the authorities as well as any others that might oppose their determination to set up a Negro republic. This was the last rising of slaves in Brazil.

A prosperous future now seemed in store for slavery, protected as it was by the existing laws and sanctioned by the moral authority of an unspeakable catholic church always ready to consecrate whatever forms of extortion are most likely to fill her coffers. Yet already there were signs of a movement to abolish slavery. In 1817 a revolution, or rather, a con-
spiration, was on foot in Pernambuco for the setting up of an independent republic to be known as the “Confederation of the Equator,” separated from the Portuguese metropolis. This future republic proposed to do away with slavery. But the plot was discovered before the conspirators were in a position to execute their projects.

Six years later a state of independence was proclaimed and the new imperial government, founded, like all the other new states of Latin America, with the support of English gold, participated in the international agreements that declared slave-trading to be illegal. But slavery was still far from being abolished in Brazil. It may even be asserted that, from the moment when the Brazilian government undertook to import no more slaves, the traffic took on an intensity such as it had never known before, rising, according to Perdigão Malheiro, from an average of 20,000 new slaves per annum, at the beginning of the 19th century, to one of almost 50,000 between 1845 and 1850.

The majority of these slaves were employed in the sugar plantations, which at that time represented the richest industry in the whole of Brazil. But already Brazilian sugar had begun to decline on the world market. The planters, steadily impoverished by this decline, held fast to slavery as a drowning man to a straw, even though a comparison between the productive powers of slaves and paid labourers showed a clear balance in favour of the latter. But the slaves represented a capital whose value increased rapidly in the second half of the century on account of the obstacles which the government had been obliged to put in the way of the contraband slave-traffic, while the planters, who depended on slave labour and who were moreover the main support of the imperial government, opposed every measure tending to restrict their prerogatives.

Against this, the planter who worked his land with paid labour had never been obliged to drain his capital of such an important sum as the planter who had purchased slaves, and was thus in a position to compete successfully with the latter. As far back as 1830 it had been possible to compare the two positions in the southern states, where huge numbers of European workers, drawn mostly from Germany, Poland and France, were being employed. Thus, when the cultivation of coffee was first introduced in São Paolo, about 1850–1860, the planters of that state were enthusiastically in favour of a policy of immigration, to which the northern planters were just as vehemently opposed, because it would prejudice their interests by lowering the value of their slave labour. The former hoped to secure, with the abolition of slavery, a “national” proletariat, already acclimatised, and consequently more productive than the imported proletariat. And because the empire was in the pocket of the slave proprietors, the southern coffee planters turned republican.
The empire, harassed by the anti-slavery campaign, decreed in 1871 that the children of slaves should be regarded as free-born. With the further development of the movement, in 1884 the states of Ceará and Amazonas abolished slavery throughout their territories. The small number of slaves in these states made it possible to realise this reform at no great cost. In the following year the imperial government set free all slaves over the age of 60. Finally, on May 13, 1889, Princess Isabella, regent in the absence of the Emperor, who had gone to Europe for his health, abolished slavery and set free more than 723,000 Negroes, all those that had not already been freed.

These liberated blacks poured into the towns, where their distress was so appalling that they were soon obliged to return to the plantations which they had just left. But the sudden release of all these slaves had provoked a very grave economic crisis throughout the country, a crisis that precipitated the first labour movement in the history of Brazil and united black and white workers against their oppressors, though it is true that the number of white workers was small at that time.

Are the blacks any better off as a result of their liberation? In a general way, yes. But there are many important exceptions. It is true that the republic proclaimed in 1889, like the French Constituent Assembly a century before, that “all men were born free and with equal rights”; but good care was taken that these “rights” should nor be upheld. It is also true that the vast majority of Negroes in Brazil, both in town and country, are workers. The lower middle-class comprises only a handful of Negroes, and the upper middle-class still less, so few indeed that they could almost be counted, certainly not more than 100 families out of the entire population of the country. It follows that the Negro in Brazil has always been regarded with open contempt. No one would be more astonished than the Negro himself if a white bourgeois were to shake him by the hand as he would a man of his own race. Among the labouring classes, however, white men and men of colour live as a rule on terms of strict equality. Here their conditions of life are identical, they work side by side in a state of the most abject subjection, common victims of a destitution which compels a good part of the population to go barefoot—in order that the bourgeoisie may spend half the year in the night-clubs of Montmartre.

Yet in the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paolo and Minas Geraes the Negro is exploited rather more severely than the white. This follows on the attempt to oppose two categories of workers, just as later an attempt was made to oppose the foreign worker to the native Brazilian. But if the latter experiment has met with a certain measure of success since the establishment of the present dictatorship, thanks to the development of a
jingoes and jingo hysteria that would delight our own mangy nationalists, and thanks also to the low level of class-consciousness among the unorganised Brazilian workers, it has not yet been possible to disunite the workers on the plea that they are not all covered with skin of the same colour.

In the north (by which I mean all that portion of Brazil between the state of Bahia and French Guiana) this manoeuvre failed for other reasons; in the first place the conditions of the workers were so generally miserable that it was impossible (outside the inevitable distinction between industrial and agricultural workers) to separate them into strata of unequal status; in certain districts, moreover, the coloured workers constitute the vast majority of the producers, the white confining themselves almost entirely to administrative and supervisory positions.

Thus in Bahia a century ago we find a total population constituted as follows: 26,000 pure blacks, 13,000 mulattoes and half-breeds of various kinds, and 11,000 white men. The proportion of these last in respect of the total population has only very slightly increased, whereas the proportion of blacks has greatly diminished in favour of the mulattoes and half-breeds, who form the vast majority of the metropolitan proletariat. In Bahia, as in the rest of the country, the half-breeds are divided into caboclos and cafusos, the progeny respectively of whites and Indians, and blacks and Indians. These two classes of half-breeds are again crossed with whites, then again with each other, so that we are presented with a bewildering scale of colours in which it is often extremely difficult to determine the respective contributions of the three races. Nor can we hope to produce figures in respect of the coloured population of Brazil, seeing that no recent statistics exist to which we can refer. We can only hazard as a rough estimate that the blacks and half-breeds between them make up from 25 per cent. to 30 per cent. of the population of Brazil. This does not include the Indians who live in the backwoods and number close on a million. There are, therefore, at least 10 million coloured men living in Brazil, and of these 10 million about four-fifths occupy the five states of Bahia, Minas Geraes, Rio de Janeiro, Espiritu Santo and Maranhão. It is also safe to say that of these 10 million four-fifths are agricultural workers, employed on the plantations, and as often as not under conditions that do not greatly differ from those of slavery.

The history of Brazil, and of the abolition of slavery at the end of the war, contains scarcely any trace of labour agitation. This may be ascribed to the rudimentary organisation of pre-war industry, and, in consequence, to the very obscure class-consciousness of the Brazilian proletariat.

Only one popular rising is worthy of mention throughout this period, namely, the mutiny aboard the men-of-war, which were largely
manned by Negroes. This was provoked by the ill-treatment to which the sailors were subjected. The least breach of discipline was punished by hundreds of strokes of the cat. The crews of two of the most powerful ironclads then in existence formed themselves into a "committee of action" and issued a manifesto calling on the men to mutiny. The rising broke out on November 22, 1910. A Negro, João Candido Felisberto, was elected leader, and was assisted by a staff, also voted by the crews, which contained no man of higher grade than second mate. The officers were thrown out and those that resisted, executed. The mutineers then informed the government that they would bombard the town of Rio de Janeiro, in whose harbour the ships lay at anchor, if they were not guaranteed a general amnesty and the abolition of corporal punishment. The government had no choice but to capitulate. But a fortnight later, when the ships had been disarmed, it forced a second rising and was thus enabled to arrest all the ring-leaders of the first. More than a thousand sailors were deported to the forests, and there perished. The ring-leaders were subjected to an inquisition of torture and confinement which lasted two years, until finally the few survivors were summoned before a court-martial and acquitted, just at the moment when the government, having nothing more to fear, was pleased to pardon them.

Yet their sacrifice had not been in vain, for corporal punishment disappeared from that day forward.

The rapid development of industry during the war produced simultaneously a renewed influx of immigrants, mainly from the neutral countries, and a first movement of the population towards the towns.

The revolutionary crisis that broke upon the world in 1917 had its repercussion in Brazil, where
a number of serious strikes broke out, becoming more and more frequent and intensive till they culminated in the general strike of 1919, which paralysed the entire economic activity of the two most important centres in Brazil: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The year 1920 saw a lull in the movement.

In these strikes, as in the naval mutiny of 1910, the revolutionary element was not recruited, as in the previous century, from the victims of a single race, but from a class composed of a mixture of races. Whites, blacks and half-breeds were united in opposing the common enemy, rightly identified in the mind of the Brazilian proletariat with the boss. And since this latter was usually a foreigner, the lower middle-class, growing in numbers and impatient to take a more active part in state affairs, opened a campaign against foreign capitalists, denouncing them to the proletariat as the agents of Anglo-American imperialism, but omitting to mention that the national capitalism was entirely subservient to the economic systems of Europe and the U.S.A., of which dependence the foreign capital, amounting to 50 milliards of francs, invested in Brazil, is a more final testimony than any argument. The illiteracy of the masses favoured this undertaking, which succeeded in diverting the indignation of the masses against foreign capital and thus in safeguarding the interests of the national bourgeoisie in all its ramifications. This is at the root of all the middle-class “anti-imperialist” agitation in Latin America in recent years, an agitation whose only effect can be to affirm the ascendancy of foreign capital, unless the proletariat intervenes, as it did in Chili, determined to enforce a definitely Communist programme.
Sambo without Tears
by Georges Sadoul

The French bourgeois turns up his nose in disgust at the American who bars the Negro from certain cinemas, restaurants and dance-halls, and proclaims that democratic France makes no distinction between black and white. Why, if that be the case, are Congo piccaninnies taught that their ancestors were Gauls, white-skinned and fair-haired, while French children are still waiting for the news that the first occupants of France were Negroes? This incoherence is all the more curious as the latter doctrine would seem to proceed naturally from the discoveries of Grimaldi. ¹

I have been reading some French papers published specially for children: Cri-Cri, l’Epatant, l’Intrépide, Pierrot, le Petit Illustré, each of whose weekly sales runs into hundreds of thousands of copies and which are bought by as many of the offspring of labourer, peasant and petit bourgeois as know how to read. I bought them indiscriminately in a village of small farmers, at the shop, and I know that they circulate in all the villages and industrial suburbs of France. I soon realised, without having chosen the numbers, that the Negro who symbolises, in these as in most other publications, colonial peoples of every shade of colour, is the stock hero of these children’s papers and one that it is found expedient to put over. Here is the Negro as conceived in the interests of the juvenile mind, the Negro as visualised by the average French bourgeois.

“In his wild state,” that is to say, before being colonised, the Negro is a dangerous ruffian. Cri-Cri presents one of our good fellows setting out in the direction of Madagascar. But he is captured by the natives and turned into a slave. L’Intrépide tells the true story of Major Lang, the English explorer, bound for Timbuctoo. All goes well till two native chieftains, the dirty dogs, take him for a spy, him, Major Lang, a benevolent pioneer, who never heard of guns or bullets, let alone missionaries. The “niggers” kill Major Lang. Just one more before bye-
bye: a pair of European pals, “gone to Africa to seek their fortune,” are discovered scouring the Sahara in a caterpillar-car. A ferocious maiden of Sudan goes within an ace of butchering them with volleys of rocks.

The white men are kind, they cannot bear to see the Negro running wild, they simply must colonise and colonise quick. Why must they? *Pierrot*, a Roman Catholic organ, lets the cat out of the bag. Only a Berber cat to be sure, but no matter; when it comes to “niggers,” nice distinctions of colour and disposition cut no ice with the French bourgeois.

A French officer, noble lad, speaks:

“This silly people seems to imagine that we come to Africa to conquer, whereas of course we come as benefactors... When I first set foot in Tafilelt, where order only now begins to reign, lice were looked upon as sacred and propagated their numbers, on account of public opinion being set against their destruction, with terrifying rapidity... We have organised a campaign against all social ills; we have created schools with medical instruction...” etc., etc. The ninny to whom the brilliant officer addresses this guff is a pacifistic aeronaut. Won over by the oration he soars into the blue on his mission of mercy, which takes the form of spraying the bold black Berbers with bombs. A man is no more sacred animal than a louse, in death they are not divided. Even a pacified Negro has his faults. He boozes.

The Negro is furthermore slothful beyond belief. He has to be bul-
lied into working.

But the Negro has his qualities. The Negro is a buffoon created by special request for the entertainment of the white man. He is the jester of the French kings.

It is presumably in this capacity, and in no other, that the Negro is elevated into the more rarefied spheres of French society, as groom or purveyor of jazz to the “quality.”

The Negro has other qualities. He can be made into a soldier, or even a cop.

These delicious colonials in their caterpillar-car who so utterly confound the Negro policeman are no other than the “Nickleshods,” the most beloved and heroic group of men in the whole of guttersnipe literature. They were burglars before the war and codded the police up to the eyes. But when the war came up they joined, killed any amount of Boches and after the armistice were transferred to the colonies. It has even been rumoured that

Plate 5. *The Negro is a soldier (L’Epatant).*

they became colonial ministers. For this reason the governor of the oasis where they have just arrived does them as proud as he knows how. Who are these women that advance? They are platter Negresses, they ply their white lords with appetisers. (Plates 6 and 7.)

And the Nickleshods, having duly looked towards the governor, decorate these faithful servitors. Even so were honours showered on those ignoble lackeys and lickspittles, the Negro under-secretaries of state in the colonies, a class that is as much the pride and the joy of France as are the black whores in her brothels. (Plate 8.)

Plate 6. *The Negro is a cop (L’Epatant).*
Plate 7. The Negro is a slave (L’Epatant).

But no matter what the Negro does he will always be an imbecile by white standards of reference. Next we have a whole Negro tribe in kinks of astonishment before the fascinating and ingenious colonial soldier, who is the first to put the darbies on an ostrich in this way. (Plate 9.)

Reading these children’s papers that are calculated to turn their readers into perfect imperialists we get an idea of the coloured man as bowdlerised by the French bourgeoisie. But when we find such “distinguished” and

Plate 8. The white man is kind to the Negro (L’Epatant).

“talented” writers as M. Maurice Martin du Gard springing to their feet in colonial fashion and demanding the segregation, and “particularly the sexual segregation,” of the black troops in France, we are entitled to wonder in what respect the treatment inflicted on the Negroes by the French bourgeois differs from the American variety which he finds so shocking. The distinction is a fine one indeed.

A journalist, M. Max Massot, in the Journal, 1931, is indignant at the idea that “in Cape Town a Hindu Brahmin, even though he were a member of the high imperial council, may not sit down for a drink next to

Plate 9. But the white colonial will always be superior to the Negro (Cri-Cri).
Thus the scandal of segregation, in the eyes of a French journalist consists in a bourgeois being denied the privileges enjoyed by a member of the proletariat. But, as we learn in the course of the same article, “the 115,000 native inhabitants of Cape Town, as distinct from the 130,000 Europeans, furnish the most menial positions and the lowest ranks of non-specialised labour.” Surely exclusion from Cape Town cafés applies less to the Negro than to the lowest strata of a class. I read that article in a café in Nice which refused admission to the drivers of cars-à-bancs parked outside because its genteel clients objected to their costumes and general demeanour. In this country (France), where the proletariat comprises a mere handful of coloured men, segregation is a question of dress. The eccentric bourgeois who tries to get into a “respectable” restaurant or dance-hall dressed like a carpenter is as sure to be evicted as the Brahmin from his café, whether it was in Cape Town or New Orleans. And that seems to be the only shade of difference between the French and American bourgeois.

With us the most exploited class is recognisable by its dress; with them by its dress and colour. Forty years ago the bulk of the black population of the U.S.A. was composed of peasants very little better off than when they were slaves. They represented the most exploited section of the peasant community and their colour, symbolic of their economic situation, was a stain on their character. Great stress was laid on this stigma in order to persuade the “poor whites,” just as badly off economically, that their situation was a privileged one. The white and black sections of the impoverished peasantry had at all costs to be prevented from joining forces.

When industry, with the development of its enterprises, began to press more and more Negroes into its service, the bourgeoisie was careful to exploit the rivalry that it had fostered between black and white members of the poor community. In certain industrial areas in France large numbers of Italians, Poles and Arabs are employed at starvation wages. They are segregated from the French proletariat, provided with their own quarters, shops, restaurants, schools, churches, and sometimes even, as is the case with the Algerians, with their own brothels. They are called every vile name from “wops” and “polaks” to “sids” and “bicots” and made responsible for low wages, unemployment and the high cost of living. These “lousy foreigners” are France’s “niggers.” Sweated labour, whether denoted by language or colour, meets with the same treatment at the hands of both the French and American industrial systems: racial peculiarities exploited to disunite the proletariat.

Thus we find black and white finally co-ordinate, in the sense that a Pole in France receives the same treatment as a Negro in the States. The whole colour question becomes a question of class. And the solution is
Marx prophesied that the chains of the Jews would only fall with those of the proletariat; the same may be said of the chains of the Negroes.

I am writing this article in Moscow, in this country where the proletariat is dictator. The children's papers that I buy at random in the kiosks present a very different Negro from the assassin, slave and drunkard imposed upon the children of the French bourgeoisie.

Here the Negro and the Negro child are shown as victims of white colonisation, the white child and the black child as fighting side by side against capitalism of whatever colour. A paper written in English on sale in these same kiosks, the American communist paper, urges its readers to vote for the two communist candidates, the white man Foster and the Negro Ford, the first coloured nominee in the history of American presidential elections.

It is true, what Lenin said, that the struggle of the proletariat and the struggle of the oppressed races, symbolised by the Negro, are one and the same; and that the liberty of the proletariat is indissolubly bound up with the liberty of colonial peoples. And that is why, in spite of the manoeuvres of all bourgeois, black and white, and in spite of the Candace or American Negro bourgeois and their paeans in honour of segregation, "source of monumental fortunes" (St. Louis Argus, 1931), the proletariat, black and white, will soon be singing with all its voices that admirable chorus that comes to us from America and was taught to me by Negroes as we stood out from the shores of Finland on our way to Soviet Russia:

Black and white we stand united,
Black and white we stand united,
Black and white we stand united,
All the workers are united,
Come!

**Sambo without Tears**

1. Anthropologists have stated that the prehistoric skeletons recently found in the caves at Grimaldi, Alpes Maritimes, were those of a Negro race.

2. Black deputy from French West Indies who followed Diagne (Senegalese deputy) as Colonial Under-Secretary.

Plate 10. *Children of every colour battle against capitalism side by side*. On the flag: *Get ready to fight for the working class.* (From a Soviet paper for children).


Plate 13. *From the “American Daily Worker.”*
Murderous Humanitarianism
by the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris

For centuries the soldiers, priests and civil agents of imperialism, in a wel­ter of looting, outrage and wholesale murder, have batted with impu­nity on the coloured races; now it is the turn of the demagogues, with their counterfeit liberalism.

But the proletariat of today, whether metropolitan or colonial, is no longer to be fooled by fine words as to the real end in view, which is still, as it always was, the exploitation of the greatest number for the benefit of a few slavers. Now these slavers, knowing their days to be numbered and reading the doom of their system in the world crisis, fall back on a gospel of mercy, whereas in reality they rely more than ever on their traditional methods of slaughter to enforce their tyranny.

No great penetration is required to read between the lines of the news, whether in print or on the screen: punitive expeditions, blacks lynched in America, the white scourge devastating town and country in our parlia­mentary kingdoms and bourgeois republics.

War, that reliable colonial endemic, receives fresh impulse in the name of “pacification.” France may well be proud of having launched this godsent euphemism at the precise moment when, in throes of pacifism, she sent forth her tried and trusty thugs with instructions to plunder all those distant and defenceless peoples from whom the intercapitalistic butchery had distracted her attentions for a space.

The most scandalous of these wars, that against the Riffains in 1925, stimulated a number of intellectuals, investors in militarism, to assert their complicity with the hangmen of jingo and capital.

Responding to the appeal of the Communist party we protested against the war in Morocco and made our declaration in Revolution first and always.

In a France hideously inflated from having dismembered Europe, made mincemeat of Africa, polluted Oceania and ravaged whole tracts of Asia, we Surréalistes pronounced ourselves in favour of changing the imperialist war, in its chronic and colonial form, into a civil war. Thus we placed our energies at the disposal of the revolution, of the proletariat and its struggles, and defined our attitude towards the colonial problem, and hence towards the colour question.
Gone were the days when the delegates of this snivelling capitalism might screen themselves in those abstractions which, in both secular and religious mode, were invariably inspired by the christian ignominy and which strove on the most grossly interested grounds to masochise whatever peoples had not yet been contaminated by the sordid moral and religious codes in which men feign to find authority for the exploitation of their fellows.

When whole peoples had been decimated with fire and the sword it became necessary to round up the survivors and domesticate them in such a cult of labour as could only proceed from the notions of original sin and atonement. The clergy and professional philanthropists have always collaborated with the army in this bloody exploitation. The colonial machinery that extracts the last penny from natural advantages hammers away with the joyful regularity of a poleaxe. The white man preaches, doses, vaccinates, assassinates and (from himself) receives absolution. With his psalms, his speeches, his guarantees of liberty, equality and fraternity, he seeks to drown the noise of his machine-guns.

It is no good objecting that these periods of rapine are only a necessary phase and pave the way, in the words of the time-honoured formula, “for an era of prosperity founded on a close and intelligent collaboration between the natives and the metropolis”? It is no good trying to palliate collective outrage and butchery by jury in the new colonies by inviting us to consider the old, and the peace and prosperity they have so long enjoyed. It is no good blustering about the Antilles and the “happy evolution” that has enabled them to be assimilated, or very nearly, by France.

In the Antilles, as in America, the fun began with the total extermination of the natives, in spite of their having extended a most cordial reception to the Christopher Columbian invaders. Were they now, in the hour of triumph, and having come so far, to set out empty-handed for home? Never! So they sailed on to Africa and stole men. These were in due course promoted by our humanists to the ranks of slavery, but were more or less exempted from the sadism of their masters in virtue of the fact that they represented a capital which had to be safeguarded like any other capital. Their descendants, long since reduced to destitution (in the French Antilles they live on vegetables and salt cod and are dependent in the matter of clothing on whatever old guano sacks they are lucky enough to steal), constitute a black proletariat whose conditions of life are even more wretched than those of its European equivalent and which is exploited by a coloured bourgeoisie quite as ferocious as any other. This bourgeoisie, covered by the machine-guns of culture, “elects” such perfectly adequate representatives as “Hard Labour” Diagne and “Twister” Delmont.
The intellectuals of this new bourgeoisie, though they may not all be specialists in parliamentary abuse, are no better than the experts when they proclaim their devotion to the Spirit. The value of this idealism is precisely given by the manoeuvres of its doctrinaires who, in their paradise of comfortable iniquity, have organised a system of politronery proof against all the necessities of life and the urgent consequences of dream. These gentlemen, votaries of corpses and theosophies, go to ground in the past, vanish down the warrens of Himalayan monasteries. Even for those whom a few last shreds of shame and intelligence dissuade from invoking those current religions whose God is too frankly a God of cash, there is the call of some "mystic Orient" or other. Our gallant sailors, policemen and agents of imperialistic thought, in labour with opium and literature, have swamped us with their irretentions of nostalgia; the function of all these idyllic alarums among the dead and gone being to distract our thoughts from the present, the abominations of the present.

A Holy-Saint-faced *International* of hypocrites deprecates the material progress foisted on the blacks, protests, courteously, against the importation not only of alcohol, syphilis and field-artillery, but also of railways and printing. This comes well after the former rejoicings of its evangelical spirit at the idea that the "spiritual values" current in capitalistic societies, and notably the respect of human life and property, would devolve naturally from enforced familiarity with fermented drinks, firearms and disease. It is scarcely necessary to add that the colonist demands this respect of property without reciprocity.

Those blacks who have merely been compelled to distort in terms of fashionable jazz the natural expression of their joy at finding themselves partakers of a universe from which western peoples have wilfully withdrawn may consider themselves lucky to have suffered no worse thing than degradation. The 18th century derived nothing from China except a
repertory of frivolities to grace the alcove. In the same way the whole object of our romantic exoticism and modern travel-lust is of use only in entertaining that class of blasé client sly enough to see an interest in deflecting to his own advantage the torrent of those energies which soon, much sooner than he thinks, will close over his head.

André Breton, Roger Caillois, René Char, René Crevel, Paul Eluard, J.-M. Monnerot, Benjamin Péret, Yves Tanguy, André Thirion, Pierre Unik, Pierre Yoyotte
Races and Nations
by Léon Pierre-Quint

The Benefits of Colonisation

The traveller of the present day, visiting Central Africa for the first time, cannot but be forcibly impressed by the problem of colonisation in all its terrible complexity. Three years ago, André Gide went to the Congo. For me, his testimony is particularly valuable: passionately attached to truth, Gide goes to infinite pains to control and verify the least of his affirmations. He left France "with an open mind"; his baggage consisted of butterfly nets; he had planned a pleasure trip, asking nothing more than to escape and be received into the rapture of nature, the rapture of the blue sky and the virgin forest.

But with the first experiences of contact the country loses something of its magic. At Libreville—famine. The cargo of tinned food sent from Bordeaux arrives unfit for use. Brazzaville, in the absence of all hygiene, is devastated by epidemics. So much for the prologue.

In the heart of Oubanghi, where but few Europeans have dared to penetrate, he comes upon a little caravan of blacks, the most lamentable collection of human cattle that can possibly be imagined. "Fifteen women and two men roped together . . . scarcely one of them in a fit state to be on his feet," advancing "escorted by guards armed with five-thonged whips." Further on, in quite independent regions, he meets with still more wretched columns. They dare not reply to his questions. The terror is general. The blacks are flying from porterage. Because here there are neither railways nor roads nor canals the authorities are obliged, in the interests of transport, to mobilise the natives, by force if necessary; the militia is set at the heels of the fugitives and a regular man-hunt is organised. The inhabitants abandon their farms and take to flight. The family makes merry on these occasions, taking to the jungle, lying hidden in caves like so many wild beasts. The governors' unofficial reports bear out these facts. Many a fertile region, with its sprinkling of flourishing villages, has been reduced to utter ruin in this way.

During the war of 1914 the natives were recruited in the same way. Each province had to furnish a certain percentage of soldiers which was
fixed in advance by the military administration. The village that fell short of its quota was considered to be in a state of revolt. It was suddenly surrounded by a detachment of militia. The natives were driven out of their huts with rifle-fire; if this end were not attained with the desired promptitude, the village was set on fire. Thus tracked down, terrified and exhausted, the blacks surrendered. They were driven off in a herd, under vigilant escort, to the nearest administrative centre. The halt and infirm were allowed to go home; the others, after a short delay, were packed off to the front.

Today the real front is constituted by the railway-line in course of construction between Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. There, in the absence of adequate and sufficient tools, the Negro does the work of the machine, the lorry and the crane. “We must either accept the sacrifice of from six to eight thousand men,” said M. Antonelli, the Governor-General, “or else renounce our railway.” 17,000 men had been sacrificed as early as 1929, and there remained 300 kilometres of line to construct.

**OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA, MORAL PROGRESS**

I am frequently stupefied and painfully moved by such revelations. I ask myself how the public can accept such administrative propaganda when it is so obviously contradicted by the facts. War in the name of Liberty and Right! Benefits of Colonisation! How is it possible for the lower middle-classes, whose sincerity I postulate, not to be struck by the enormous hypocrisy of these official prevarications?

Can it be that the public is ill-informed? No. But the colonial regime is depicted, even by the most courageous writers, with such circumspection and prudence, with such an obvious determination not to track down the evil to its origin, that the abuses of that regime appear in the light of exceptional cases, whereas, in fact, they constitute a state of affairs that is not merely tolerated, but admitted as normal. When Gide speaks of Negroes—shackled, whipped, burnt and tortured—the public recognises that certain administrators are at times inclined to exceed their functions, but remains in ignorance of the fact that these “scandals,” far from being isolated and extraordinary, are everyday occurrences.

Even if it did realise that such was the case no doubt it would consider these extortions as a necessary evil. The great mass of public opinion imagines that war, the cruelties of men, the exploitation of man by man, belong to the natural order of things; and most notably it seems to imagine that it is the duty of white peoples to invade every corner of the world and exact service from the natives. So much postulated, official propaganda assumes the mantle of a benevolent invention whose function it is to mitigate the small bourgeois vision of an inevitable reality whose excessive brutality, were it not for such official aid, might tend to cause his heart to bleed.
It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of this propaganda. In itself it constitutes the only new contribution of the last couple of centuries. All the declarations of the Encyclopaedists and the French philosophers on the Rights of Man, all the sentimental elucubrations of the anti-slave movement, have been adopted by our governments and applied to their own ends.

Today the entire colonial system is represented as a cultural dispensation, its benefits are proclaimed to the world in a series of sermons, speeches and tracts. And yet there is scarcely any difference between this system and that of the early slave-traders. For example, there is a striking similarity between the cargoes of Negroes sent from Fort Archambault to the coast for the construction of the railway, and the cargoes of “ebony” dispatched to America in the good old days; just as formerly, the blacks are packed together like so much merchandise, and die in quantities; some fall into the river and are drowned; others succumb to a hail of living coals from the funnels; others, without any covering to protect them from the terrible cold of the night, die in a fever.

About 1820 a public exposure was made by a French philanthropist of the dank holds, the shackles, chains, whips, etc., that then formed part of the slave-trader’s stock-in-trade. The public was stirred to a great movement of sympathy. Today opinion would remain indifferent since everybody, including the youngest schoolboy, is convinced that the European in the colonies is actuated exclusively by the desire to propagate the bounties of civilization. Such a conviction corresponds indeed to a very real progress; the natives themselves believe in the end that the white man comes simply and solely in order to rescue them from damnation and poverty; and they are only mildly surprised that the kingdom of Heaven on earth should be such a long time about putting in an appearance.

**The Hierarchy of Castes,**

**A Consequence of All Colonisation**

This system of barriers, attenuated by the traditional humanitarian homily, is by no means confined to the colonies; it flourishes in many ancient European possessions that have by this time succeeded in regaining their independence—for example, in the U.S.A. The pure-bred Americans have established an impassable “line” between themselves and the blacks. They have rounded them up like lepers in their own quarters. Woe to the fool-hardy bold enough to emerge from the ghetto; lynching, sanctioned lynching, the death by stoning of our modern biblical society, is generally the extent of his welcome. Thus in the U.S.A. we have this ladder of races, built up of sharply distinguished successive castes. At the foot of the social scale: blacks and Chinese; at the summit: the Anglo-Saxons. And yet the
public applauds when an American like Miss Mayo denounces the shame and abomination of this régime of castes as applied . . . in India. The unfortunate pariahs, whose mere contact represents desecration for the Hindu, are deserving of pity; yet it is perfectly natural that in the trains and trams of the Southern States special compartments should be reserved for the blacks in order that the white man may be spared their proximity. No doubt the peace of mind of the American is guaranteed by the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour. Furthermore we have the official assurance that the U.S.A. was the first country to proclaim the Rights of the Citizen. Of what importance is the occasional accommodation with the reality of life, so long as the ideal remains intact? Thus racial prejudices take shelter today behind a hypocritical ideology while remaining as tenacious, as savage and as universal as ever before.

Racial Prejudices, or the Absence of the Spirit of Relativism

Every collective group believes itself alone chosen by the Gods, alone destined to receive the Truth, alone summoned on earth for the greater glory of Heaven. In this conviction of superiority resides the idea that other men are not altogether human. Other men are strictly "alien." Have they a soul? A sensibility? An intelligence? It is hardly likely. They lack certain fundamental constituents of human nature. They belong to a vague indistinct herd, impoverished by nature, more or less harmful, and that must be taught to keep a respectful distance. Every race, every people, every social class has, at all times, designated with a generic term of contempt the great bulk of men outside its particular group, the Greeks speak of the "barbarians," the Jews of the "gentiles," the reigning classes of the "canaille," the guttersnipes. These convictions correspond to the old religious dogmatism. They can be traced back to the period when every race considered itself unique; the universe was reduced to an infinitesimal portion of the globe; immediately overhead, the solid vault of the sky, punctuated with stars; the invisible God, anxious no doubt to keep up Jewish appearances, took a bit of a dander each evening in the Garden of Paradise. Now that the earth is no longer a point in space, now that we can comprehend the rise, decline and death of civilisations, the infinite has assumed very different proportions; space has pushed back its frontiers; the idea of an absolute has no longer the same significance. You would have expected these modern notions to have their counterpart in social conceptions. Unfortunately, the atavistic instincts of the masses have not evolved with the development of our knowledge. And yet the final claim to honour of the 18th century in France is to have introduced for the first time the idea of relativism. Peoples are differentiated by circum-
stances of time and place, by education, by degree of evolution. From this point of view the historical concept of race loses its importance. It has no longer any absolute value. It can no more separate man from his neighbour than accidents of physique, variously coloured eyes and hair, can separate members of the same family.

RACIAL PREJUDICES, AND THE RIGHT OF MIGHT

Racial prejudices are not merely the expression of certain intellectual conceptions of nationality, but also of the circumstances relating peoples at a given period in terms of material power. The Hebrews, for whom the universe did not exist beyond the limits of the Promised Land, have provided the most striking example of racial pride. Their downfall dates from the day they were brought into captivity. A people, before it can consider itself as the only valid representative of the human species, must be in a position to dominate its neighbours. Conquered, it believes itself abandoned by its Gods. Its assurance collapses. The pariah imagines that upon him are visited the sins of his fathers. The slave feels himself despicable because he is a slave. Reciprocally, the patrician, the Brahman, Rome, by the simple fact of their reigning over other men, never have the slightest doubt as to their innate superiority. Because there is no essential difference between racial prejudices and those of nation and class. All forms of order, social, international, colonial, are founded on the belief that power is of divine right. A mystical belief, shared, most frequently, by oppressor and oppressed, where each is imprisoned in his own system of reference. We laugh at the expense of the Negro who looks on every white governor as a god—and fail to appreciate the absurdity of the white who is incapable of separating in his mind the Negro from the brute. In effect, the stupider the white man and the greater his material authority, the greater his contempt for the native. Consequently, it is not the racial prejudice that impels one people to persecute another, but, on the contrary, the faculty of persecution that engenders the prejudice. The race that applies a material ascendancy and the race that submits to it are equally persuaded that inequality is conformable to divine law. And if this hierarchic organisation between races and classes is so impregnable today, it is due precisely to the conviction, the essentially religious conviction, that between races and classes no relations can exist except such as obtain between the subordinate and his superior.

RACIAL PREJUDICES REINFORCED
BY THE RESIGNATION OF THE OPPRESSED

Christianity (the Gospel variety) created the first great breach in this system; it established the equality of souls, but it abandoned the physical
man to his miserable destiny, as though life in this vale of tears were of little or no importance. It was not until '89 that men dared formulate the idea that human injustice is not a necessity and that privileges are not automatically conferred by accidents of social status and cuticular pigmentation.

The race that yields to the old traditional prejudices is bound to be slowly absorbed by the invader. Thus, in antiquity, the Greeks disappeared before the Romans, as, at a later date, the Romans before the Barbarians. However much the conquered people may have imposed its civilisation on its oppressor, the acceptance of its destiny was an act of self-destruction. Precisely the same process is at work at the present day: the slow extinction, under European domination, of the happy natives of Tahiti and the other islands of that archipelago, who soon shall be no more than the memory of a name, like the Aztecs or the Incas.

On the other hand we see how colonised peoples, sufficiently cultivated to take up their stand, more or less consciously, on the principles of '89, succeed, in the long run, in expelling their masters. Thanks to their contact with the whites, they increase, prosper and multiply. Thus the Hindus and the Indo-Chinese will cast off the yoke because they demand their independence by insisting on the notion of equality. In which of these two great categories must we situate the black colonies? Alas! the fact of the matter is that in Africa, under a regime of coercions and executions, the blacks are slowly becoming extinct, dying silently, one by one, subsiding, like so many punctured balloons, into nothingness. The few rebellions that did occur in the Congo proved ineffectual. These black populations need an elite capable of adapting itself to revolutionary thought. Even in the U.S.A.—contrary to the opinion that is generally held—the mortality rate among the blacks is on the rise.

The Notion of Man Must Precede the Notion of Race

Certain well-intentioned individuals imagine that, in order to remedy this situation, it is sufficient to demonstrate to the Negroes themselves and to the rest of the world that their race, although oppressed, is not entirely devoid of certain qualities. Thus the black man’s friend sets out to prove that the unhappy sons of Ham are not at all so lazy, untrustworthy and vulgar as is generally thought. We are exhorted to credit them with having produced many remarkable musicians, singers of great charm, temperaments rich in the most delicious qualities of ingenuity. By all means. But even were it established that Negroes were the most intelligent, generous and hard-working people alive it is unlikely that their situation would be in any way improved. The Europeans will adopt the most precious
elements of their civilization; indeed certain branches of their art have already been infused with a new spirit taken unhesitatingly from the blacks; the aggressor can submit to the influence of his victim without ceasing to exercise his prerogative of domination, absorption and death.

It is a mistake to base an apology of the Negro on the reality of his numerous qualities. The oppressor will none the less continue to believe himself superior to the oppressed, by the very fact, as I have said, that he oppresses him. Thus the Jews, in the face of the most open hostility, may climb to the highest positions in society, they may impose themselves as men of talent and genius, and for all that continue to be detested as a race. The only valid and truly fertile propaganda must assume a more general character; the essential is to insist on the notion of Man and to pursue the ideological researches undertaken by the Encyclopaedists in this domain. Their importance cannot be over-estimated. It is not mere chance that impels the bourgeois intellectuals of our time to a depreciation of the thought of Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau, and the students of French literature whether in Asia, China or India to an almost exclusive preoccupation with the philosophers of the 18th century. Before man can be liberated from his race, his nation or his class it is necessary to refute the claims of such artificial frameworks, which are no more than the very imperfect expedients arrived at by the collective activity of mankind, to be worshipped as sacred and eternal. Their tyranny will be removed as soon as they are adapted to our present state of knowledge, historical, ethnographical and psychological. The mind, being no longer shackled in its natural tendency towards progress, in its belief in progress itself, will communicate a great impulse to the social sciences. But such an advance implies a definitely anti-religious attitude on the part of the intellectuals, an attitude that is considered “board-school” by a whole section of contemporary opinion. This accusation, a stumbling-block to the timid, has been launched by the survivors of a worn-out mysticism. The concern of every courageous thinker should be to live up to such an ascription since it leaves him free to attack and finally destroy the most monstrous prolongations of a spirit that has served its time.

FROM AN INTER-RACIAL ORGANISATION TO AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

The opponent of racial prejudices must finally abandon the attempt to classify races in terms of their respective values. To presume to establish a qualitative distinction between black and white is like trying to estimate the intensity of a given pleasure in terms of pain—futile. Such method of approach would only tend to confirm and exasperate the idea of race. It cannot be repeated too often that the man who defends the Negro from
such a standpoint is simply playing into the hands of his opponents. Racial and international frontiers must be abolished before the new social Jerusalem can arise. Every race, by virtue of its particular specialisation, makes some personal and unique contribution to the world. There must be collaboration between the various social groups; that is the only conclusion possible.

But no breeding between races. That would only serve to aggravate current prejudice. Take the mulatto, with his almost negligible percentage of black blood; the American despises in him, not only the inevitable Negro, but also the bastard who has lost his racial character.

Is it so impossible to imagine a collaboration between races founded, not on complete interpenetration nor yet on material distinctions, but in terms of equality? Friendly, not hostile relations? A pacific commerce instead of an exploitation?

We are, as a matter of fact, in the presence of a very remarkable evolution. At the present day races, in their effort towards emancipation, tend to constitute themselves as nations. Indeed, it is only in so far as it achieves the organisation of the modern state, militarist and capitalist, that the oppressed race is capable of opposing and vanquishing the invader. The Jews themselves, in order to escape persecution, attempted to establish a State of Israel on the contemporary republican model. Such an evolution, under modern conditions, is certainly not without danger. It is a source of anxiety even to the finest minds among the chosen of Asiatic peoples. And yet, this nationalism could vindicate itself as a revolutionary movement, as was originally the case with the French patriotism of '89; it could very well represent a real step forward towards the liberation of man. In any case that is the orientation that must be ascribed to it at all costs, the only orientation that does not constitute a retrogression. . . .

As soon as every race is established as a nation, the problem of inter-racial organisation will coincide with that of international organisation which, in due course, will be very much simplified. Then, and then only, will humanity accept the federation of peoples as the only possible solution; a federation whose detailed organisation must devolve on our jurists. But such a labour presupposes a complete renunciation of the tyrannous idea of national sovereignty, an idea which in itself implies a mystical acceptance of an absolute that has no longer any significance.

**ANTICIPATION: THE TRUE BLACK PERIL**

Unfortunately, as things are at present, we seem to be getting further and further removed from such reasonable considerations. The opposition between groups of men is more violent than ever. France is pleased to construct a new Chinese wall, in the form of concrete fortifications stretch-
ing the length of its frontiers. International barriers are aggravated by such measures as protective tariffs, passports, laws against emigration, contingents of men and merchandise, while prejudices of language, religion, local tradition, resentment, national passion and private interest oppose Jews and Christians, Armenians and Turks, Flemish and Belgian, Serbians and Croats, Irish and English . . . and, elsewhere, peoples of colour against the ancient race of whites . . . no single group having succeeded in recognising the right to existence of another.

Dare one hope that at some future (alas, most future!) date we may enjoy the spectacle of the collaboration of collective units? At least one is entitled to believe that, when such a miracle occurs, the blacks will assume a very remarkable position in the racial community. Their most notable characteristic resides in their childlike qualities. Now surely we know by this time that after the age of twenty the life of man, viewed under its most varied aspects, is one long decline, and that it is before he attains this age that his imagination, his sensibility and his poetic faculty attain their maximum. There is no dearth of races possessing to a high degree qualities of experience and maturity. Perhaps it is necessary, in the interests of world harmony, that there shall be, in some corner of the earth, adults who never grow up. If the race of Negroes should happen to disappear tomorrow, no doubt their absence would be deprecated by the white man; as transatlantic stokers, as hewers of wood and carriers of water it would be a matter of some difficulty to replace them. My own opinion is that with the disappearance of the Negro something would be irrevocably withdrawn from the world, an entire mode of human sensibility abolished. To speak of the disappearance of Negro populations constitutes, I regret to say, no mere abstract theory. In the Congo, as in the U.S.A., under the harsh treatment of the whites, they are thinning out. The black peril, as evoked by the American, is not only a myth; but the real black peril resides in the possible extinction of this race.

**RACES AND NATIONS**

1. Compare the details given in the *Memoirs of a Slave-Trade*, early 19th century (Edition Plon.) and contemporary accounts (André Gide’s *Voyage to the Congo*; the articles of Albert Londres, etc.).

2. *The Bible*, Chapter 1, Genesis.

3. As far as I know, the only scheme of this kind is Kant’s proposed *Society of Nations*, dating from more than a century ago. It is surprising that it has never been emulated; obviously I do not consider the Pact of Geneva as a serious constitution, but rather as a grotesque caricature of a court of international jurisdiction that might have attained truly monumental proportions.
The Negress in the Brothel

by RENÉ CREVEL

In every metaphor—and the shining univocal 17th-century metaphor was no exception—an author discovers himself and his public.

Whatever France you are pleased to consider—France vibrating to the Homeric “Get rich” of her Guizot; France bankrupted before her Poincaré and stabilised in one little sharp erection of that sacrosanct goatee; France meditating colonial expansion and reprisals and, once a week, after a quick Mass, the charms of her estate—at no period, not even when she cast her legendary woollen stocking in favour of one of artificial silk, did she relax that economy of word and image, that intellectual and sentimental sobriety, that bestowed upon Racine the letters patent of the poetry(?) of love.

It is natural enough that a nation whose practical ethics never lost sight of at least one transcendental proposition: *Un sou est un sou* (a penny’s a penny) should gladly remember now, in the fine flower of her genius, the fully licensed purveyor of passion, privileged to apprehend at the court of his King the whines of Princess X and the snarls of Princess Y and the paralysing ballast of falbalas common to them both, who saw fit to crystallise the delirium of their royal gallants and catalogue them: objects of desire.

Such a formula had only to become current to set in motion the shabby and pitiful erotic machinery destined to produce a new love and a new notion of love, sapless and withered and lamentable in the bathchair of some preposterous qualification, “divine” for example.

The lecher in his lust to possess, even with the creature of his choice, cannot rise above the simple notion of an act of annexation. And when we find the instinctive articulation of sexual pleasure in such an affirmation as “You are mine” or “I possess you” and in such an acquiescence as “I am yours” or “Take me” it is clear that the idea of inequality has been finally and definitely admitted by and between the elements of the couple. Hence the notion of love-servitude, love-hellfire, if we accept all the implications of remorse on the part of the master who abuses, and recrimination on the part of the slave who is abused. Love-hellfire, only to be expressed in incandescent formulae:—

*Brulé de plus de feux que je n’en allumais*—
a grand old high and mighty Alexandrine, but pyrogenous, smelling of roast pork.

Man in the middle, obedient to God, obeyed of women—chaplet of subordinations.

A corporation of hypochondriacs banishes this intimacy from its midst, except in the form of a sacramental privilege. So the libertine is converted and Maintenon exults, and social and religious orthodoxy flourishes within the not intolerably narrow limits of the morganatic union.

So much then for our ideas, our Christian ideas, whose faculty of arbitrary restriction twenty centuries have not exhausted (notwithstanding a God that is the Supreme Being, Spirit, notwithstanding a progressive atheism and the thinking that calls itself free), and that still claim the right to direct a world that they have so competently trampled to death. The white male takes his Mediterranean heritage, whose most fascinating characteristics were a contempt for women (prostitution—civil incapacity) and a contempt for barbarism (colonisation), flavours it with a little gospel sauce and proceeds to exercise his millennial prerogatives. In France Norman guile is no longer a regional phenomenon, but general. Which accounts for our national miasma of fatuous credulity as well as for that tolerance which, ever since the Valois, has encouraged an intersexual free trade in ideas and at the same time the poisonous obligation to sneer at every educated woman as a “Précieuse” or a “Blue Stocking.” Safely entrenched behind that fine old tradition of French gallantry, they sneer and sneer. Ergo, all subsequent social tomfoolery—flirtation, marivaudage, etc.

Objects and subjects of conversation, as their less fortunate sisters were objects of desire, the rich philosophistic ladies incurred the same frustration. There wasn’t much good holding the high cards when hearts never turned up trumps. (And how much longer, by the same token, must we wait for the psychoanalysis of games?). The only escape from the paralysing constraint of their position, unless they chose to be branded à la Récamier, lay in the shilly-shally of an adultery, and adultery, at least in the decrepit theory of our decrepit code, is punishable by imprisonment.

No, for the woman in this society there is neither solution nor evasion, in spite of the patriarchal misconduct of such thinkers as Rousseau and Diderot, who only required the stimulus of a tuppenny-ha’penny notoriety to withdraw, in favour of a polite world, from the humiliating inadequacy of the marriage contracted in youth.

Thus our civilisation splits up into the holy and divided kinesis of:

In the Brothel: Sexual intercourse.
In the Drawing-room: Social intercourse.²

“Using” prostitutes translates only one aspect of masculine com-
plexity: establishing foci of contempt and respect in the hierarchy of blue stockings translates another.

On the reverse of the medal we find an aspermatic Baudelaire in the alcove of his official Egeria, Madame Sabatier, the “chairwoman.” The chairwoman belonged to the spiritual system, not to the physical, and it was out of the question to pass from the one cosmogony to the other. But she bore him no ill-will, whether out of goodness of heart or a clear vision of our old friend the main chance, for having failed to mitigate her inflammation. And he has merely to refer himself and his indignity to Jeanne Duval, his mistress, the harlot. Not even his enduring hypochondria can prevent him now from acting the male with a sense of superiority, of superiority over the woman, over his woman. And with the same stone he kills the suppliant bird of those velleities that were so real a part of him (cf. Mon Coeur mis à nu), in so far at least as he anticipates his milk-and-water critics whose mawkish more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger deprecation of his liaison with this whore, an offence doubly deep in the eyes of society since she was not merely a whore but a colored whore, was already in his mind to consolidate the axiom of her subordination. Thus the circumstances of what the aesthetic canaille is pleased to accept as a providential dispensation conferred upon the destiny that suffers to the point of lyricism is no more than the poet’s self-imposed ordeal. If we must cling to the worm-eaten image of the cross that was borne, at least let it be applied as a testimony to the naivété of a humanity that gives itself away even in the most subtle movements of its sharp practice. The father on earth of the Son of God was a carpenter, and of crosses, inter alia: which means, if it means anything, that parents are at some pains to carve and plane and polish the misfortune of their children. The Christian symbol is a statement of that sadism that relates old to young, man to woman, rich to poor, white to black, in the ratio of torturer and victim.

Charme inattendu d’un bijou rose et noir: Baudelaire adores the dark flesh of Jeanne Duval, the charming convolutions of this dark, rose-tinted shell. The Taylor system with division of labour. The other, the cerebral Madame Sabatier, has the monopoly of his ethereal devotion and the proud conviction that hers is the far, far better part.

At last we are beginning to understand, in spite of the torrents of Dostoievsksian colic concerning the rehabilitation of loose women, that all these condescensions and artificial gallantries that stoop to the whore for the favour of her caresses are nothing more than a hypocritical servility before things as they are. We are concerned neither with the compassion inspired by the spectacle of a creature in the gutter, nor with any adventitious homage that she may receive from a manifestation of man’s so-called sacrosanct “virility”, but with the very elementary justice (ne-
glect of codified injustice) that cannot regard this social degradation as of any importance. But since such an attitude is impracticable in capitalistic societies stinking of class consciousness (coloured men and women being assimilated to the proletariat because they happen to have suffered colonisation), it becomes necessary to annihilate the imbecile ideology that is precisely the cause and the sanction of that social degradation. In the meantime let no man weep or rejoice because he happens to have desired, enjoyed and perhaps even married a black woman out of a brothel: the very considerable epithelial advantages of such an intimacy absolve it from the need of apology or justification. And finally we may succeed in reducing to its grotesque essentials that pernicious literary antithesis between soul and epidermis, culminating in every case, the Baudelairean not excepted, in the triumph of the church.

What can be wrong with Baudelaire’s Negress and the brothel, a home from home, when the Turkish ladies rendezvoused with the Crusaders round the holy sepulchre (which seems to me worth two of the unknown warrior under his Arch of Triumph)? Oh I could tell you where the Kimmerians itch when they emerge from their horizons of spleen under a sun in a blue sky.

I think you will agree with me, Victor Hugo, that it was only right and proper that the labours of our blessed company of infected settlers and cut-throat Jesuits, punctuated so gloriously by St. Louis, Lyautey and the Duc d’Aumale (who conferred, by the way, his name and titles of nobility on one of the most highly esteemed propositions in brothelian geometry) should culminate in the colonial anthem of Les Orientales: Sarah belle d’indolence se balance.

The very and proudly European bawd claps her hands and calls upstairs: “A customer, Sarah! Sarah, a customer!” And Sarah, beautiful and indolent and African, the jewel of the collection, dully imparts tone to the depraved manoeuvres of white erethism. Which brings us back to our object of desire, with this difference, that now, thanks to the scenic organisation of venal love, the object of desire has become an object in the decor of desires. The Negress of the metropolitan brothel, at least, in the eyes of the pertinent consumer, is as appropriately situated as her sister in bronze on the stairhead, holding aloft her light to lighten the red carpet and its golden rods in a petrified testimony to the ineffable self-sufficiency of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

And Sarah need not be homesick. For what are they doing, governors, generals and even the Imperial Roman marshall himself? Playing with the piccaninnies: which is only tit for tat. The heart of so prosperous a family shall not be troubled.

After that I propose to withdraw my subscription from the Society
for the Diffusion of the White Man’s Moral and Physical Complaints among Savage Peoples.

The mind of the Frenchman who gets clear of his country, of his continent and his continence, experiences a liberation (hence the success of Morand, Dekobra and others). But even when for one reason or another he is obliged to remain at home he demands to be entertained and debauched by the exotic curiosity that lifts him clear of the national fact into an illusion of renewal. Hence the popularity of Martinique jazz, Cuban melodies, Harlem bands and the entire tam-tam of the Colonial Exhibition. Nowadays the white man regards the man of colour precisely as the wealthy Romans of the Late Empire regarded their slaves—as a means of entertainment. And of course it is no longer necessary to go to Africa. The nearest Leicester Square, now that our livid capitalism has instituted the prostitution of blacks of either sex, is as free of European squeamishness as was thirty years ago the oasis of André Gide’s Immoralist. Then again the average Frenchman who is not interested in depravities, who is merely seeking the picturesque, can go to the brothel and meet a thoroughbred Negress.

Now, if, instead of appropriating the value of his money with the traditional member of his nauseating person, he could be persuaded to approach those hired nymphae not merely as the exquisite negation of the regrettaingly prolific article on tap, so to speak, at home, but rather as the shell that imprisons the music of the sea, it is just possible that he might be favoured for all his cloacal labyrinth, with the inexorable vibrations of a distant wave that hastens to engulf every capitalistic fortress, from brothel to cathedral.

And then at last goodbye to geographical symbolism. The old saying: Truth our side of the Pyrenees, falsehood the other, will appear nonsense even to the survivors of a carious Chartism, and paleontologists will no longer attempt to justify the sordid and implacable imperialism that has the insolence to outrage with its ragbag the naked splendour of black peoples.

THE NEGRESS IN THE BROTHEL


2. Surely the case of the young man who, having met with a misfortune at the outset of his sexual investigations, marries from a need of comfort and security, is identical with that of the licensed free-lance prostitute settling down in a red lamp.
Little is known of the position occupied by Madagascar in antiquity. It is only possible tenta­tively to identify the Great Island of the South with the Phanbalon or Phébol of Aristotle, the Menulthias of Ptolemy (compare the Menutheseas or Menuthis of Arian and Stephanus), the Cerne of Pliny, the Pacras of Tharetas and the Albargra and Manutia-Alphil referred to by a few old anonymous authors.

In more recent times we have the Arabs Edrisi, Aboul-Feda and Massoudi referring to it variously as Serandah, Chebona, Phanbalon (this last identical with the Greek term and not far removed from the Iamboli of Diodorus of Sicily), Zaledz and, finally, Gezirat-al-Kmor or Island of the Moon—the name by which it was actually known as late as August 10, 1500, when it was discovered by Pedralvarez Cabral’s Portuguese flotilla under Diego Diaz, who then conferred upon the island the commemorative name of Isola San Lourenzo.

But Marco Polo had heard of it long before, from either the Arabs or the Hindus, in the course of his famous journey. It may even be asserted that the Venetian was the first European navigator to refer to it by name. And we can still read with profit, in spite of a few mild blunders, Chapter 33 of his Travels, devoted to Magaster or Madeigascar.

With the appearance of the French at a much later date, September 26, 1642, the island was successively known as Ile Saint-Laurent, Ile Dauphine and France Orientale—all of which names were to sink into oblivion with those who had given them. Madagascar alone survives, in the year of grace 1932.

What is the source of this name that sounds so proudly with its
quadruplicate vowel? And of that of the inhabitants, *Malagasy* or *Malgache*,
which does not seem to be more than remotely cognate?

It is more convenient to begin with the second of these two ques-
tions and to reserve the first, whose elucidation has decided the entire
tenor and direction of this account, for a more detailed treatment.

*Mala*, according to some, is only another form of *Malay*, and *gasy* an
autochthonous generic designation. In that case the word would seem to
commemorate the crossing of the first invaders with the original natives of
the country. According to others the word is not a compound but a direct
derivative of *Malacca*, which peninsula they declare to be the ancestral
land of the Hova.

It is clear that the two theses, far from being irreconcilable, complete
and explain one another.

But the word *Madagascar* is an altogether different problem and one
which has never, as far as we know, been seriously examined or discussed.

Either no cognisance has ever been taken of an ancient chronicle
describing an expedition to the Great Island brilliantly organised by the
monarch of a South African empire known as *Magadoxo*, or else, on ac-
count of its essential obscurity and questionable authenticity, it has hastily
been ruled out of court.

Yet this despised narrative is worthy of serious consideration, and the
more so as it would seem to be corroborated by another quite independ-
ent account which in its turn has been discredited, solely because of the
failure on the part of the author or group of authors to specify its date and
source. It asserts that the *Vazimba* (a name commonly given to the pre-
sumptive aborigines and to which we shall have more than one occasion
to refer in the course of this study) were no other than a colony of *Wuzimba*
or *Wazimba* that emigrated from East Africa and settled down in *Nozindambo* (literally Island of Boars—an other name for Madagascar).

Surely it would be reasonable, after a careful comparison of these
two records, to take them together and consider the subjects of the black
empire and the Wuzimba or Wazimba as belonging to one and the same
race? We are the more encouraged to do so when we bear in mind the
identity, very broad it is true, between the geographical points of depar-
ture mentioned in the two accounts.

One fact will suffice for the moment: the first inhabitants of Ma-
dagascar were Africans, generally accepted to have been the Vazimba.

Mr. J. Crawford, who spent many years in Polynesia, went a step further.
Arguing from original ethnographical and linguistic considerations he rejected
the entire theory of a Malayan emigration to Madagascar and declared that the
native population of the island was exclusively descended from Kafirs.

Some time later Mr. Staniland Wake, having declared himself in agree-
ment with these assertions, stated their implications in a thesis of his own, to the effect that the Vazimba, having prospered and multiplied, had extended their dominion beyond the seas and conquered, amongst other territory, the Malay Archipelago.

There is nothing wanting to confirm (or, if you prefer, infirm) this theory but the absence of all historical evidence, the legitimacy of the most extravagant suppositions being generally allowed in default of historical information. It was duly dished up, unconsciously no doubt, by our compatriot Rabe Régis as late as 1928, and with an impetuosity whose most amiable characteristic was an intolerance of the mildest scientific admonition.

Now to us it seems possible to reconcile the two points of view by postulating, if we do not care to admit, the existence, in the vanished world of the primary period, of a Lemurian continent. This kind of austral Atlantis would have linked the Indian Ocean to Oceania and made the Eastern Archipelago of easy access. Traces of such a formation have come down to us, according to some scientists, in the forms of certain families of monkeys and common plants, shallows and island groups.

Further evidence is provided by certain analogies of language and custom.

In the meantime, is it not at least remarkable that Lemuria, alone of all the fabulous continents, should have been ignored by all the mythographers and writers of antiquity? It is not once mentioned, as we have seen, by either Greek or Latin writers.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary and of a more thorough investigation of the facts we shall continue to assert that Nozindambo, originally colonised by East Africans, received a subsequent influx of Malayans.

Where, when and how? The whole period is shrouded in the darkness of the ages.

It would seem to be an evasion rather than a solution of the
problem to situate, as is commonly done, the arrival of the Malayans in the 15th or 16th century—the recognised date of the establishment of their hegemony on Malagasy soil. A number of circumstances are either ignored or set aside by such a supposition.

Whereabouts were the Africans established when the Asiatics arrived? Were these latter made welcome? Did they live together on good terms? Above all, to what extent were the two parties armed?

It must therefore have been about this time, if not somewhat earlier, that the Arabs arrived, among them many illustrious families. Inflexible on the question of breeding, practicing a religion that prohibited all impure contact, it was inevitable that they should hold themselves strictly aloof from the bulk of the population. Their descendants are still to be found on the eastern shores of Madagascar, from Tulear to Diego; for such are the Vezo, the Antaimoro, the Antambaboaka, the Betsimisaraka and the Antakarana; they may even complete the circuit of the island before long, if indeed they have not already done so; even now Majunga is their “colony.”

It was not long, however, before the Arab leaders, jealous though they were of the purity of their race, made overtures to their neighbours. It is always possible to compound with the facts, especially for the scions of a royal house; what is obligatory for their subjects is a dead letter for them. It has been truly said that kings and queens have neither race nor country, but only breeding. The whole question for these nobles was to maintain their level of breeding, avoid decay.

The Moorish leaders, therefore, making themselves at home, had no difficulty in arranging eminent matches for their children and perpetuating their illustrious species in this way. The arms of the Hova bear irrefutable witness to these alliances, several of the reigning houses in Imerina being of Arab stock. Still more definite is the testimony of our hereditary noblemen and noble confrères alike; we find, for example, branches of purely antaimoro origin grafted on to the old andriana-masinavalona stock.

A personal reminiscence before we go any further:

Some time ago, having occasion to visit Mananjary in the ancient district of Masindranro, some miles from the famous stone elephant brought formerly from Imaka-Mecca, we made various enquiries of the freemen of the Antambahoaka. But in vain. The contempt for the infidel, in spite of a conversion to christianity on a large scale, persists in this race that has never ceased to be Arab at heart.

We also visited certain families of royal descent, by whom we were most amiably received as soon as they learned that we were andriana (noble). There was one host who showed us his ancient hereditary books
covered with that arabesque that does not belie its name. Having translated one or two passages for our edification he recounted how, formerly, a prince allied to his house had gone to *make* or found Betsileo. Now it transpired, as will appear in due course, that other Hova princes had departed on precisely the same mission.

So much for the Berbers and their relations with the first inhabitants of Madagascar.

What other settlers came to the Great Island? Semites, according to one authority. But which Semites? Circumcision, which might just as well be of Mussulman origin, is quoted in support of this vague assertion. Nor is the old name for *Sainte-Marie*—*Nosy-Boraha*, or, Island of Abraham—calculated to recommend it.

Persians and Buddhists are also proposed. This thesis is notably championed by Father Razafintsa-lama, who loses no opportunity of illustrating it with curious social and sematological considerations.

Our attention is next claimed by the early years of the 16th century. The first Hova queen had just come to the throne, after having founded the little principality of Imerimanjaka (literally: where-the-kingdom-is-well-in-view) on the hill that still bears this name. The identity of this queen has long been debated. Was she Ranjita or Rafohy?

All the evidence points to her having been Ranjita, and the ethnographical inferences to be drawn from the names themselves are a further argument in favour of this view. Ranjita (Frizzy) was the mother of Rafohy (Dumpy)—she was a Vazimba-Hova cross-breed, her hair being also a proof of this.

What became of the Arabs and the Africans when this first Hova queen came to the throne? By what refinement of cunning were the Asiatics enabled to outmanoeuvre their rivals and set up their hegemony? Not the least of their exploits was that of imposing without loss of time a single language on the entire island.

There is no more reliable
source of information available than that provided by the follow­
ing hypotheses based on tradi­tion:

The African families were not entirely extinct. Their royal houses, thanks to a skilful and persistent policy of alliances, not only subsisted, but received all the deference due to their rank. The Malayans intercalated them­selves wherever they could, and not only in Imerina, but as far afield as Sakalava; the princess Rasoanerinerina, grand-niece of Ranjita, had already been sent there and contrived to marry one Claude Bonet, a Spaniard, native of Lerida (Catalonia) and founder of the kingdom of Menabe, known to the chroniclers as Adrianandazoala (the Prince who burns the forests) and Andriandahifotsy (the white Prince).

Three other princes, one man and two women—Andrianony, Ramanjaka and Ramanalinarivo—founded Betsileo between 1675 and 1710.

But already in 1540 the Afromalagasies were on the verge of extinc­tion—if we except the aforesaid royal houses of Imerina and a few scat­tered strongholds. The conquest had passed out of its pacific stage, and for Andriamanelo, the new king, a policy of polite extermination was no longer sufficient; he declared open war.

What are the Arabs doing all this time?

It is not likely that there were many of them on the High Plateaux. The colony that they had tried to found in Alaotra (a fertile region to the N.E. of Antananarivo) had turned out a failure, and they had pushed for­ward to the west as far as the sea, where they enjoyed the advantage of being able to exchange news with the coasting-traders of their country.

But they had abandoned, whether through indifference or fear of the Malayans who greatly outnumbered them, all idea of expansion, and were never again to entertain such a project.
Their contribution to the language is confined to the names of coins and the signs of the Zodiac and words connected with dress and music.

Contention died for want of a bone. The Arabs made the best of a bad job and settled down to the tolerable prosperity that they knew must accrue from their superior commercial methods and familiarity with the occult sciences.

The Malayan contribution is much more considerable and complete. An entire vocabulary dealing with parts of the body, the family, earth, sky and sea, had been transported from the Indomelanesian fatherland.

Having attained this degree of active absorption, filled with pride as creators of a country, the Malayans changed their name and, true to their love of the concrete, adopted the simple one of Niova (changed). But they were reckoning without the spirit of the language which, intolerant of cacophony, duly suppressed the prefix ni as often as it followed the frequently used article ny.

Such at least was the spoken form of this generic term in the 18th century when Jacques de Lasalle was resident in Ankova or Imerina. It was only later, with the growth of scholarship, and probably less in consideration of the harmonies latent in the euphonic initial h than out of an anxiety to obviate possible confusion with the root ova, that the Ova, or Owa, began to call themselves Hova.

The Vazimba, however, still nourished secret thoughts of reprisal. In this they were encouraged by the proud bearing of their princes at the court and the illustrious condition of their most influential leaders.

A distinguished student of Madagascar, M. Eugene Baudin, sees in this ambition, destined never to be achieved, a constant source of anxiety to the Hova, from the rising to the setting of their supremacy. And, in effect, as we follow the course of events as presented by this expert in all matters concerning Madagascar, we can easily discern, behind every palatine intrigue, the unmistakable hand of a Vazimba.

Take, for example, the rivalry that sprang up immediately on the death of Ralambo, our fourth king (1571–1610), between our ancestor Andrianjaka (1610–1630) and Prince Andriantompokoindrindra, Vazimba on his mother’s side and a reluctant subject as long as he lived.

In the council chamber their record is more distinguished. Here we have a long line of Vazimba origin, from the famous Andriamampandry to the no less famous Rainilaiarivony, last Master of the Palace and nominal husband of three successive queens. Nor should his grandfather, Andriantsilavo, favourite of the great Poina, be forgotten.

Thus it appears that the rivalry between Hova and Vazimba, whether openly avowed or not, never wholly disappeared. Towards the end it even showed signs of taking a decisive turn in favour of the first arrivals, until
H.M. Ranavalona III, four or five years before his own fall and that of his dynasty, contrived yet again to gain the ascendancy.

It is an agitated and a tragic spectacle, this twilight of royal Imerina after less than a century’s dominion over all the island: a lurid twilight and peopled with phantoms. Who is this Vazimba chief, flying in fear and trembling before an angry queen? It is one who formerly was master and whose slightest gesture was law. In vain the English adventurers, Willoughby and Shervington, try to console him.

Then, drowning all alarums and changing fear to panic, sounds the thunder of the French cannon.

On September 30, 1895, Antananarivo was occupied by what remained of the expeditionary force. One year later Madagascar was declared a French colony, and the Hova kingdom, its dynasty of 25 sovereigns, was a thing of the past.

This affair cost France several millions, and us . . . more victims than can ever be forgotten.

A Short Historical Survey of Madagascar

1. The names of tribes and races are nearly always preceded by the prefix *anta* or *anta*. The problem of this prefix has baffled more than one foreign etymologist. In our opinion it is merely a corruption of the contraction *on* as it occurs in *ondevo*, the old and correct orthography of *andevo*, meaning slave; we also find it in *ontaiva*, from *olon-taiva*: man of the burnt forests.

A grave with carved wooden posts, S.W. Madagascar.
The Ancient Bronzes of Black Africa

by Charles Ratton

It was not until 1891, after the conquest of Benin by the English, that the first Negro bronzes reached Europe. It is well known how England made a handle of the killing of her consul Philipps and his companions, when they attempted to enter the capital of Benin during the religious festival and in spite of the royal prohibition, to despatch a punitive expedition which resulted in the colonisation of the country and the burning of the capital. The invaders contrived however, before their fires had gutted this immense and ancient city which had been the admiration of the earliest Dutch travellers in the 16th century, to filch from its altars and royal palace some bronze sculptures which they sent to London to be sold as scrap. Europe was amazed at the excellence and high artistic quality of these casts. At the end of the last century the “civilised world” still thought of Black Africa as a waste land, infested with fevers and wild beasts and inhabited by barbarians of immemorial antiquity. It is true that many travellers had already carried off, by way of make-weight in their collections of native weapons, some wooden statuettes and masks; but these were written off complacently as “savage” idols and allowed no further value than that of diverting souvenirs. It never occurred to anybody that these roughly carved figures were works of art. So that the bronze plaques and statues of Benin, not merely flawless in technique but of such beauty that they brought to mind the sculpture of ancient Egypt, made people wonder what miracle had enabled the “savage” Blacks to produce such masterpieces. Nor was it long before certain figures on the decorative plaques were identified as Europeans in 16th-century costume, and this native art explained, to the unspeakable relief of the connoisseurs, as being of Portuguese origin. Next, by blue-eyed English research, the inevitable local tradition was elicited to the effect that this art of bronze casting had been imported towards the close of the 15th century by one Ahammangiva, a member of the first party of white men to set foot in Benin, in the reign of Esige.

This theory was consolidated when French painters discovered “Negro art” about the year 1907. It was in virtue of the reaction against the
predominating naturalism of art as conceived in Europe that some few artists, in the presence of these African carvings, were overwhelmed by the sense of an entirely new form of beauty. But in their uncertainty as to the precise source of the few specimens of this Negro sculpture at their disposal, they tended to concentrate on those whose synthetic treatment best exemplified their own subversive theories and to regard their bold economy of statement as the essential characteristics of Black art. Every deviation from this norm, the least trace of realism or even of subtlety, was set down as the expression of an Arab or European influence. Thus the critics of Negro art considered the bronzes of the great period in Benin as hybrid products, while they admired without reserve, as being more primitive and powerful, the simplifications of the decadence.

The systematic exploitation of African territories has effaced the last vestige of their ancient beliefs and indigenous civilisations, and emptied their huts and sanctuaries of those masks and statues which Europe had begun to favour with her approval. So that now a large variety of specimens from the sculpture of almost every region enables us to proceed to a thorough appreciation of this Negro art. A study of the old chroniclers gives us some idea of the importance of the regions south of the Sahara at the end of the Middle Ages, when the Europeans began to arrive, and the standard of culture that obtained there. These highly organised kingdoms seem to have enjoyed a uniform prosperity: populous and thriving cities; vast areas of land under cultivation; flourishing industries; orderly inhabitants, richly clothed in their native stuffs and velvets. As Frobenius has justly observed, it is to the European conquistadors who laid waste these tranquil civilisations, in their ravaging for gold and slaves, and to their ignoble anxiety to palliate these extortions, that we owe the legend of the barbarous Negro so lately current in Europe.

Thus our knowledge of African art has greatly developed. We know now that Negro sculpture is not of necessity primitive and schematic, that its purity is in no way diminished by the decadence into subtleties of detail that architectural solidity which distinguishes African sculpture no less than that of ancient Egypt. Common to the most ancient work of separate regions, as, for example, of the Congo and the Ivory Coast, we meet with an exceptional maturity of treatment, as regards both execution, which is of a scrupulous precision, and conception, which is much more dependent on the object than is usually the case. We find the same quality in the bronzes, earlier for the most part than the earliest carvings in wood, which the heat and damp of the climate make it difficult to preserve. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the art of the founders, always the monopoly of a single caste, had succeeded in carrying on the tradition of ancient African art, an art admittedly less popular than that of
the sculptors in wood, but one that better attests the grandeur of a forgotten civilization.

Professor Frobenius, in the course of his excavations at Ifa in British Nigeria, discovered the most ancient African sculptures that we possess. These heads, some in terra cotta and one in bronze, represent the culmination of an art that has passed through centuries of the most slow and cautious development. They bear a remarkable likeness to the oldest bronze heads of Benin. In view of the close relations existing between these adjoining regions, the first kings of Benin having come from Ifa and continued long after to recognise its religious authority, it would not be surprising if the Ifa heads had furnished the model for those of Benin. The art of casting was known in Yoruba before it reached Benin, and we know that it was usual for the high priest of Ifa to send a bronze head to each new Obba (king of Benin) on the occasion of his coronation.

Thus it is in all probability from Ifa that the art of casting radiated throughout Western Africa. There can be little doubt that the Blacks received this craft from Egypt, whose ascendancy over the whole of Africa was so considerable that we find traces of Pharaonic influence even on the shores of the Gulf of Guinea; and it was Egypt and the Sudan that furnished the ingots of copper before the arrival of the white men. The Blacks were abundantly supplied with their own tin.

The most important African bronzes come from Benin. The moulds in all cases have

Bronze warrior, 16th century, Benin, Nigeria. From the private collection of Charles Ratton, Paris. By courtesy of the owner.
been constructed by the difficult “vanishing wax” method. Von Luschan, a competent observer, has paid a notable tribute to the masterly technique of these bronzes: “Cellini himself could not have made better casts, nor anyone else before or since to the present day.” The maturity of this art and the prodigious skill of the ancient native founders appear in a number of decorative plaques from the walls of the royal palace, in the carvings of various animals among which cocks and panthers predominate, and in the heads of the defunct kings adorning the altars. The plaques representing Europeans in the costume of the middle 16th century, on which the theory of European influence had been based, go rather to prove the autocthonous origin of this technique. It is inconceivable that the Binis should have achieved such astonishing results in the short space of some twenty years, as the thesis of their having learnt to cast in bronze from the Portuguese would have us suppose, and the more so as the Portuguese themselves were quite incapable of turning out such work. This virtuosity presupposes a long and arduous apprenticeship.

Von Luschan and B. Struck have endeavoured to date these bronzes by a system of reference to the royal chronology, which goes back to the foundation of the capital in the 12th century. This classification, however, especially when applied to the earliest period, seems rather dubious. Greater precision will be possible when excavations have been carried out on the actual site of Benin and something more is known of the various centres of production that must have existed throughout British Nigeria.

Benin, for long the most powerful kingdom of the Guinea Coast, seems to have exerted a strong artistic influence on the neighbouring states. The few extant Dahomey bronzes are very akin in treatment to those of Benin and Yoruba. But the statuettes and groups in latten, manufactured in Abomey and Zagnanado for the last fifty years, are a lamentable falling off from the excellence of native casting prior to the European interference. In Dahomey, however, the metal industry has undoubtedly reached a high degree of development; the wrought iron statue of the God of War in the Trocadéro Ethnographical Museum, another made from sections of sheet copper, and various metal objects from the treasury of Behanzin, the last king, evince great dexterity in the handling of the most disparate mediums.

The style of the bronzes in the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast seems more detached from the Benin influence. Here the treatment is more familiar and the productions of these regions, while they never attain the hieratic splendour of those of Benin, are far more dynamic and vivacious. Among the Ashantis we find a curious cylindrical vessel, called Kuduo, varying in shape and employed as a receptacle for gold dust. It stands on a pedestal in open-work, the lid is usually surmounted by a group of
Mortuary figure of the Bakuni, Loango, French Congo. From the private collection of Mr. Henri Lavachery, Brussels. Photo by courtesy of the owner.
Snuffbox of the Badjok tribe, Belgian Congo. From the private collection of Mr. Henri Lavachery, Brussels. By courtesy of the owner.
figures or animals and the bowl inscribed with delicate arabesques fused into its surface, or else with engravings. The British Museum possesses a fine specimen of this Kuduo. Then there are the bronze weights used for measuring gold dust and one of the most interesting of all Africa’s artistic products. They are commonly found among the Ashantis as well as throughout the eastern region of the Ivory Coast, among the allied peoples of the kingdom of Coumassie. Some of these represent, in a style that frequently verges on caricature, the entire fauna of the country: fish, birds, crocodiles, snakes, scorpions, gazelles, elephants; others, of a more comic tendency, various characters in their everyday occupations and pastimes: the mother dandling her child, wrestlers, the husbandman in his orchard, men smoking their pipes, musicians and equestrians. Though some measure as much as ten or twelve centimetres, the usual height is between five and six. We find the same subjects among the Ashantis and in the Ivory Coast. The work of the former is the more delicate, and even tends to exaggerate this quality. The “vanishing wax” process is employed with extraordinary skill in the casting of all these little bronzes. The bronze snakes discovered by Professor Labouret in the Ivory Coast excavations testify to the antiquity of the industry in these regions. In north-east Ivory Coast we find pendants and other small objects very different from the weights in point of style. It is scarcely necessary to remark that no comparison is possible between the clumsy statuettes produced for exportation, which traffic has extended even to such remote peoples as the Mossi, and the little masterpieces of former years. Through Western Africa the art of casting is in a state of galloping decadence.

Even so late as a few years ago the productions of the kingdom of Bamum, to the east of Nigeria, retained some faint trace of the quality that we associate with the royal castings of Funbam. Specimens of this work are to be seen in the Völkerkunde Museum in Berlin and in other German museums: open-work bracelets, necklets, taurine masks, bells, pipes and a number of other ornaments. Though the style suggests strong Benin influence, yet there is something rustic and exuberant in Cameroon modelling that sets these bronzes, whose purpose was mainly decorative, quite apart from the sacred sculpture of ancient Benin.

But indeed our knowledge of the bronze work of Black Africa is very scanty. We may expect to learn much from those vast areas whose archeological survey is long overdue; and it is to be hoped that the ethnographers will realise that there are few manifestations of the human spirit more profoundly significant than art or more likely to be of service to them in their study of racial development. Surely it is for them to establish the foundations of this science whose development would assuredly be as rapid as was that of Chinese archeology since the beginning of
this century. The bronzes of Black Africa, with their perfection of tech­
nique and maturity of style, establish beyond all question the antiquity of
Negro art. In their gradual recession from remote beginnings and ap­
proach toward the style of the wood carvings we can observe how Negro
art has evolved from an extreme subtlety of analysis to the most abstract
synthesis, controlled by those same laws of growth that took effect in Greece,
Chaldea and Mexico. What we esteem and love is not this or that quality
or degree of achievement, but the work, irrespective of its site in the world,
of man’s hands, and a real thing.
Notwithstanding the assertion of M. Georges Hardy, in his *Negro Art*, that all enquiry along the lines laid down in this essay is of necessity premature, I am persuaded to persevere, with all proper modesty, in my undertaking. I admit the danger of making generalisations at such an early stage of our familiarity with African archeology. But at the same time I consider this problem of style in the domain of Negro statuary to be of such capital importance in the art of those countries that it becomes desirable that someone, and the sooner the better, should accept the chances of a speedy refutation and hazard a few general classifications.

There is little to choose in respect of usefulness between truth and error when it comes to putting a virgin soil in order. The path that we hack through the forest may lead us nowhere, but it is none the less a cutting, through a press of plants and the roots of unknown trees.

The Congo, "colonially," Belgian Congo, lends itself to a fairly comprehensive survey.

It is a natural unit, bounded, or, perhaps better, restricted, by the curve of the river and its great tributaries, the chain of lakes and the Rhodesian savanna. Its statuary, which I propose to consider here from a purely morphological and technical point of view, presents at first sight a great variety of complex forms. These are observed to fall gradually into certain well-defined groups, separated by narrow zones of interpenetration.

Three main schools are to be distinguished:

1. The art of the Coast, comprising Southern French Congo, the Enclave of Cabinda, Mayombe, the river up to the first falls, and Angola.
2. The art of Kasai, not one as is too frequently assumed, but breaking up into two distinct and powerful currents:
   (a) The art of the Bayakas and Batekes.
   (b) The art of the Bushongos, Bena-Lulua, Bapendes, Badjoks, etc.
3. The art of the eastern regions or Balubas.

The statuaries of the above regions constitute the culmination, ac-
According to some the decadence, of ancient formulae whose plastic data are at first sight difficult to determine. On their own merits, and not alone because they express an active and vigorous sensibility, they are entitled to our attention and admiration; nor should the fact of their having sprung from the decomposition of more grandiose forms cast the least reflection on their status. It was just such an unwarrantable disparagement that caused Byzantine art to be so long misconstrued as a brilliant but poisonous flower that had blossomed out of Greco-Asiatic putrefactions. . . .

It must furthermore be borne in mind that these statuaries are very rarely the work of professionals. Though there are numerous examples of sculptors segregated in guilds of their own, and though every tribe, and in some regions every village, seems attached to a few highly stylised types, still we find all finished products, irrespective of their worth, presented on a plane of absolute equality. The amount of rubbish is enormous, and our first care must be to discriminate. Even when we consider work of the highest achievement we must always remember that as a preoccupation the beautiful was nearly always subordinate to the useful: religious usefulness, the respect due to the redoubtable ancestors, and, above all, to a fever to imprison by means of the image, and if possible in its very texture, all the malevolence of the dread elemental spirits, night and death.

We must not allow ourselves to postulate too strict an evolution of forms. Can we be sure that the barest and most succinct of these are the most recent, and that all that is rich and florid is of necessity remote?

It is my own opinion, when I can free it from such presumptions, that plastic evolution in a given mode (assuming its canon to be established beyond appeal) is much more a spatial than a temporal reality.

Thus we find all the purest styles of the Congo surrounded by their barbarous harmonics, statues that are simply bad, others reduced to an absence of all modelling, others, finally, so far removed from the pure central type that they succeed in creating a kind of secondary style, primitive in aspect and liable to deceive the observer as to the true origin of the principal style. Because as soon as we lose sight of the long and illustrious ancestry of contemporary Negro art we can very easily fall into the error of considering these wilfully decadent forms as more “primitive” than those of the most authentic antiquity.

**Art of the Coast**

If we could fill one room of an ethnographical museum with specimens of masks and statuary of coast origin, from Benin, Yoruba and Dahomey as far as Angola, via the Cameroon coast, Cape Lopez, French Congo, the Enclave of Cabinda and the river hinterland up to the first falls, we should
be struck immediately by the resemblance between the works of widely divergent tribes.

We are familiar with the importance assigned to the head of the subject in all black statuary. And it is here that this resemblance is particularly noticeable. The face is treated with a realism, even a naturalism, that suggests the portrait. The maternities of Mayombe, the medical charms with mirror, the sepulchral figures similar to that reproduced here, the ivories, sceptres and fly-flap handles, of a given region are typical in this respect. Such a peculiarity can scarcely be explained as an effect of standardisation, when we find the sculptor insisting on his right to state as he sees fit the characteristics of whatever subject he happens to be working on. The same realism may be extended to the entire body, but only in the case of early works. Generally speaking, whereas the hands, legs and feet are treated naturalistically, the torso is often reduced to the cursory expression of its bare essentials. This rather paltry anxiety to imitate nature was for a long time ascribed to the influence of Portuguese traders who encouraged the blacks to copy religious images of the European variety. The Portuguese used also to be credited with having introduced the plastic and technical methods whose application we admire in the Benin bronzes. I deliberately associate these two extreme points of the segment of African coast that we have just considered.

The realism of Loango is closely related to the realism of the oldest Benin work (a few heads in the Berlin Museum, the girl’s head in the British Museum). And yet here too there are certain formalisations that betray a poverty of vision and a taste for the merely decorative symptomatic of decadence.

These would seem to be further arguments in favour of the "imported art" theory. But fortunately we possess specimens of an art anterior to that of the Benis. I refer to the seven terra-cotta heads and the bronze head discovered at Ifa in 1910 at the mouth of the Niger by the Frobenius expedition.

These obscure masterpieces (whose enigma is perhaps already read as a result of the fresh discoveries made by Frobenius in 1932 in the Libyan Desert) certainly represent Africans, but of more than one race. They are of such pure style and perfect workmanship, they are so manifestly under an artistic control of the highest order, that it would be absurd to ascribe them to the skill, or even influence, of Portuguese traders and missionaries.

It may be inferred from these works—and there is cultural and religious evidence in support of this view—that the region of Ifa, at a period that cannot be determined, was the seat of a culture whose art had attained a degree of perfection scarcely surpassed by even the finest monu-
ments of Egyptian art. It is to be presumed that this Ifa school spread all along the coast, transmitting certain stringent aesthetic principles derived from an observation and imitation of nature, a continual reference to the living model.

From the Niger to Angola we can trace the course of this influence. We pick it up again, bastardised, among the Yorubas of today, in Dahomey. Among the Ekois of the Cameroon coast it established itself firmly as a vital force, specially noticeable in the expressive and profoundly human quality of some of their masks. Similar principles, their vigour somewhat impaired by a sort of decadent grace, are further to be discerned in the Pongwe masks of Gaboon and in the figurines, often of exquisite workmanship, that as late as twenty years ago were still being sculptured by the Bavilis of French Congo, and by the Vatchivokoes, in the Portuguese Enclave of Cabinda.

Here, where certain articles of 16th century Portuguese attire were still the fashion, notably the cuirass and morion, it was the habit of certain artists, in the absence of the living model, to surround the heads of their figures with coiffures of a most fantastic and decorative nature.

Which brings us back to the littoral of Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, where a realism of ancient importation continues to be manifest in the heads of sculptured figures.

The bodies of the big village charms and famous studded fetishes are all too frequently characterised by the grossest formalism. The two legs, sagging at the knees, that support the rudimentary torso, culminate in shapeless feet of enormous size; then, springing from the profusion of thick-set nails, sachets and figurines that adorn the neck, a face with delicately sculptured features, perfectly modelled nose and ears, an expressive mouth, lips of a most sensitive reality, their curve implicit in the heavy layers of carmine ngula.

This formal statement of the human body as a central cylinder, abundantly sexed, adorned with the tribal tattoos and scarifications, the frail arms and elementary hands, the legs reduced to the function of stunted supports, is to be found throughout black Africa. It is true that we still find in certain tribes a cultivation and scrupulous reproduction of the total beauty of the human body; but these are only the rare reversions to a past many of whose aspects, unfortunately for us, are still plunged in darkness.

**Art of the Bayakas, Batekes, etc.**

There is no abrupt transition between the arts of coast and hinterland. Notably in the case of the Batekes, who occupy the Leopoldville district and thence inland along the French bank, we still find traces of naturalistic treatment, but in respect rather of detail than of modelling. Yet even
here there is the indeterminate nose, standing out harshly between two slanting furrows, the ear reduced to a semicircle and erect close to the eye.

Historically, as a result of conquest and invasions from the east, this people has for centuries been one with the Bayakas. And yet there is a moderation and reticence of statement in the works of the former strangely opposed to the exuberance, vehemence and incredibly real fantasy proper to Bayaka forms.

A peculiarity of the Bayaka masks and statues is the treatment of the nose. It is curled up like the trunk of an elephant in the act of trumpeting and recalls the nose of the God Chac as seen in the angle decorations of the Maya temples in Yucatan, which I hasten to say is only a mere coincidence.

In the second volume issued by the Congo Museum in Tervueren on the subject of ethnographical collections, the transformations of the Bayaka nose are studied in a series of drawings, ranging from the almost normal nose to one bent up and back to meet the forehead. It is in their latest work that freest vent seems given to the superabundance of their decorative extravagances. A vigorous, indomitable and intensely cannibal race, the Bayakas express in this art, entirely exempt from what the apostles of naturalism call “normal vision,” that robust sensuality which is a condition of their joy in living.

The ingenuous luxuriance of the sex, communicated in all its minutiae, is stressed by the summary features and monstrous nose, the cylindric trunk and almost amorphous limbs; and the sense of ardour and strength enhanced by the furious polychrome in which the carmine of the ngula predominates.

But the masks reserved for the Grand Masters of the Secret Societies, unlike those worn by the rank and file of the initiate, with their more than Breughelian intricacies, affect a simplicity and grandeur that cannot be explained as a mere effect of their superhuman dimensions. These are probably a survival of the primitive manner, akin to the simplicity that still prevails in Bateke art.

The differentia of this ancient style seem to have been consumed in the stress of iteration. All I can do is draw attention to its intimate relation with the statuary of the neighbouring Kasai tribes.

**The Art of the Bushongos and Others**

The effigies of the Bakuba chiefs, in virtue of the beauty of their wood and perfection of detail, are considered by some to be the indisputable masterpieces of Belgian Congo. I myself am convinced that the art of the Kasai tribes in general, and Bushongo art in particular, is decorative rather
than sculptural. Here the human figure, though widely employed, is presented for the most part as merely an important element in the decorative scheme. Though not devoid of vital qualities, exaggerated on occasion to the point of caricature, this art is the most conventional of any to be found in Africa, as appears most clearly in the thousands of faces all carved to the same pattern and the famous wooden rhytons that were once the craze of the earliest amateurs of African art. The canons of Bushongo statuary are as strict as those which standardise the raffia velvets, fard-boxes, big drums and all the other objects whose only embellishment is furnished by certain combinations of straight lines disposed against a plain or patterned background, in pursuance of a geometry of invariable significance. No emotion, very few natural references, admirable formulae applied dispassionately, but with elegance.

These Bakuba kings all look the same—the same dolichocephalic skull, the same flat heavy nose, the same tight-lipped mouth. The only one to mark a slight deviation from type, in the sharper oval of the face, is Mikope Mbula, the last of the series to reach the Congo Museum in Tervueren. But he has the same eyes, shaped like a grain of rice or a cowry, and the same features. These statues, which we know to be centuries apart in time, seem to come from the hand of a single master.

The same applies to the drinking-cups carved to the shape of a human head. But here the formulae vary in their detail from tribe to tribe, some favouring the pointed nose, others the somewhat oriental eye, others the ear reduced to a curved ridge; but there is no variation in general style and proportions.

Such a formal crystallisation establishes this art as a culmination of others more ancient. What others? At the present stage it seems impossible to say with certainty. According to the popular traditions collected by Messrs. Torday and Joyce in their remarkable monograph on the Bushongos (Brussels, 1911: Annals of the Congo Museum) this race originated in the north-west, that is to say in the Shari region. Our authors assimilate the Bushongos to the peoples of the Sudan and credit them with having had a white chieftain, a Berber, at the beginning of their history. Their material and moral civilization was, in effect, greatly superior to that of their neighbours. Their vigorous and ancient traditions were already in decay when the white man arrived. Thus their history verifies what their art makes manifest.

The influence of these incomparable craftsmen, for such the Bushongos were at some remote period of their history, must have been considerable and extensive.

The narrow limits of this essay make it impossible to show how the Bushongo formulae pervade all the statuary of the region that extends
from the Djuma, a tributary of the Kasai, to the Lualaba, now localised, as by the Bapendes, now stylised to excess, as by the Basonges.

With these latter we reach the limits of what might be called the Kasai style. The Basonges are next door to the Bena-Lulua, whose art is quite peculiar, and unrelated, as far as one can see, to either Kasai or Baluba art.

It is certainly the richest of them all in commemorative figures, "maternities," helmed and bearded chieftains armed with spears and shields, girt with a loin-cloth, bedecked with carcanets and cicatricial tattooings of extraordinary abundance and decorative splendour.

These royal effigies remind one inevitably of those in Benin, which, however, with but few exceptions, are much more conventional than the Bena-Lulua statues. Here, it is true, all is formula save only the head, which is so personal, so deliberately characterised, that it has almost the quality of a portrait. An occasional nose of aggravated dimensions recalls that of the Bayakas. But there is really nothing in common between the arts of the two regions. It is certainly to the Baluba that the Bena-Lulua style approaches most closely, if we consider the general lines of the face. There again the conventional elaboration of the trunk and limbs is reminiscent of formulae to be found in certain parts of the Sudan.

**ART OF THE BALUBAS**

The Balubas are of all African sculptors the most detached from Europe. In Rhodesia, in old German East Africa, in Uganda, the only art known is decorative.

The region that coincides approximately with the province of Tanganyka-Moero is one of the richest art regions of all Africa and one in which the human form is most often represented. The commemorative ancestral figures, the caryatic chairs, the "mendicant" figurines whose purpose has given rise to a charming legend and much controversy, the chieftains' maces richly adorned with figurines, the small ancestral ivories, the ceremonial monoxylous masks, are the most common forms.

Like the arts of the centre which we have rapidly reviewed, Baluba art is subject to strict academic rules. There is one formula, and to all intents and purposes one alone, for the construction of the head, shape of eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, chin. For the body and limbs, however, the artist seems less concerned with formulae than with the constant reference of his work to natural fact. In the play of muscles on the rounded torso, the bold explosion of the breasts, the powerful thighs that support the caryatids, the graceful arms and long fine hands, in all this commonplace of Baluba art we feel an eloquence and vitality, a plasticity in fact, unique in Congo art with the possible exception of a few figurines of the Atlantic littoral.
Baluba statuary, therefore, appears as the faint echo of the much more ancient and skilful statuary from which it proceeds. Indeed, I cannot think of any source in Africa, unless it be Egyptian sculpture, competent to furnish the technical and imaginative elements without which the profound and real talents of the Balubas could never have come to such fruition.

This hypothesis of Egyptian influence is obviously a very frail one. It must have taken hundreds and hundreds of years to penetrate, as though by osmosis, to the heart of the black continent. Or it may be that all that was needed to reveal to such skilled craftsmen something of this grandiose and subtle art was a few statues, perhaps only one, brought by a vagrant. Certainly it is rare to find in Africa, outside the valley of the Nile, the grandeur and grace achieved by some of the Balubas' ancestral figures, "mendicants" and caryatic stools. Even the faces of these statues, in spite of their academic organisation, are far from being reduced to a serenity synonymous with absence of all expression. Real life lurks behind the formula. And this again I believe to be the vestige of an ancient fecundation by one of the most complete and perfect arts that ever existed.

This rapid expose' lays no claim to being comprehensive. Within the major schools we should distinguish certain local variations, clearly defined and nearly always of great aesthetic interest. And outside these main stylistic categories lie many centres of diffusion, less important but none the less of real value. These I have deliberately discarded, though I am well aware that a more thorough study of the subject must reserve a place for them and integrate them in the general view.

On this minor plane we find the Bangala, famous for their pirogues, who produce barbaric figures of almost geometrical design; the Mongos, who model primitive clay figures, similar to those of the quaternary period; the Mangbetus, probably more Sudanese than Bantu, a highly civilised people and creators of genuine social art in ivory, pottery and wood in praise of their beautiful and voluptuous women; the savage Waregas, from whose highly synthetic ivory carvings decrepitude might be argued as validly as barbarism; the Badjoks and many others who remain in the Kasai tradition and yet have each their particular originality.

To conclude: one fact seems capital in this question of styles in Congo statuary.

In the African zone approaching the Atlantic we find peoples highly gifted for the arts. But it is in statuary, daughter of the sense of rhythm that pervades the dances and music of the blacks, that their genius seems to find its most fitting creative expression.

At the two extremities of the Congo, whose almost physical unity is not to be forgotten, outside influence has had a fertilising action on the
plastic instinct. On the one hand, the supreme and mysterious contribu-
tion of the noble naturalism of the Ifa heads; on the other, the infiltra-
tion—or revelation—of Egypt.

In the centre, partially controlled by the actions of the Atlantic lit-
toral and the lake district, a slight and charming formal art tends more and
more towards decorative standardisation.

These arts which the white man, only a few decades ago, found full
of vigour, are almost extinct today.

Civilisation, christianity, industrial processes, have done no more than
accelerate a decadence that had begun before those intruders stepped
down from the ships of Europe anchored in the river.

But the profound qualities of the black race are still alive in the
present generation. It is essential that the masters of Africa should realise
this before it is too late and act accordingly. If it be desirable honestly for
the black peoples of Africa to attain that degree of civilization where civi-
lization will not signify only a supply of useless trifles and labour spell
slavery, the revival of their arts must be encouraged and maintained. Not
in the ancient forms which have collapsed with the cultures from which
they sprang; not in the European moulds proposed *ad nauseam* by our
missions to the blacks. But a new form and a new beauty whose uprising
on African soil would be an assurance that the blacks had at last recovered
a happiness of their own.
Ubanghi-Shari lies beyond Cameroon, 2,000 kilometres from the coast. It is inhabited by about 1,000,000 blacks, divided into four large groups: the Banda, the Mandjia, the Sara and the Baya. My researches, the results of three separate visits, have been mainly among the Banda and the Mandjia, whose territories are roughly bounded by Fort-Sibut and Fort-Crampel, Buka and Bria, and it is with these two groups that I am here concerned.

A close study of “primitives” reveals in all cases the same force behind the evolutionary process: the irresistible force of Magic. Not magic as conceived in the feverish cerebration of a few well-meaning students of pseudo-religion, where study is made of the devil and diabolical manifestations, but one which, in the definition of the primitives themselves, is the art of living in intimate union with Nature, of possessing her secrets, and of using them on behalf of oneself or of others.

The two active and opposite principles of magic ceremony were revealed to me one day by the chief of a school of initiation:

1. **Positive Magic**, or Sorcery.
2. **Negative Magic**, or Taboo.

The words of the chief magician were as follows:

1. *Do a thing, accomplish an act, pronounce certain words, in order that what one desires may take place.* (Positive Magic.)
2. *Abstain from a thing, from certain words, from certain acts, in order that what one fears, or does not desire, may not take place.* (Negative Magic.)

So much has been said about the law of taboo that there is no need for me to deal with it here; we shall therefore confine ourselves to *positive*
magic, or sorcery, as it appears in bewitching and in such rites of initiation as I have witnessed.

I assisted at one most disturbing incident which I now propose to describe without additions, just as I find it recorded in my diary.

One afternoon, after forty kilometres of unbroken travelling, I called a halt beside a stream; I was just falling asleep when suddenly one of my boys shook me by the shoulder and said:

"Listen! Someone is calling for help!"

I listened, and sure enough I heard shrill cries of distress, apparently coming from behind a belt of trees. Followed by some of my boys I ran in the direction of the voice, and soon, sheltered by a dense thicket, we saw the following extraordinary spectacle.

Fifteen blacks were standing in a circle about a man and a boy, also standing and bound tightly together, breast to breast, by lianas of rubber. Another black, whom I recognised by his distinctive ornaments as a magician, was making what looked like mesmeric passes above the heads of the couple and pronouncing magic formulae in a loud voice, accompanied all the while by a disturbing monotone beaten on a little ritual tom-tom.

The magician was handed a calabash full of seeds; with his left hand he sprinkled these with blood taken from a black hen that lay on the ground outside the circle. He next took a handful of these seeds and held them to the lips of the bound man, who took a mouthful of the mixture, chewed it for a moment and then spat it out into a little dish that was held before him. Then the magician tried to make the boy swallow the contents of the dish, but he refused them resolutely and with every appearance of the most mortal terror. Finally the authority, or perhaps mesmeric powers, of the magician prevailed, and the boy swallowed the seeds, upon which the two subjects were unbound, the tom-tom became louder and all present broke out into a weird chanting.

Suddenly came an outburst of howls, like those of a wild-cat in the bush. They came from the boy's mouth.

I emerged from my hiding-place. There was movement of panic among the blacks, but when they heard me speak their language and recognised my boys as belonging to their own clan they all came towards me. I even obtained a promise from the magician that he would give me an explanation of the ceremony.

We all set off in the direction of a small village deep in the heart of the bush. I was later to learn that this village was a centre of initiation.

I am guilty of no breach of confidence in revealing what I learned. Here is a literal transcription:

"Among us there is a very widespread belief that men can be possessed by certain malevolent beings, half man, half beast, who dwell invis-
ibly (except for the initiate) throughout nature, and who prefer, when possible, to take up their abode in the human stomach. Whoever are possessed by these beings belong to themselves no longer.

“At nightfall they are irresistibly impelled by these indwelling demons to leave their huts and they then take a delight in tormenting other people. Everyone is terrified of these possessed and shuns them.

“We magicians are able to deliver them, but we must first find another individual to serve as a receptacle for the invisible being (the widwa) and keep him close until such time as he, in like manner, can get himself delivered.

“What you saw this afternoon was a ceremony of exorcism, in the course of which I succeeded, by means of special rites, in making the widwa pass from the body of the man into that of the boy.

“The latter, bereft of both father and mother and condemned, in consequence, to a life of misery, will now become an object of respect, and at the same time strike terror into the hearts of those who hesitate to give him food when he howls to them to do so. For he will no longer be able to speak, but only howl, because the being that has entered into him, by the mere fact of its presence, kills all possibility of human utterance. It was for his own good that we chose this child, for from now on he will never want for food, everyone will give to him, even though it only be out of fear of his vengeance.

“The act of deliverance was accomplished when the widwa, tempted forth by the seeds which the man had chewed, impregnated with his saliva and then spat out, had been transferred with them into the mouth of the boy.

“The man and boy were bound tightly together in order to facilitate communication between them and in consequence the deliverance of the former.

“That is all I can tell you. The wherefore of such things is my secret, and I may not reveal it.”

The notes that follow on the subject of magico-religious initiation will bring some light to bear on this very complex subject.

II

INITIATION

Initiation, notwithstanding some variations in ritual from tribe to tribe, is the force which breaks down tribal barriers, makes one in spirit tribes that economically are at enmity and unites these million individuals in wide fraternity.

The question arises: How have these “primitives” come to institute this symbolism of initiation? Having spent several years among the Banda,
Mandjia and Baya, I am in a position to reply that the purpose of initiation is the application of the abstract phenomena that we meet with in magic and religion to the concrete elements of social experience. For the symbols and ritual of initiation proceed, in the last resort, from the myths and superstitions of religion and the most mysterious laws of magic.

Although the Ubanghians are as a rule most uncommunicative regarding matters whose mysterious aspect fascinates the profane European, it is nevertheless sometimes possible to obtain information and even, on occasion, to experience the actual ritual of initiation.

Nothing could better illustrate the gist of this article than the expression for “initiate” in Sango dialect: “So a-gwe tâ na dou ti hingga”—literally: “he who enters truly into the depths of knowledge,” that is to say, the initiate.

The process of initiation may be said to begin about the age of six or seven and to continue until marriage; in other words it comes to an end, at least in the practice of the more important tribes, at the age of twenty approximately. At that age the majority of subjects would have attained what I shall call the “major initiation.”

The complete process of initiation is made up of three degrees. I may add that there are still higher degrees, but these are accessible only to the most intelligent and ambitious subjects, those who feel themselves impelled to practice the magic arts and occultism in general; which means that they are more or less confined to professional magicians and medicine-men. These higher degrees only come to an end with death, for, in the words of the native dictum, “perfect possession of the veritable mysteries is never acquired and even a whole lifetime is often insufficient for the acquisition of perfect knowledge.”

Initiation can only take place on holy ground, which ground is taboo—that is to say, closed to the profane. A circular track, two feet wide, provides a rampart of magic about the Temple of Initiation, which consists of a great dome of foliage resting on branches driven into the ground and can only be entered by a small low door. About 500 metres further off is the ritual altar, a rudimentary structure of branches erected close to the sacrificial stone.

Since all initiations take place at night, the interior of the “temple” is lit by a wood fire.

**First Degree**

This degree entails a series of revelations bearing mainly upon the origin of the world and the mechanism of procreation; these revelations are communicated in the form of spicy legends, related to the candidates by the oldest man in their village.
The master-initiator next proceeds to “fashion” the candidate, who must have previously passed through the hands of his assistants, whose function is to “prepare” him—that is to say, ensure his absolute isolation from the outer world, so that he may withdraw into his chamber of meditation. He is brought before the master-initiator, his eyes closed to the light and his hands bound, both in the literal sense. At this moment the candidate’s relation to the outer world is that of a man bereft of all his means of action, for he can accomplish none of the essential acts of life: as he now is, it is impossible for him to establish contact with the outer world, either by means of speech or gesture.

Thus the fundamental purpose of initiation of the first degree is to restore to him all those faculties that will fit him to take his part in the moral and material edifice of society.

Before the ceremony his eyes are sealed with heavy scales of clay, his mouth closed with a gag and his hands bound with stout thongs.

He is brought before the altar and his mouth opened symbolically by the “master” pouring in water till the gag falls; then follows the ordeal by fire—a sure way of testing the courage of the candidate—consisting of setting fire to the bonds and letting them fall away of themselves, which does not happen before the candidate himself has been severely burnt; and finally the decisive ordeal or supreme point of the whole initiation: the reception of the Light, a privilege which involves a certain measure of physical suffering.
While his eyes are still closed the candidate receives upon his body the mark of initiation, recognisable only to the initiate, and consisting of special tattoos (whose position I may not specify) interwoven with the ordinary tribal tattoos, but distinguishable by the unusual quality of the scar, which looks as though it had been made with a white-hot iron, the result of pouring the sap of certain corrosive plants into the open wound. Meanwhile a large fire of aromatic wood has been lit.

The “master” now announces to the candidate that he is about to receive a great gift, but that he must first take a terrible vow and sign it with his own blood.

Next is laid on the stone the victim brought by the candidate, who is handed a knife with which he must deal the victim, his “substitute,” its death-blow at the precise moment when the scales are taken from his eyes.

It is when the fire previously lit begins to burn most brightly that the scales are torn brutally from the eyes, the lids being sometimes lacerated in the process.

Then, dazzled after the many hours spent in darkness, the new initiate will see the great Light and understand deep down in his heart that Truth has been revealed to him, Truth in all its brightness and also in all its dreadfulness, because its abuse, according to the “primitives,” may be the cause of the greatest dangers and disorders, both moral and spiritual.

The new initiate, for such he has become in virtue of his Conquest of the Light, is now informed by the head-man of his village, representing the master-initiator for the occasion, that he is no longer alone but may rely in all things, at all times and in all places, on those who henceforward, in accordance with the reciprocal vow, must provide him with all the support and aid of which he may stand in need.

Thus, before receiving the gift of “great Light” the candidate has had to suffer three capital ordeals: those of earth, water and fire, the object of which was to restore to him those means of action which he had lost and now has recovered intensified, and which will continue to develop as will appear in our description of the second degree of initiation.

His eyes having been opened he can see all things in nature; his mouth having been rid of the gag which impeded it and rendered his speech unintelligible, he can now express himself freely; finally, his hands having been loosed he can, with the aid of the “ancients,” labour efficaciously at the construction of the social edifice.

**Second Degree**

If, during the three years that follow the reception of the Light, the new initiate has given the headman of his village, as well as the magician and all his fellow-initiates, full and entire satisfaction in pursuance of his
vow, he is received as a pupil into the school of initiation for a period of about 35 days. The purpose of this second initiation is a purely social one. It is simply a question of fitting the subject to become an effective cell in the vast tribal and inter-tribal organism.

He is not called on to suffer any ordeal in the course of this initiation; only his intellectual and supersensible faculties are wrought to as high a pitch of development as is possible.

From what I have seen and heard I think it likely that the essential object in this case is the fabrication of power, or, more exactly, the annexation of what the Buddhists call shakra or force-centres. The faculty of controlling these force-centres or latent powers of man is developed during this period of initiation to a very high degree, and its acquisition makes the initiate an object of veneration and fear, not only in his own tribe but also among the neighbouring tribes.

**THIRD DEGREE**

So we come to the study of the third degree, whose symbolism may be summed up in the following words: the death and rebirth of the initiate.

I had occasion to check my interpretation of this symbolism at widely divergent points: on the high Bateke plateaux, among the Pygmy tribes, throughout Ubanghi and among the Sara of Tchad.

There are local variations of ritual, but never any deviation from the common fundamental principle: a fictitious death and then a rebirth, the death involving the loss of former habits, the rebirth the acquisition of a new mentality.

This is the only degree in which ornaments are employed; they are made of red ochre and kaolin and cover the essential parts of the subject’s body: the heart, testicles and eyes. These ornaments are the work of the magician and of a definitely magic nature, their purpose being to indicate to the guardian spirits those organs for the protection of which their favourable action is solicited.

Thus adorned the subject is led by two assistants before the magician, whose duties in this degree are precisely those of master-initiator. He takes the hands of the subject and applies them successively to the head, thorax, abdomen, upper and lower limbs, referring all the while the body to the sacrificial altar by means of the oblational quality of his gestures. In these is made manifest on behalf of the subject the total gift of himself to the clan, the tribe and all his fellow-initiates.

Next the two assistants lay him on his back on the ground, his head at the foot of the altar in the right-angle formed by the intersection of the magician’s baton and the head-man’s staff of command. The apex of this angle points towards the altar. It is between the arms of this right-angle
thus constituted as a symbol of the two forces that control all social groups (the secular and religious arms) that the applicant receives his initiation. The members of the initiatory society now approach and join hands in a circle, to the sound of tom-toms and flutes.

The victims brought by him are now sacrificed and the altar and his body sprinkled with their blood.

All this time the dignitaries invoke with chants the spirits of nature and the great god, calling upon them to protect him who is about to pass into the other world.

The master-initiator now takes up his stand at the feet of the prostrate man and demands a bow; from this he discharges a number of small arrows feathered in different colours into the ground all round the head of the subject and so close that they touch his hair. Next a sheaf of assegais is handed to the magician, who darts them into the ground all round the body of the subject and so close that their blades graze his skin. Finally it is proclaimed in a loud voice that the subject is dead and the blood on his body proof thereof.

The magician, assistants and dignitaries now pass on to the other applicants. They are all obliged to remain prone for hours on the ground, incapable of the slightest movement, for, symbolically, they are dead and must appear locked in the rigidity of a corpse.

At last the magician returns to the first applicant, calls again upon the spirits and offers up fresh sacrifices, this time
composed of libations of palm-wine, with which he sprinkles the altar and
the body of the applicant.

Then the assistants pluck the assegais one by one out of the ground
and the ceremonies symbolic of the rebirth begin. After a short pause the
initiator stretches himself out at full length on the body of the prostrate
subject, limbs against limbs, mouth against mouth, and with his breath
inspires him with the new life. When this has been accomplished the magi­
cian gets up, claps his hands three times to recall the departed spirit, while
the initiate rises to his feet and takes his place in the circle of dignitaries.

The greatest care is taken throughout to sustain the initiatory ten­
sion of this symbolic process of death and rebirth.

What could be better by way of conclusion than the introduction of
one of my black friends, Sâ-yâ-mâli, a magician of great renown through­
out this region?

It was he who gave most of the information contained in this study,
and which I was at pains to verify. He is tall and thin, his eyes are cold and
full of an acuity that troubles many who approach him.

All his life he has offered up animal sacrifices and, according to his
own account, human ones as well. But “Human flesh,” he declared, “is
never eaten for the pleasure of eating it nor with any orgiastic motive, but
only when certain magical rites require it, and then the victim is always
designated by the magician.”

A last word on the subject of those who were once the principal legis­
lators of this immense region.

It cannot be denied that the magic practices which we find so hard to
understand and accept have, if only by virtue of their disciplinary tradi­
tions, established a certain measure of order among these primitive peoples
and a consequent standard of morality and fraternity which, however ap­
parently elementary to the European mind, did in effect lead to many
valuable results. And it is to the influence of the magicians that the exist­
ence of an Ideal must be ascribed.

**MAGIC AND INITIATION AMONG THE PEOPLES OF UBANGHI-SHARI**

1. The fundamental purpose of these ordeals, both moral and physical, suf­
fered in the course of initiation, is to ensure that the subject possesses sufficient
courage and resolution to endure them to the end. For should his courage fail
him and he betray it by tears, cries or even nervous laughter, he is liable, for not
having observed complete silence, to be put to death, and this not symbolically,
but literally and immediately.
“Primitive” Life and Mentality

by Raymond Michelet

A number of the documents brought forward in this study are taken from M. Olivier Leroy’s most interesting book, *Primitive Reason* (Ed. Geuthner, Paris), which is presented as “an essay in refutation of the thesis of pre-logicism.” It seemed to me, though I am not primarily concerned with the destruction of the thesis arraigned by M. Leroy, that many of the arguments and records adduced by him could, when completed and rearranged, provide a convenient point of departure for an outline of the Negro “mentality,” this term to be taken in its fullest acceptation, as denoting the most material as well as the most spiritual aspects of life.

Thus I shall endeavour here, by way of complement to the account of the history, organisation and civilisation of Negro peoples which I have given elsewhere from a material standpoint, to convey some idea of the quality of their thought and life as it appears in their most various manifestations. The mere fact that the Negroes, in the first instance, meant nothing more to the white man than a commodity to be bought and sold, like ivory or alcohol, then enslaved and exploited, as they still are, like beasts of burden, resulted inevitably in their being labelled, so that such a system might be justified, as uncivilised, semi-animal or bestial savages, and being looked on as such for centuries. In the phrase of Frobenius, “the notion of the barbarous Negro was invented in Europe, where it reigned unchallenged until the 20th century.”

For even when it became necessary to acknowledge the existence of an authentic material civilisation among the Negroes, there was no doing away with the prejudice which had become firmly established and which even today is almost as virulent as it ever was. The system of forcing people to work for the exclusive benefit of their masters, on lands that have been stolen from them and under conditions verging on slavery, if not worse, very soon creates its own ideology, namely, that these people are, by definition, inferior and only receive the treatment they deserve. This spurious ideology of extenuation is consolidated by the fact that the white men on the spot are in no way concerned with understanding the natives, but only with extracting from them the maximum of foot-pounds, and is so powerful and widespread that even those who have no interest in the matter ratify it in effect.
The various beliefs, facts and customs baldly recorded by travellers and colonists less interested in what a thing meant than in how it looked and how they looked beside it, and at pains to stress only those grotesque, bizarre and unexpected superficialities most likely to startle the profane European, were duly labelled as so many superstitions and stupidities only worthy of children, and adduced as the signs of an arrested and inferior mentality, subject to the most vile, bestial and cruel superstitions and obviously incapable of the least rational or sensible process.

That such a conception is not merely still current, but systematically fostered and popularised, appears clearly in the commentaries that accompany the African films produced in the capitalistic studios of Hollywood and Joinville, in the ignominious animated cartoons starring without fail the howling and cannibal nigger, and in the reflections and reactions of the public in the presence of such films and entertainments, which can also be compared to the general style of the Paris Colonial Exhibition or the English Wembley. Even bourgeois writers of liberal reputation, from whom an elementary effort of comprehension might be expected, divagate about Africa, lapped in the maximum of apathy consistent with their passion for butterflies and the vague apprehension that colonisation is perhaps not quite the brilliant success that is generally supposed. Witness M. Gide, whose books leave one with the impression that there is nothing here to merit the attention of a “man of culture” beyond a certain fortuitous picturesqueness which he steadfastly, and rightly, refuses to consider. In the midst of black peoples Gide sits down and reads and re-reads Faust, Macbeth, the tragedies of Corneille, Paradise Lost, and God knows what else besides. On occasion, and as a special favour, he condescends to be briefly moved by the beauty of the speech and chants of his paddle-men.

Faithfully, copiously, and with the most glaring impropriety of expression, our imperialists of learning have ratified these various opinions. The latest imprimatur, that of M. Lévy-Brühl and his disciples Blondel and company, sets out to demonstrate that the black mentality, like that of all primitives in general, is absolutely impervious to experience and to European modes of thought, that it moves on an entirely different plane, that of “pre-logicism.” It might be as well to mention, before we go any further, that M. Lévy-Brühl has never spoken with an African in his life.

In this system the savage appears as a kind of dismantled creature, bound to his environment, his group, food, dwelling, wife or wives, laws of his clan, etc., by a variety of “mystical participations,” which are presented with the utmost extravagance by M. Lévy-Brühl and his school. It is on this account, we are informed, that the behaviour of the Negroes is inexplicable and unreasonable. For in this system no single reference is made to the desirability of understanding the native, his acts and thoughts,
and how his mode of life, tribal organisations and other circumstances, explain and even justify the beliefs he holds. From the endless works in this, the Lévy-Brühl manner, we receive the impression of a demented existence, a state of perpetual hallucination, held together materially by some miracle of chance, since all communication with reality has been severed. This is no exaggeration.

In all this is implicit the postulate that we have to do with aberrations of the mind and unreasonable superstitions, so that it is really nothing but the old legend dressed up to the latest nines. The savage, and in particular the Negro, thus qualified as pre-logical, presents automatically a clear case of arrested mentality, and this in whatever sphere of his activity we may choose to consider, not excepting the most technical (the Lévy-Brühlian prestidigitations in this connection are positively scandalous), and consequently lags far behind the white man on the road to reason, logic and taylorised industry.

Thus our tradesmen and gentry enjoy the satisfaction of being able to elicit from a perusal of M. Lévy-Brühl the obligation that is laid upon the white man to relieve, on no authority but his own, the Negroes of their responsibilities, take over their land which they are clearly unable to work themselves, and instruct them in the healthy methods of European labour and christian morality so that they may emerge from their vale of folly and ignorance into the light of pure reason.

It is impossible to overestimate the danger of such books and their pernicious influence. It is on record that a governor-general of French West Africa procured several hundred copies of Lévy-Brühl’s first book and distributed them in all the administrative centres throughout the Sudan, as the depository of the verity of verities.

But this bourgeois and imperialist ideology makes no attempt to understand how these “strange” thoughts and actions may be an integral part of life itself, profoundly human and often evincing, what is more, an acute perception of reality and an ability to harness its most hidden resources—so acute indeed that it cannot immediately be apprehended by the narrow, cocksure brain of the European (or American) positivist.

For it would be quite as false to take the contrary view of the Negro as no less—and no more—logical and reasonable fundamentally than the model white rationalist. But could anything be more fantastic than to present the latter as the archetype of truth and practical wisdom? Indeed the Negro mentality must be considered as approaching more nearly to such an ideal, for, being more elastic and in closer contact with nature, it is more tolerant of what appears to be incoherent, knowing perfectly well how to turn it to account. They are familiar with the logical manoeuvres and modes of action of the whites, but they do not hesitate to discard
them when their virtue as operative agents collapses into the merely deri-
sive, and to set aside a principle of contradiction which, both symbolically
and in fact, is of no importance.

It must not be forgotten that their material conditions of life never
called on them for any very prolonged or strenuous effort (natural rich-
ness of the soil and its products, extreme frugality, or rather simplicity):
three months’ labour in the year (even the household slaves only work
three days in the week) being found sufficient on an average for all the
needs of life. Because they were exempt from that perpetual struggle for
existence which confines the mind to a single bread-and-butter theme of
petty logic, they could react more sensitively to the world about them (a
world which is invariably much less logical and correct than people think).
Hence they were at liberty to develop in themselves to a high degree
certain modes of perception and of action, apparently extra-scientific, but
symptomatic in effect of reality quite as real, if not more so, as the positiv-
ist world of the European. It is on this basis that a complete civilization
has sprung up in Black Africa. And already there seems to be no good
reason for continuing to speak of it as “primitive,” unless indeed it be in
virtue of that same postulate which we have just examined. But if magic is
something real and effectual, even if it can be said to justify itself, then
indeed one is entitled to assert that civilisations, involving magic culture,
having developed in themselves the “magic” germ which the European world
has long been without, represent a very advanced stage of society, in so
far as they have steadily evolved in pursuance of an initial principle of
development and on a plane which is at least their own and, all things
considered, no less real than the strictly reasonable plane of the white
world.

Let us consider in the first place some fallacious interpretations of
Negro life and thought.

To begin with, there is the artificial and arbitrary, because exagger-
ated, barrier set up between the mind and life of the Negro and those of
the white man. The latter are not all reason, and certainly the former are
not all error and childishness. In this connection M. Leroy makes a very
clear distinction (op. cit.): Lévy-Brühl, like everybody else, “makes no
attempt to relate the mind of the savage with that of civilised man. He
seems to have set out to contrast the two as violently as possible. In the
presence of such contrary tendencies as the savage’s delight in and accep-
tance of the inexplicable on the one hand, and on the other the positivist
rationalism that he encounters no further afield than in his own mental
processes, M. Lévy-Brühl is totally blind to the points of contact in which
these two spiritual currents are merged.

“The determinist logic which appears in the system of Lévy-Brühl”
(as in the bulk of public opinion) "to be the be-all and end-all of western thought is really no more than a working hypothesis, a laboratory device. Given a serious anxiety to compare the thoughts of a savage with our own, is it legitimate to take excerpts from manifestations that do not run parallel? Let us suppose for the sake of argument that the processes of the modern investigator are determined exclusively by pure experimental logic. What we must look for, therefore, is the proportion of experimental logic present in the thought of the savage investigator in so far as he is absorbed by the necessity of solving in a practical way the problems of fishing, hunting and the construction of gear. If we eliminate this field of activity and only consider the emotional manifestations of the savage psyche, the ceremonies in which he expresses his joy and sorrow and aesthetic exaltation, religious, social or sensual, his obsequies, initiations, rites of tribal communion with the ancestral spirits, or the satisfaction in magic of the spirit of vengeance—if we do this we load the dice, and it is only too obvious that an almost insurmountable barrier has been set up between the two orders of thought." (O. Leroy.)

More precisely: not only have the dice been loaded, but the entire proceedings become impossible and absurd. An attempt is being made to compare two things which have no longer anything in common, as on the one hand a factory or a chemical experiment and on the other love or some other specific psychic reality. Let us compare, if we must compare, the European factory with the Africans' iron foundries, their weaving looms, bronze-work, etc. The fact of the matter is that European thought is so engrossed in material activity that it has no longer any other standard of reference. Yet this is far from being the essence of life, its true interest and mystery. It would furthermore be impertinent in the highest degree to consider this essence, as cursorily referred to above by M. Leroy, with the eyes of a member of that capitalistic society which has concentrated all its powers of development on labour and the most tawdry enjoyment and reduced "aesthetic exaltation, religious, social or sensual" to a repertory of superannuated, artificial and dishonoured gestures. Whereas among the Africans it is the living reality that informs and controls the individual.

To conclude with M. Leroy: "Let us take simple and legitimate points of comparison and we arrive at a far less spectacular conclusion and one that brings us back to . . . a much more human notion of the savage mind. Thus the idea, so often quoted as a superstition, that death is unnatural, . . . that strictly speaking there is no such thing as an accident, may easily (obviously) be opposed to the attitude of a medical jurist conducting a post-mortem and must be considered as physiologically unreasonable. But metaphysically it is no such thing. . . . It is only necessary to suppose that causes may be occult and yet real at the same time. The belief of the
pre-logical savage in respect of this principle is shared by certain philoso-
phers, who hold that explanation of an event by its immediate antecedents
does not exhaust its total reality and that the remotest causes, and in their
view the only valid causes, remain inaccessible to our understanding.

“It is grossly unfair to compare a primitive in whom the element of
prejudice has been magnified out of all proportion with a westerner in
whom it has been reduced to nothing at all.

“We may go further . . . The negation of so-called occult phenom-
ena, of those manifestations which the theologian brings under the head
of divine or diabolic mysticism, is a comparatively recent attitude in the
history of human thought and one which it would be rash to regard as
final. ‘The reign of Wonder is perennial,’ writes Carlyle, ‘indestructible in
man; only, at certain stages (as the present) it is, for some short season, a
reign in partibus infidelium.’”

Thus we would be well advised to be incredulous of certain extrava-
gant revelations and to interpret the accounts of travellers rather less in-
genuously than is usually done. Many of the phenomena described, however
incredible they may appear on the surface, are literal occurrences and on
inspection are generally found to yield a most vital principle.

Take, for example, the following anecdote, which becomes a mighty
argument in the hands of M. Lévy-Brühl: “A drought in Loanda was at-
tributed specifically to the fact that the missionaries wore a kind of toque
during divine service. The natives declared that this circumstance pre-
vented the rain from falling. They began to protest with great vehemence
and to clamour for the missionaries to leave the country.”

“These Congo natives,” observes M. Leroy, “do not strike me as
being so very pre-logical. If they requested the toque to be removed in the
first place, I am inclined to believe that they were merely being polite. I
am supported in this view by what follows: ‘. . . and to clamour for the
missionaries to leave the country.’ The natives argued, and with very sound
logic, that the foreign sorcerers were irritating the tutelary deities of their
country; hence the drought; once certain premises have been allowed,
this is an irrefragable chain of reasoning. They lodged their initial com-
plaint against the toques, out of either courtesy or fear; but the metonymy
is flagrant; what they really wanted to get rid of was what was under the
toques.”

I myself came across a similar anecdote related by one Germond, a
missionary, in Evangelical Missions: “A Basuto chief said to me in all inno-
cence: ‘You can come and preach in our village as often as you like. We
shall never make fun of what you say as long as you are present, though we
might when you have gone.’” This is what Lévy-Brühl describes as the
mystic dread of malevolent supernatural action on the part of the missionaries if contradicted. Very mystic? Whatever ambiguity might conceivably attach to the words of the chief is dispelled by the following phrase of Granville and Roth, writing of the black people of Warri (Nigeria), quoted by Lévy-Brühl, who fails entirely to grasp its obvious and straightforward meaning: “If a European argues with them they immediately conclude that he is angry, and that that is dangerous.” They are not far wide of the mark.

Many other beliefs that seem quite as strange have only to be examined with a little attention to become perfectly human and normal. “In Loango,” according to Dr. Pechuel-Loeschche, “the departing stranger must not destroy his buildings or plantations, but leave them as they are. This is why the natives protest when Europeans dismantle the movable structures which they had assembled on the spot and transport them elsewhere. At least the corner pillars must be left standing. In the same way it is forbidden to remove the trunks of trees, to make excavations, etc. . . . There is trouble in store for the trader who finds it convenient to substitute a new path, however more direct and suitable it may be, for the one generally used.”

Notice in the first place the flagrant misrepresentation of fact; it would appear that it is always forbidden to remove the trunks of all trees! Then follows Lévy-Brühl’s fallacious interpretation of the facts, which can so easily be explained and are so in keeping with what we know of the Negro attitude to the dead. “This does not derive from a straightforward dislike of all break with tradition. With the old path you knew where you were, but it is impossible to foretell what incalculable consequences may attend its dereliction in favour of a new one (sic). A path, like everything else, has its mystic properties. The Loango natives, speaking of a path, say that it is dead—a most significant figure; for the path, as long as it lives, has its secret powers, like houses, trees, stones, plants, clouds, animals and men, in short like everything of which the primitive has a collective notion.”

“This,” observes M. Leroy in his excellent reply to the whole passage, “is no more than an affirmation, with no shred of proof to confirm it. The Loango natives mean literally what they say when they speak of a dead path, because their primitive mentality requires that they should. But there is nothing in the accounts of those who understand African phenomena much better than we do to authorise the above explanations. The facts related by Pechuel-Loeschche have obviously to do with the veneration of sacred places, considered as such because spirits dwell there. If France were invaded by a people unfamiliar with the cult of the dead and the ‘barbarians’ were to establish their camps and factories on the sites of
our cemeteries, the French would manifest that very same distress which we find among the Negroes, and no doubt some sociologist would refer curiously to this aspect of a tradition incomprehensible to what he would term his logic."

I find it no less preposterous to interpret as the sign of a singular mentality the celebrated alacrity with which an African hands over whatever object he is asked for. They are quite right, it seems to me, when they suppose that a refusal might alienate the person who desires the object and that he might be unable to prevent his resentment from making itself felt. Nor has it ever occurred to anybody to explain this characteristic by the very great natural hospitality of the Negroes, or to make allowance for the tacit assumption on their part that equitable compensation will be made and that in any case it will be possible to retaliate the following day on any person unscrupulous enough to take advantage of this hospitality which is the due of every stranger, by demanding an object of considerable value and then leaving an absurdly disproportionate compensation in its place.

Many other arguments, of a moral order, would collapse in the same way with the exercise of a little penetration: all that has been said, for example, on the subject of lying, the so-called "African vice," and which stimulates M. Dieterlen to the following proposition: "they lie for the sake of lying, instinctively, knowing that it cannot help them. It is an irresistible instinct, a congenital habit" (sic). It is forgotten that prevarication is the most natural weapon with which to parry the curiosity of the white man, rightly considered by the black as a dangerous indiscretion. What is the good of telling the truth to a person who will not understand, who will jeer and turn it against you and your group? The commentaries of M. Delafosse which I have quoted elsewhere should be remembered in this connection. M. Dieterlen writes: "A female catechumen, Rosa, was taxed with being pregnant. When I spoke to her she denied everything. The next day but one she made, a full confession." Surely M. Dieterlen, who is after all a missionary, realises that in the eyes of the blacks he is first and foremost a white man and, what is more to the point, a pitiless censor pronouncing in the name of a mysterious moral code the most incomprehensible and anti-natural prohibitions. Why confess to an act when you know that you will be reprimanded, and perhaps punished, undeservedly, as you believe, but beyond appeal? No less ingenuous is the astonishment of M. Gide because, when he asks a Negro why he did such and such a thing, he is told as often as not how the thing was done . . . and he concludes that Lévy-Brühl is a profound thinker. The reason is simply that the Negro does not want to reply at all, but deems it advisable to say something, and hence proceeds to beg the question with great volubility.
Similarly for the old man who, when Gide enquired how many goats there were in his tribe, replied: “They cannot be numbered. No. If they were numbered they would die.” And Gide is in despair. Could he not reflect that it was part of this native’s duty to look askance at all white men on the grounds that they would not scruple to requisition as many of his goats as they saw fit to consider in excess of the number sufficient for his needs?

Above all, what becomes of the reality of life, of ordinary everyday reality, in this imaginary welter of horrors and “superstitions”? It is not merely an exaggeration, it is sharp practice, to present the occasional as the regular occurrence. We have just had a specimen of such practice with Dr. Pechuel-Loesche and his tree-trunks. But it often takes a more serious form. The majority of authors, impelled by their prejudices as “civilisers,” spare no pains to give us a terrifying idea of the life of the Negroes; this is specially true of authors of religious tendency, always itching to set up the christian life against that of the blacks. To take only a few passages at random: M. Allier (Uncivilized Man and Ourselves): “Uncivilized man is haunted all his life long by the dangers that hem him round . . .”; “. . . an endless variety of terrors all springing from the same source. . . .”; “the constant obsession of uncivilized man is to find out what particular enemy has bewitched him. . . .”! And Father Viaene on
the subject of the Bahunde: "The life of these poor blacks is ruled by fear, fear of the maladies caused by spirits and sorcerers. . . ."; and so on. At the base of all these ethnographical labours, vitiating their observation, misrepresenting the facts and giving rise to unwarrantable generalisation, we find the same intolerable prejudice: a determination to contrast the life of the Negroes with the illuminations of reason or religion and in this way to justify the tyranny of the white man. It is typical, for example, that one of the very few acute and reliable observers of the present day, Professor Malinowski (how regrettable it is that he does not write about Africa!), should only be quoted by Lévy-Brühl on two or three occasions, and then in respect of detail scarcely related to the main thesis.

Even Lévy-Brühl himself is obliged to admit that most travellers "retain only that which is startling, exotic and incredible." The Negroes are in the habit of looking on certain forms of death as more natural than others, but the spectator disregards this peculiarity because it is not of the kind that excites his interest. As a general rule he proposes to the reader nothing more than a vague nightmare, an incoherent and unexplained symposium which has no reality outside his book. Authors of the stamp of Lévy-Brühl, Blondel and Frazer carry this form of exaggeration a step further by delving in such specious accounts for the most grotesque and sinister details. Henceforward all contact with reality is broken.

This is no literary overstatement on my part. Consider the following passage dealing with the Mosi from the pen of Father Eugène Mangin, whose sole anxiety is to give an exact transcription of what he has observed (quoted by M. Leroy): "You would think that the Mosi, surrounded by all these spirits infesting the air, earth, fire, houses, fields, and almost every other object, would be forced to live in a state of constant terror, there being no end to their apprehensions, poisoners by day and seuya (souleaters) by night. Yet it is far from being so. They are a gay people, easily moved to laughter and apparently strangers to worry. An old man, to whom I made this remark, replied: 'We are not all tormented. And even if we were, what is the good of worrying about things that cannot be avoided?' Furthermore the Mosi, like so many others, can forget all their beliefs in the actual practice of life and behave as though they were masters of their actions and certain to attain their ends. When a swirl or wind comes, catching up a cloud of dust and dead leaves, they bombard it with sticks and stones, laughing and shouting like children. Yet they know it to be the abode of various spirits and sorcerers, one more terrible than another. The more fervent among them consult the sorcerers and offer up sacrifices before the least undertaking; the others have no use for sacrifices except at the feast of the dead or when they are visited by misfortune. . . . Here, as in every other community, there are the fervent and the indifferent. . . ."
M. Leroy has an acute commentary on this passage: "this gives me no disturbing sense of phantasmagoria, but rather the calm and peaceful impression that springs from things that are. . . . Thus the 'primitive' mind may sometimes be characterized by an exclusive interest in the occult attributes of objects and human beings and remain undisturbed by their material aspect (as is seen, for example, in their graphic representations), while in the domain of language this same mind passes over all that is not concrete detail. Sometimes the savage, like the poet,

passe à travers des forêts de symboles
qui l'observent avec des regards familiers . . . 

sometimes his vision is wholly prosaic and practical and engrossed by the mere surface of the object. . . . I hold that this contradiction exists. Nor does it offend me in any way. Is it not a fact, and a fact in the savage's own mind?"

When we pass on to consider in more detail some of the circumstances adduced as indicative of a mentality that knows nothing of logic, or is merely base, we are immediately struck by the futility of such arguments as those bearing on the slipshod and ineffective scientific conceptions of the Negroes. Is it surprising to find that experimental science, whose development is a function of national industrialization, has remained in the rudimentary stage in a country whose industrial requirements are of the simplest kind and where intense objective experiment presents no interest in and for itself? (One of the major European superstitions is a belief in the absolute value of science.)

As though such arguments were not sufficiently ludicrous, it is further asserted that this absence of development under the aegis of experimental science proves the Negro's inability to reason logically and his ignorance of the laws of causality. . . . An immediate refutation of this infantile thesis is implicit in their material achievements: the construction of furnaces for the casting of iron, of weaving-loom and weapons, an extensive acquaintance with medical remedies of their own invention and with their properties, with poisons and their various degrees of potency. (We shall have occasion to consider all this in greater detail.)

The obstinacy with which they cling to their traditions, their refusal to be europeanised or to acknowledge that their way of living is unreasonable, their loathing of European importations, are commonly quoted as symptomatic of an eminently stupid and purblind spirit, so inferior to ours that it cannot even appreciate the advantages of our civilisation. . . . So wholly are the whites convinced of the unique and absolute value of
their civilisation! The eminent boot is more likely to be on the other foot! But it is essential to realise that their refusal to abandon their way of living does not arise from an inability to assess for what it is worth the substitute that is proposed to them, but on the contrary from a definite act of preference and with full knowledge of what they are doing.

“We are told how faithful the Bushmen remain to their nomad life. A missionary was anxious to induce them to settle down. He suggested that they should buy goats with ostrich-feathers or the skins of animals taken in the chase. This proposal tickled them immensely. They enquired how many of their ancestors had ever reared domestic animals. They were fully determined, they explained, to eat them, without concerning themselves with the rearing of them.”

M. Lévy-Brühl concludes that they altogether failed to understand the missionary’s proposition.

“Yet it is obvious that the attitude of these tribes is a strictly conscious and deliberate one and that its underlying philosophy is by no means to be despised. . . . The same is true of those peoples who prefer their frugal forest life to the routine of labour in the fields, because they are of the opinion that ‘the game is not worth the candle.’ This is exactly the view that was expressed to Mgr. Le Roy by an East African Pygmy.” (O. Leroy.)

On the other hand, when they see an interest in doing so, the Negroes are very quick to take advantage of whatever may be of use to them in their technical appliances—and yet we are assured that their arrested mentality is evinced, not only in a refusal to learn, but in a positively chronic inaptitude to learn or receive fresh vigour from any alien source whatsoever! Nothing could be more specious than this argument.

“The Protestant missionaries,” writes M. Leroy, “often complain that the natives come to the mission only in order to learn a manual trade. . . . Furthermore, and not to mention those African peoples who attained in the past to a high level of civilisation, the many examples of enterprise that we find among them at the present time should exempt us from the error of supposing the Negro mentality to be generally affected with the malady of misoneism (hatred of what is new). A system of writing invented from start to finish by a Negro prince of Cameroon is typical of this enterprise. I may add that the writing was taken up promptly by the peoples of Fumbán.

“Mr. R.H. Milligan, a close and perspicacious observer of the Negroes of West Africa, actually picked on this faculty of assimilating and communicating instruction, disallowed by the majority of critics, as being their most impressive characteristic. . . . ‘Children twelve years old would gather the neighbours, old and young, about them and teach them all
they knew of reading and doing sums. This is a common sight in every African mission. All Africans possess this charming childish quality, an aptitude to learn. . . . The most illustrious African chief will sit down and listen to a child for as long as the child is able to teach him something.’

‘. . . What M. Lévy-Brühl has done’ (and the general public thinks instinctively in the same way) ‘is to collect patiently all the most sottish aspects of African life and deduce from them an isolated type of intelligence. It is not exactly the model method. . . . It is scarcely necessary to point out that examples of primitive enterprise would be more numerous if they had received the slightest encouragement from the whites. But as a rule such encouragement was extended only when the people had been already decimated or degraded, this degradation being the result of imported alcohol or of traditional discipline being displaced by European culture without any transition or moral compensation.’ Thus M. Leroy. We may add that even this small measure of encouragement was a very rare event.

‘. . . Besides,’ he continues, ‘if we confine ourselves to questions of technique, if we merely enquire what technical improvements have been made in the course of native enterprise, it is evident at once that the alleged stagnation of this technique is altogether relative and apparent. Every tribe, in effect, evincing in its cultural type a more or less perfect adaptation to the conditions of its habitat, can only have attained the so-called stagnant phase after a long series of gropings, transformations and improvements. The least detail in the construction of a weapon—the curve or reinforcement of a bow, the feathering of an arrow, etc., represents a series of failures, experiments and discoveries. . . .’

Even Lévy-Brühl pays a tribute to the ‘natural eloquence of the natives in a large number of societies, the fertility of argument displayed in their palavers, the skill with which they advance and defend their assertions. Their tales and proverbs are a testimony to their subtle and malicious observation, their myths are full of a rich and poetical imagination. . . . They engage, just as we do and often with more effect, in questions of physiognomy, ethics and psychology, and as practitioners rather than theorists.’ But there is a catch! ‘We must not forget, however, that such points of resemblance are only to be established in those modes of mental activity where the primitive, like ourselves, proceeds by direct intuition, immediate apprehension and an almost instantaneous interpretation of what is perceived. . . . They are guided by a kind of flair or tact, which is developed and refined by experience and may become almost infallible without having anything in common with intellectual operations as strictly understood.’

So much for the affirmations of M. Lévy-Brühl. Personally I con-
sider such processes as the guarantee of an essentially acute intelligence, sensitive in its observation and interpretation of significant detail and thus competent to frame an opinion without loss of time. To describe a particularly rapid and accurate ratiocination as "flair" amounts to a joke which can scarcely be excused by the itch to establish the Negro mentality as essentially low.

No less absurd is the attempt made by Lévy-Brühl to ascribe the skill of the Negro hunter to an automatic memory operating independently of reason; this skill, far from being a mere mechanical faculty, is the result of a long apprenticeship and of a development fostered and controlled by the art of observation and favoured by faculties which are obviously more sensitive than ours. The identification of spoor may be no more than a question of memory, but the ability to ascribe it correctly and to follow it up where a European would be entirely at a loss presupposes a rational process of the most penetrating order. The fact of the matter is that we really know very little of the life of these "savages" and of its concrete and rigorously experimental aspects.

I do not propose to deal here with African art which, we are told, is the product of an infantile mentality. To speak with such careful disparagement of what has been created by the most profound, fertile and complex spontaneity, seems to me mere nonsense. And surely it is impossible, if we only consider their drawings, to assimilate to the clumsy scrawls of children the abstract and tumultuous splendour of the immense designs of the Bushmen divulged by Frobenius. It is no longer permissible, in the presence of such extraordinary achievements, to parrot the shoddy formula of "mechanical and irresponsible imitation of reality."

It occasionally happens that a minimum of exact observation compels the European sociologist to acknowledge that the facts as pompously established by his imagination are precisely the contrary of the facts as they are. It is on these occasions that the European positivist betrays his wilful determination to establish the inferiority of the primitive intelligence at all costs and in the face of the most recent evidence. The giveaway is particularly flagrant when they come to deal with African languages.

M. Leroy has good reason to give a humorous turn to the title of his chapter on this subject. "The indigence (supposititious) followed by the richness (established) of the 'primitive' dialects considered respectively as the signs of a primitive intelligence," and to observe that "not so long ago the term 'primitive' denoted the habits and appearance of a shadowy pithecanthropus, concerned more with his grub than with 'mystic participations.' This savage, whose language was co-ordinated with the onomatopoeias of a gibbon, was only credited with a very limited vo-
cubulary and this alleged indigence of expression adduced as one of the proofs of ‘primitive’ intelligence.”

It may perhaps be supposed that our author is here guilty of exaggeration and unwarrantable distortion of the facts. But not at all. In a treatise quoted by M. Leroy, Genetic Sociology, which appeared in 1905 under the name of F. Consentini, professor in the newly founded University of Brussels and editor of the Scienza Sociale, we find the following passage: “The intellectual and moral conditions of savage peoples are a function of their natural conditions; a language reduced to a tiny (!) vocabulary, an inability to grasp abstract ideas (the faculties of enumeration and reflection being absent), attest the poverty of their intelligence.” (!!!)

In the recent psychological treatise published under the direction of M. Dumas (and purporting to be the last word in modern science), there is a section devoted to ethnical psychology in which the author polishes off the psychology of the African Negro as follows: “The fixed idea of the Negro is to eat his bellyful, stuff himself to the point of indigestion.” (!!!)

“The author of these frivolities,” remarks M. Leroy (for frivolities read abominations), “would certainly be embarrassed if he were one day to experience the beauty of the Fan Hymn to the Sun, or the incredibly subtle enigmas that are the delight of the fanciful Ba-Ronga, or again, the noble simplicity of Bushongo art. What idea of the primitive mentality can the unfortunate student extract from such ultra-simplified ‘ethnical psychology,’ the sociological mysticism of Durkheim and the pre-logicism of Lévy-Brühl” (not to mention current opinion)?

But now we know that African languages are remarkable for the richness of their vocabularies, forms and locutions. M. Lévy-Brühl would have us believe that this results from their inability to see beyond the surface of the object or to generalise their visual experience. There is no authority for such an affirmation. A concrete vocabulary of such abundance and variety is perfectly normal in a civilisation that is rooted so firmly in nature and physical life and is absolutely essential for the huntsman, fisherman, etc. Are we not recommended, as M. Leroy does not fail to remind us, by one of our leading philologists, M. Brunot, in his unbiased account of Thought and Language, to substitute for such vague generic terms as horse, tree, etc., an abundance of specific terms according to the variety in question? Can it be that M. Brunot’s mentality is arrested?

Again, how are we to explain the facility with which our missionaries find in these native languages all the equivalents they require? M. Junod tells us that the bible has been translated throughout South Africa, in Guamba, Ronga, Suto, Zulu and Pedi. How could that be possible if the Africans were ignorant of generic terms or unable to understand them?

Passing on to more complex questions, it is frequently asserted that
yet another proof of the grossness, stupidity and primitiveness of the Ne­gro mentality is to be found in their inability (!) to conceive the notion of God or at all events to entertain more than the rudiments of such a no­tion—ethnography saving her face with a clause as usual. Whereas the truth of the matter is, so far as can be ascertained, that they have an idea of God which is so straightforward as to be totally incomprehensible to those Europeans who, whether believers or “free-thinkers,” are in the habit of gorging on the most foolish and complicated conceptions, irrespective of the sauces that help them down: protestant sauce, catholic, neoBuddhist, and in fact every kind of theological, sentimental, sensual and so-called rationalistic hotch-potch. The African point of view has more in common with a serene atheism than with anything else.

The entire question is summed up by the eminent African authority M. Delafosse: “There can be little doubt that this belief in a ‘supreme being’ is almost universal among the Negro peoples of Africa, but it is of a COSMOGONIC, not a religious, order. They admit that the world and all that it contains have been created by a higher being, whose existence they acknowledge but who remains for them AN OBJECT OF INDIFFERENCE, because they have no means of communicating with him and because he himself is indifferent to the lot of his creatures.”

Confusion on this head is bound to prevail as long as people in general, and missionaries in particular, continue to speak of the African “religion,” a habit which gives rise to such diabolical definitions as the following (Rev. J.H. Weeks on the Congo Bangala), typical of the more well-intentioned of its kind: “Their religion is founded in fear, fear of the invisible demons. . . . The only object of the Bangala, when they practise their religion, is to humour, appease, outwit and overcome the demons that torment them, etc. . . .” Now a belief in spirits has nothing to do with the ideas of religion, cult, and the like. I shall return to this much obscured subject when I have put the reader in possession of certain facts necessary for its clarification.

Nor is there any authority for considering the African conception of the soul as primitive, stupid or pre-logical. It is only the hopeless confusion of his own notions on the subject that allows the white man to preen himself on their nobility. M. Delafosse, who is not at all prone to flights of fancy, is quite definite on this subject: the Negroes of Africa, he explains, distinguish in every creature firstly a kind of vital fluid, purely impersonal and dissociable, which does not die with the creature, but is eternal, combining perpetually with other parts of nature, “like a kind of electric current,” to quote his own phrase; and secondly, an altogether different principle, mind, which is born with the body and confers upon it the “faculties of thought, will and action.”
All this is perfectly coherent. But what M. Lévy-Brühl finds particularly offensive is the notion of “multiple souls.” Mary Kingsley and Nassau speak of the dream-soul as understood by the Negroes of Calabar (as well as by many other peoples). The interesting passage that follows is taken from Father Van Wing’s observations on the Bakongo: “The Bakongo consider man as a dual being, made up of one part which is corporeal, outward and visible, the other inward and psychic. The psychic being in its turn is dual, containing a mysterious element that comes and goes. As long as this element is present the man has consciousness of himself; when it departs he loses that consciousness. In virtue of this element (mfumu kutu) man can enter into contact with another world, can live and act in another sphere, the sphere of spirits and magic. Thus a man may be transformed in such a way that in the normal sphere he remains a man in respect of his outward being, while in respect of his inward being he has become a man-animal. ... The Bakongo do not look upon dream as an illusion. Through his mfumu kutu man establishes contact with this other world. When he dies he enters wholly therein. . . .”

I can find nothing here symptomatic of an arrested mentality; on the contrary, I am sensible of a most audacious conception and one which we shall have to consider seriously, if not ratify in its entirety, when we come to treat of magic and the abnormal facts related thereto. This distinction of multiple souls, or more exactly of multiple faculties innate in the soul, with their recurrent periods of hypostasis and predominant importance, derives from an observation which in reality is very profound; we only have to remember the circumstances of dreams, the displacement of the dreamer in space, the “revelations” of dreams, and other established facts, such as those connected with telepathy.

It is now time to consider a sphere of native activity distinguished by a more profound, ample and precise perception of reality. It should be noted in the first place that this perception is undoubtedly promoted by senses and a physical and nervous organisation much more delicately receptive than ours and which, while atrophied or inoperative in white men, have been highly developed in the Negroes by the mere fact of their mode of life. A purely physiological example of this is to be found in their “sense of direction,” a faculty which has given rise to much discussion and which, if not infallible, is nevertheless one of their most real possessions. M. Van Gennep, in his Religious Myths and Legends, has collected the accounts of several observers who are convinced that many Negroes can find their way correctly without any outside aid; specially remarkable are those of Dr. Ouzilleau on the peoples of the Congo, of Junod (in part) on the Ronga, and, on the Thonga, of M. Chatelain, “who explored the regions
of the Limpopo estuary which were quite unfamiliar to his usual guide who, nevertheless, seemed to have no difficulty in finding his way, even at the darkest hour, through the bush.” M. Delafosse is confident, from what he witnessed in the Sudan, that “no factor is involved other than this pure sense of direction, for, in the bush, it is impossible to see more than five paces ahead and there are no visible landmarks to go by.” M. Leroy quotes the testimony of a friend of Dr. Rivet, in Madagascar, who took a Malagasy woman, bound her eyes with some heavy material, turned her round several times, made her walk about in various directions, etc., and then suddenly stopped her and asked her to point to the north: “she would indicate the direction without hesitation and was not once at fault.”

It is clear that we have here to deal with a physiological fact, a real sense, however inexplicable it may seem; yet why should we not allow a sense of space, on more or less the same conditions as the sense of colour?

Examples of this amazingly delicate nervous sensibility, both physiological and psychological, are common, among which may be quoted the following incident which occurred in Welle, noted by Father Basil Tanghe, and whose effect on M. Lévy-Brühl seems to have been fulminating: “On March 26th I was in the village of Ngamba . . . where a very young child had died early that morning. . . . It was not long before the whole story came out: the wife had called down a malediction on her husband and an evil anger had taken possession of the man’s body. The child fell sick in consequence and died in a very short time.” Lévy-Brühl finds an abundance of similar anecdotes among the Ba-Ila, Bergdama, Azande, Kikuyu, Bakota, etc. But why describe it as “an uncouth belief that the anger of the man has bewitched the child”? The extreme nervous sensibility of the Negroes, which in Europe would be looked on as diseased and which is never more intense than in the case of a child, betrays itself in this people’s extraordinary sensitiveness, in the literal sense of the term, both of body and soul, to the faintest stimuli.

In the same way it is impossible to overlook, in the domain of pure psychology, their unrivalled natural endowments, the normal consequence of faculties that are much more acute than ours and more sensitive to certain mysterious “vibrations.” These modes of cognition, at once comprehensive and precise, cannot fail to surprise the European with his prejudices in favour of slow and laboured mental processes. I have already referred to the well-known ability of the African to divine the thoughts and wishes of a stranger. This may be explained by the extreme rapidity of their cogitation, founded on the immediate apprehension and interpretation of the smallest detail. Here is another example, taken from everyday life, which shows the African’s profound familiarity with the inexhaustible resources of the mind: Calloway has the following passage on divination
among the Ama-Zulu: “When a precious object is mislaid, a search is immediately instituted. If it should not be found, the searcher inaugurates a process of inner divination by trying to sense the location of the object, in the course of which, though the object is nowhere to be seen, he becomes conscious of some inner directive urge which informs him that if he goes to a certain place he will find the object there. . . . Finally he sees the object, he sees himself going towards it, though he has not moved a step from his position; he sees it distinctly, so that there can be no further doubt in his mind. This vision is so vivid that it seems less that of the inward than of the physical eye actually seeing the object and the place where it is. Even though the place be hidden he hastens towards it as though possessed by some force intolerant of the least delay. If the process has been one of genuine divination the object literally appears to him, whereas if he has proceeded logically, reflecting that he has not been in such and such a place and that therefore the object must be elsewhere, he usually fails to find it.”

This is only one of many examples in support of the view that the Africans are familiar with logical methods of investigation as well as with their scope and limitations, and yet Lévy-Brühl seems to regard it as typical of their aversion for reasoning (sic). I cannot forbear from quoting, in this connection, M. Leroy’s excellent reply to M. Lévy-Brühl: “The behaviour of the Ama-Zulu on this occasion denotes neither a distrust of reasoning on their part nor yet a preference for the intuitive method, since they inaugurate, to use Calloway’s expression, the proceedings by reference to the ordinary means of investigation. When they supply the deficiencies of such means by a process of inward inspiration, analogous to that which in a dream might suddenly rise from the depths of involuntary memory, they are perfectly logical and give evidence of a surprising familiarity with the machinery of the subconscious, by rejecting such promptings of conscious memory as could have no result other than to impede them.”

Which carries us forward naturally into the domain of magic, taken in its broadest connotation. And here my first act must be to withdraw in favour of M. Leroy, who has explored this subject with the greatest precautions and must even be suspected of an excessive anxiety to spare the rational susceptibilities of his readers and colleagues, to whom such certified and now quasi-scientific phenomena as telepathy, to take only one example, still appear dubious or incredible.

But such western precaution only adds weight to his testimony, whose value is further enhanced by the number of original documents which it brings forward—for up till now there has been a real dearth of reliable documents on this subject.
"We must consider whether, over and above the phenomena explained wholly or in part by the savages themselves, there be not others incomprehensible to such representatives of civilization as ourselves. No doubt the question does not arise for M. Lévy-Brühl, who can scarcely fail to be amused by such an enquiry, so perfectly organized is the universe which he inhabits. Which does not mean that his attitude is scientifically adequate, for it may well be founded on an inverted 'mysticism,' the mysticism of the positivist..."

"From what fragmentary information I have been able to acquire from documents here and there as well as in the course of conversation with serious thinkers on the subject of divinatory faculties, I am inclined to think that many aspects of this question have scarcely been touched. M. Paul Heuzé, whose scepticism in these matters is well known, since he has devoted his energies to exposing the frauds of mediums, declares in his book *The Present State of Metaphysics:* ‘having studied the methods of the most celebrated seers, I am convinced of the reality of telepathy and second-sight, at least in so far as they deal with the past and present.’

"I do not think that a study of the methods of African seers, were that possible, would have caused the author to modify his opinion. But it is very doubtful whether it would be possible. Reputable sorcerers are not in the habit of giving sittings to fatuous Europeans. The observations, whether favourable or the reverse, of casual explorers on the exploits of native magicians are entirely worthless. Even among those who have lived for many years in the country and whose perfect mastery of the language constitutes a certificate of naturalization in the eyes of the natives, only very few have had direct experience of the sorcerer's arts.

"I must admit," writes Mgr. Le Roy, 'that more than once, on arriving at a village, I have received the assurance of the local sorcerer that he knew of my visit in advance and he was able to tell me where I had slept the previous night, what I had eaten, what I had done, etc...' At first one is inclined to see nothing unusual in such an occurrence, and assumes that it can be explained by coincidence or, better still, by the rapid means of communication peculiar to savage peoples and so often a source of astonishment to Europeans. This is naturally what first suggests itself to most people. But unfortunately the facts are not satisfied by such a comfortable explanation. For I am assured by one of Mgr. Le Roy’s companions that the details given by these sorcerers were so precise and of so intimate a nature that they could only be explained by an unusual aptitude for thought-reading.

"Father Trilles told me that one day, when on his way to a Fân village accompanied by his superior and by a native guide who was on his way home, they suddenly realised that they had forgotten to revictual at
the last halt and indulged in some banter at the expense of the native
whose corpulence augured well in the event of famine. It is essential to a
proper understanding of this anecdote to note that the Fân guide had
never had any previous contact with Europeans and did not know a word
of French. The travellers, as soon as they reached the village, presented
themselves to the chief, who, in the course of conversation, observed slyly:
‘I did not know you white men were cannibals!’ ‘What?’ ‘Yes! Did you not
say that if you found yourselves without food your guide would make you
a nice roast?’

“The missionaries were flabbergasted. They questioned the chief, who
replied that he had known of their coming, announced to him by his fa­
miliar spirit, that he had seen them approaching in his magic mirror, and
furthermore that he had listened to their conversations from which he was
able to quote the most remarkable details. Father Trilles learned later that
this chief was an initiate of the second degree in the Ngil confraternity,
which I shall have occasion to discuss in due course.

“The same missionary has recorded in the form of a simple anecdote
the following incident which he assured me to be authentic: ‘In the Fân
village of Okala, a sorcerer was holding a seance of divination. . . . Turn­
ing suddenly to me, who was close beside him, he demanded: “Well, white
man, will you not consult me?” The opportunity was tempting and I
resolved to put his powers to the test: “Friend,” I said, “the future mat­
ters little to me . . . but no doubt you can also see into the past?” “I can.”
“Then, tell me, where was I before I was a missionary, what were my
occupations?” . . . The Fân sorcerer smiled composedly, stirred up the
wood under the pot that was boiling before him, fanned the fire by blow­
ing on it three times from different quarters, and began by calling several
times on his familiar spirit which he invoked in a kind of incantation, a
great part of which I could not follow. Then, above the pot which was
simmering gently, he passed backwards and forwards a small mirror which
I had previously noticed in his hand; the vapour settled on it in a light
mist and then evaporated. . . . The sorcerer stared into it intently: “You
bore arms, you were a soldier, you did this and that. . . .” “For how many
years?” “For so many.” “And before that?” “You read books, you wrote: I
see a lot of other children studying like yourself.” “Do you see the build­
ing?” “I do, it is big, very big.” “Do you see my bed?” “Yes—there.”
“How many brothers and sisters have I?” “So many.” “How many chil­
dren have my sisters?” ALL HIS REPLIES WERE ABSOLUTELY COR-
RECT. “What is my mother doing now?” “She is weeping.” “What is
my father doing?” “Your father, he is in a big box under the ground, he
is dead.” “That, my friend, is where you are wrong, for I received a
letter from him less than a fortnight ago.” “He is dead.” A week later, at
the mission, my home mail brought the sad news that my father was dead!

"Nassau, who spent 40 years in Africa, admits that 'the native magician does and tells some wonderful things.'"

Junod is just as astonished by certain facts (which he scarcely dares accept as real on account of his prejudices as a European and a Christian): "none the less we do not deny that there may be some mysterious element, some unknown cause, hidden behind the strange phenomena of sorcery as practiced among the Ba-Ronga."

M. Lévy-Brühl himself admits, or rather is obliged to by the cumulative evidence of the various accounts he has studied, that The Phantasms of the Living of Myers "contains nothing likely to surprise the primitives." But for him their whole attitude is a mass of superstition and error. Such an opinion is justly criticised by M. Leroy: "It is assumed by him—and by many others—that the problem implicit in these facts has been solved once and for all. The facts themselves, in the sacred name of logic, are shamelessly abused. The Siamese monarch, who refused to believe that water could be solidified by cold, argued in much the same way. An ambassador from a northern clime had described to him the effects of winter in his country. Only a lunatic, thought the sovereign, could talk like this. And he expelled him forthwith from his dominions lest he should continue to propagate notions so subversive of reason."

He continues:

"Of all the preserves of savage thought privileged to afford M. Lévy-Brühl a good day's sport, that of magic is certainly the best stocked. To believe in incantations, in the dances of the healer or the maker of rain, to cower beneath the menace of sorcery or exploit it for one's own ends, to dread the attacks of the man-leopard or the sorcerer-crocodile, to subordinate one's life to the suggestions of dream and methodical divination—all this, we are told, is indeed the triumph of a 'pre-logicism proof against experience.' My contention is not that magic is exceptional among
uncivilised peoples, for it is common knowledge that the contrary is true, but that a faith in the powers of the sorcerer does not of necessity denote a mind intolerant of the fundamental laws of logic. . . . For the sorcerer, far from being a mere charlatan, does possess unquestionable powers, as will appear in due course. . . . Among the Fân peoples (Gaboon), studied by Father Trilles, the sorcerers are recruited in the following way: . . . when the child chosen by the sorcerer to be his successor has grown up and obtained some experience he must undergo his first initiation. . . . Now the Association of Pahouin (Fân) sorcerers comprises three orders of hierarchies: the NGIL, AKHOUNG, and EVODOU. Each of these orders is made up of ordinary members, titular sorcerers and high-sorcerers. Before it is possible to become a titular sorcerer of the Ngil, which is the inferior group, it is necessary to have been previously admitted ordinary member of the Akhoung, whose sorcerers in their turn are drawn from the ordinary members of the Evodou. At the head of the Evodou we find the supreme hierarchy of the three KOUN, high-sorcerers, whose function is to receive and transmit the orders of the Spirit, the unique and occult head of the society.

". . . After various preliminary tests of physical endurance and others which require the postulant to commit a crime . . . he is formally received into the association of the Ngil, though he has not yet been ordained Ngil, i.e. sorcerer. . . . Further ordeals are necessary before this can take place, ordeals of endurance and murder. . . . A Ngil convert assured Father Trilles that the Spirit was invariably present at these ceremonies. 'He is like a mist,' said the Ngil, speaking of the Spirit, 'a shining mist, in shape something like a man: his eyes are specially noticeable, or something bright which he has in their stead, something brighter than fire. He speaks and laughs with us, but if you try and touch him your hand meets with no resistance, only a sensation of cold, and he punishes you.'

". . . One of these endurance tests is similar to that which was a condition of ordinary election to the Ngil. . . . The final test is of a different order and requires, according to the belief of the initiate, the participation of the Spirit in person, who must make it clear by a 'prodigy' that he accepts the neophytes into his service. These shall be three in number. For a month beforehand they follow a special diet, confined to small quantities of highly spiced meat; for drink they are given the narcotic juice of the elun, a dangerous poison, which they take copiously diluted with water. . . . The sorcerer elected to receive the neophytes must submit to an even severer preparation. At the end of the month everything is made ready. . . . A stake about three metres long and forked at the top is driven into the ground at the centre of an open space before the huts. . . . In this fork as fulcrum is balanced a stout pole six or seven metres long and
secured there in such a way as to leave sufficient play for it to oscillate freely. *What follows is so curious and the results obtained by the sorcerer-medium so far in advance of the inoffensive parlour-tricks of a Eusapia Paladino, which played such havoc among European scientists, that I cannot do better than quote the description of the EYE-WITNESS:*

"When the sorcerers have assembled (this is one of the ceremonies to which strangers may be admitted) they form up in a line and begin to walk in a circle about the pole, clapping their hands and chanting their Hymn to the Spirit, while one of them beats a low monotonous rhythm in triple time on a tom-tom made entirely of wood. The neophytes are now brought into the enclosure: they are begrimed with smoke and ashes, emaciated, hollow-eyed, indescribably filthy, all forms of ablution having been prohibited during their month of preparation. . . . They take up their position astride one of the extremities of the pole, close together and clasping it firmly. It follows that the end of the pole is now resting on the ground. . . . The senior Ngil now comes forward and stands under the other extremity of the pole, which is necessarily five or six metres above the ground, and raises his hands, holding them together in the form of a cup (Fig. 1). After a more or less prolonged pause, the assistants imitating his gesture, without however interrupting their chant, the end of the pole is seen to quiver downwards towards his hands, then move more rapidly. At the other end of the pole the feet of the youths are now clear of the
ground; they cling on to the pole as best they can, for if they fall, as sometimes happens, it means that they are rejected by the Ngil.

"So far nothing very extraordinary has happened, for the youths may have pushed themselves off the ground with their feet and thus, whether deliberately or not, been accessory to a fraud... But little by little their end of the pole rises and the other falls steadily down towards the hands of the Ngil, but with so slow a motion as to be scarcely perceptible; when the pole is perfectly horizontal the movement is checked; at this moment the hands of the sorcerer are 50 centimetres from the pole, the feet of the youths at the other end some two metres from the ground, without any support (Fig. 2). The assistants resume their chant, encircle the pole three times, then halt. Then the sorcerer, his hands still raised, slowly bends his knee (Fig. 3), lowers himself gradually, sits down and finally stretches himself flat on the ground, his hands folded on his breast, the end of the pole being in sympathetic motion all this time; the youths are now suspended in an almost horizontal [sic] position (Fig. 4). They must on no account speak. Then the sorcerer rises, reversing his former movements, the pole starts to move back, and when it is again horizontal the assistants move off once more, the sorcerer slowly turns the palms of his hands towards the ground, and the youths astride the pole descend gradually to their starting-point. As soon as they are safely back on the ground the assistants set up an ear-splitting Yoyo. The test has succeeded.

"At this juncture the high-sorcerer, who apparently has been in a somnambulistic condition throughout, falls like a log. He is carried away and sprinkled with lustral water until he recovers his senses...

"... The final and decisive test is a ceremony in which the Spirit manifests his willingness to receive the candidate as a sorcerer in the Akhoung. In the course of this ordeal the candidate is seized with a species of hysterical attack: Akhoung a sha, Akhoung a bi ne oh! exclaim the assistants: Akhoung has come, Akhoung has taken him! Like certain ecstastics, the man seems rooted to the spot. The sorcerers, however great their combined strength, are unable to stir him. He gashes his body, but no blood flows. Then, in the magic mirror or a bowl of water, he gives a demonstration of those divinatory faculties which henceforward he is assumed to possess."

"Nothing is known of the initiation required to enter the Evodou and be ordained Koun (one of the three supreme sorcerers). The fact that Father Trilles, after 20 years spent among the Fân and in spite of a tenacious and methodical curiosity favoured by a perfect knowledge of the language, was unable to obtain the slightest information on certain initiations, must make us question the veracity of certain current accounts, just as we do the revelations of Spencer, Gillen and Howitt on the subject of Australian sorcery."
None of these facts are in any way exceptional. I chose the society of the Pahouin sorcerers simply because I was able to refer easily to the picturesque and precise description from the pen of a particularly well-informed observer.

Stress must be laid on the empirical justification of this belief in spirits current among savage peoples, where there is no scarcity of mediums quite as powerful as the most celebrated European mediums. The mediumistic performances in the humblest colony recall the spiritist séances of Paris, London and Berlin, with all the usual manifestations: rappings and other mysterious sounds, the displacement of objects in the absence of all apparent contact, the interrogation of spirits and their responses, the various phenomena of levitation, with this distinction in favour of the native operator, that instead of raising himself a few centimetres off the ground he is found after the seance on a tree-top, where he declares he was set down by the spirits. The same adventure, according to Mgr. Le Roy, is experienced by certain possessed Negresses who leave their huts at night and are discovered next morning bound with liana to the topmost branches of trees. In the same way Father Papetard, head of the African Missions in Nice, described to Dr. Imbert Goubeyre how 'he had seen on several occasions native sorcerers rise to a height of two or three feet above the ground and walk on the surface of the vegetation.'

The following anecdote, translated from the original Pahouin, is taken from M. Allier's Uncivilized Man and Ourselves, a book whose missionary tendency is greatly to be deplored. A Pahouin, Ekomi Nze, having fallen ill, was brought by his wife to the neighbouring tribe of the Akele. The Akele sorcerer demanded the blood of one of his kinsfolk. The sick man replied to the sorcerer: 'I have a son who has returned to his wife. Choose between the two of them.' The sorcerer retired to consider these two persons in a vision and saw that it was the woman who must die. He summoned to his aid the other spirits of the Akele (the spirits of the sleeping Akele; it is implicitly believed that a man may be seen in his home and sleep there, and yet be present elsewhere: note of M. Allier) "who declared war on the spot. They left their village and arrived in Akhogengol in the middle of the night. And all the Pahouins knew of it in Ngwel." (That is to say, in a state not altogether of dream, but closely akin to hallucination. When the Pahouin says that he has perceived something in Ngwel he means that he has perceived it in occult fashion, by means of a mysterious contact with the invisible world, by emerging from his personality and entering a world which is not the ordinary world, but none the less a very real one for him: note of M. Allier) "And all the Pahouins knew in Ngwel that the Akele spirits were there. These
took hold of the woman who woke up with a start and said to her husband: 'I have seen spirits and they threw a hunting-net about me.' The husband gave the alarm and roused the whole village. Owls were heard hooting in the night along the road which the Akele spirits had taken. Then the villagers became angry and it was the turn of their spirits to go to war and they drove away those of the Akele. And several Akele were killed that night by javelins hurled by the Pahouin spirits.” (Not real javelins: note of M. Allier: “Two of the Akele died. A third, wounded, asked a Pahouin some days later: ‘Did the woman whom we seized on die?’ ‘No,’ was the reply, ‘but she is very sick.’ ‘She will certainly die,’ said the Akele,’ and it is because of her that we too must die.’ The next day the woman was dead and the Akele also.”

M. Allier, being a European, a professor and a devout man, does not believe in African magic. According to him the sorcerer, whom he regards as a bloody-minded playboy, gave notice of this expedition, the Akele imagined that they went to attack the Pahouin in spirit, a process of auto-suggestion convinced the woman that she had been attacked, and the Pahouins also imagined that they had counter-attacked (sic). And the dead men? M. Allier is never at a loss. “Auto-suggestion,” he writes, “continues to operate and finally causes death.” In the light of what we know of the Negroes’ suggestibility—a characteristic which we shall have further occasion to consider—such an explanation appears typical of an author who, in his chapter dealing with magic, solicits his facts after the manner of Lévy-Brühl and all the others, and retains nothing of the testimony of Father Trilles as given above save the “horrors,” and appears to relish nothing so much as those passages dealing with murder. Thus all student readers of M. Allier will doubtless swallow his classification of the Akele-Pahouin affair under the head: “Terror and unbalanced mentality” (sic). But a reference in Father Trilles to that other Pahouin sorcerer who, while bodily at home in his hut, visited in spirit a meeting of sorcerers and furnished the whites with material proof of his exploit (see further on), inclines us to accept as real the episode which M. Allier finds so offensive, and to index it among our most reliable documents.

M. Lévy-Brühl is further shocked by the relations that exist between the sorcerers and certain animals, and he fails to see how this obstacle is to be circumvented; but at least he enjoys the satisfaction of having secured yet another item of proof to support his view of a primitive mind devoid of logic and common sense. “For otherwise how can we explain the belief of the savages that an animal can be possessed by the spirit of a sorcerer, and thus be the sorcerer himself and an animal at one and the same time?” It is obvious that such a contradictory proposition must be rejected by every European mind that respects its tried and trusty principles.
At this point we would be well advised to return to the excellent disquisition of M. Leroy: "Lévy-Bruhl is pleased to find an impregnable point of departure, if not an immediate classification, in certain phenomena which are at the root of the so-called 'collective representations' of the 'primitives' and whose origin he cannot explain. I am entirely of the learned author's opinion and I realise that we are here faced with a difficulty. But this difficulty resides not so much in the illogical processes of the savages as in the illogical phenomena which they observe and which they have no choice but to accept, even at the risk of jeopardising the principle of contradiction.

"Indeed there are many reliable European eye-witnesses who share the native belief in the relations, and relations of a very disquieting order, that exist between the African sorcerer and his 'nagual.' As it is scarcely possible that our author (Lévy-Bruhl) is in ignorance of these facts, we must only assume that he finds it more convenient to disregard them. . . . Here now is the description of how Father Trilles was initiated into the reality of the nagual and the intimacy in which he was one with his sorcerer: 'It was in 1896 that we encountered for the first time among the Fân a nagual and his proprietor. . . . At that time we were in a village called Ongek. We had been received by an old chief who had very kindly offered to share his dwelling with us, only reserving for himself a corner of the antechamber. . . . About two o'clock in the morning I was awakened by the rustling of dry leaves close to me. I drew aside my mosquito-net but there was nothing to be seen. I must have imagined it. I replaced the mosquito-net. . . . Hearing the same noise repeated I jumped out of bed and put on the light. Judge of my horror: an enormous black snake of the most dangerous kind was coiled motionless in the corner, its head reared, its eyes gleaming, hissing with fury, ready to strike. Instinctively I seized my rifle. . . . At the same moment the light went out, my weapon was struck violently upward and went off harmlessly in the air.

"'Don't fire, mini," cried the old man, who suddenly appeared beside me, for it was he who had struck up my rifle, "don't fire! If you kill my snake you kill me. Don't be afraid, the snake is my elanela."

". . . The chief fell on his knees beside the snake, threw his arms about it and strained it to his bosom. The animal submitted quietly, made no attempt to resist and showed no signs of either anger or fear. The old chief carried it off in his arms and laid it down beside him in the adjoining hut. . . . The whole affair was quite clear to the Fân men who were with the missionaries: the chief had planned to kill the Father through his elanela (the Fân nagual). . . . In spite of my insistence the old chief refused to give me any information, on the grounds that the decree of the elanela was absolutely binding. But I was on the right track. After much subse-
quent investigation I WAS ABLE TO ESTABLISH BEYOND ANY DOUBT AND ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THE EXISTENCE OF THE ELANELA.'

"... Father Buleon, who later became Bishop of Senegal, declares that he assisted at the nocturnal ceremony of the blood union between the sorcerer and his nagual. According to him, at a signal given by the sorcerer in charge of the initiation, the chosen animal emerges from the forest and submits quietly to the operation that must precede the mingling of blood. If the animal is a panther the ear is cut, if a serpent an incision is made just below the ear. The sorcerer is also marked in a certain way on the arms and genitals. As a result of this rite a veritable union is established between the sorcerer and the animal. One Negro, with whom the missionary claims to have been acquainted, was visited in the evening by a familiar vulture, another received into his hut, and even into his bed, a boa snake. Father Trilles declares that panthers have been killed bearing the mark of the elanela on the ear. The Negroes claim that the sorcerer has absolute power over his nagual, which obeys the summons not only of his voice but of his mind. ..."

Several other valuable testimonies remain to be quoted:

"Dr. Cureau, who collected all the available material bearing on the art of the Bantu sorcerers, writes: 'Missionaries have assured me that some of these "ngangas," both men and women, can produce phenomena of a metaphysic order. They described to me several incidents of bilocation and levitation. A curious incident was related to me by an eye-witness: One of these sorcerers applied a strip of red-hot iron to his leg without causing a burn. The eye-witness, by way of corroboration, caused the same strip of iron, under the same circumstances, to be brought in contact with his walking-stick. The wood was charred.'"

"But along with these psychic diversions we find practices of a more serious and impressive kind. These, however, are as a rule withdrawn from the light of day and their success depends for the most part on such a rigorous course of self-discipline that the specialists are not prepared to organise a séance at a moment's notice for the edification of the first stroller that happens along. When Father Trilles asked a sorcerer whether he could bring off the operation of the pole with a European taking the place of the neophytes he was informed shortly that they were not in the habit of treating such things as a form of recreation.

"Here are some of the phenomena which the same observer saw obtained by the Fân sorcerers, and whose details he noted on the spot. What I now propose to reproduce is the gist of these notes supplemented by oral explanations. To question their veracity would either be to ques-
tion the veracity of Father Trilles or else to suppose that he has been the victim of very singular hallucinations. I do not think we need consider the first hypothesis. As for the second, Father Trilles has confessed to me that the incredible nature of the facts witnessed by him had frequently made him wonder whether he was not under the influence of some infinitely powerful suggestion and that, on the off-chance of such being the case, he had resorted to various mental artifices, as for example fixing his mind on an arithmetical problem, etc. . . . (But, even in the unlikely event of hypnotisation, the value of the facts quoted remains intact, in so far as the hypnotic power of the sorcerers would justify empirically the belief of the Negroes.)

"'I have seen,' said Father Trilles, 'a black man take a stick at random and balance it on a forked branch driven into the ground; then, with his hand held about ten centimetres above one of the ends of this stick, make it follow his hand in a circular movement, like a compass-needle. In the course of this movement either the fork or the stick would be broken. I have seen this experiment carried out successfully with specially tough owala wood and a stick as thick as my wrist.' (Notice that in this case the hypnotism hypothesis is more or less exploded by the presence of the material fragments of wood that remain after the experiment has been completed.)

"Another sorcerer was brought a bowl full of water. By the mere imposition of his hands he caused the water to spout out of the bowl. The water, says an eye-witness, seemed to fly before his hand. When he stuck his finger into the water an empty space, conical in shape and about 20 centimetres in diameter, formed about it. The liquid was expelled with such violence that it foamed out on all sides. Another took a bowl full of water, raised it in his hands, then removed his hands gently from the sides of the bowl, which remained suspended in space. When a certain limit had been exceeded, the bowl fell.

". . . There are records of still more esoteric powers which are worthy of being described in some detail because they throw a curious light on certain ideas of the savages. For example, there is the belief already referred to that the soul 'quits' the body during dreams or merely during sleep, a notion which is apt to puzzle the sociologist. But the following facts make it clear that this belief in the exteriorisation of the spirit has a more concrete and tangible foundation than M. Lévy-Brühl supposes.

"Father Trilles, having had occasion to visit a mountain in Gaboon known as the Nsas, famous among the Negroes as a meeting-place of sorcerers, took it into his head to carve his initials on one of the large stones of the cairn. Several years later, in a village some 30 days' march from Nsas, a sorcerer mentioned to him that he had to attend on the
following night a meeting to be held on that same mountain. Father Trilles, remembering his visit to the Nsas, saw a chance of showing up the sorcerer as an impostor: ‘If you go to the Nsas, you can tell me to-morrow whether you noticed anything remarkable about a large stone which is situated in such and such a place.’ The next day the sorcerer declared that he had been to the Nsas, as he had said he would, and he gave a very exact description of the place which he swore—though there is no need to believe him—that he had never visited before. Finally, and this is the interesting point, he was able to outline on the sand a more or less faithful reproduction of the design in which Father Trilles had commemorated his visit. The initials were correctly placed.

“The same observer was enabled on another occasion to study at close hand the mechanism of these curious displacements. On his inviting a Fân native to accompany him on a fishing excursion he was surprised to meet with a refusal: ‘Why can you not come?’ ‘I shall be absent to-morrow.’ ‘Where shall you be?’ ‘At X.’ (Distant about four-days’ march.) ‘But you cannot be at X to-morrow, there is not time.’ ‘I have my means.’ ‘Very well, if you go to X you must pass through Aleva. Will you do a message for me?’ ‘Willingly.’ ‘Then look in on Esab ’Eva who lives in the fourth hut on the right along the bank and ask him to bring me the box of cartridges and the powder that I left with him. But, now that I come to think of it, you might perhaps bring them yourself?’ ‘That is impossible.’ Pressed by questions the native finally avowed that he was attending a meeting of a special nature and using means of transport that did not permit of his encumbering himself with baggage, either going or returning.

“Father Trilles, all the more curious as his scepticism regarding the Fân sorcerers had been considerably shaken by the Nsas episode, obtained permission to attend the native in his hut while he was making ready for this mysterious expedition. . . . Having smeared his whole body with some concoction, made a fire of special sorts of wood and chanted, as he stepped round the fire, various incantations to the spirits of the air and the particular guardian spirits of his confraternity, the sorcerer fell in a cataleptic fit, his eyes turned up, his skin without feeling, his limbs rigid. . . .

“. . . Until two o’clock the following day, when the sorcerer came out of his torpor, the observer did not stir from his post. When the man was fully awake he proffered some details relating to the meeting which, according to his own account, he had duly attended. ‘As for your message,’ he said, ‘it is performed. Esab ’Eva has been told. He must have started out this morning and now is on his way with your cartridges and powder.’ Three days later Esab ’Eva arrived in the village bringing what the missionary required. He was not aware of anything strange about the message which he had received. Someone had stopped outside his hut about
nine o’clock in the evening and shouted to him that the Father wanted him to bring without delay the bundle which he had left behind.”

Let us examine all this a little more closely. I am well aware of the significance of other rites not yet mentioned, such as the collective ceremonies in honour of the ancestral spirits, the tribal initiation of the youths when they reach puberty and the mode of initiation into certain secret societies. These are characterised in all cases by an intense effort to establish communication between the individual and the world about him, the mysterious forces which it hides, and in other cases by an attempt to develop the most fundamental and complex emotions of his being, both sensual and social, until he is absorbed by them body and soul.

In the first case, at all events, it would be absurd to speak of cult and religion. Animism, and especially the belief in spirits (the spirits of ancestors or other dead, these are the spirits alleged to intervene in certain magic practices), seems mere humbug to the European. I lay no claim to an immediate solution of this problem. But it is essential to state that if certain facts on record do not necessarily imply astonishing mediumistic powers on the part of the sorcerer, there are others which would seem to entail the presence or intervention of the spirits invoked by the sorcerer. I do however insist that these “spirits” are of a purely material nature (material in the sense that a living person is material) and that they have nothing in common with a Christian spook nor with any purely spiritual and incomprehensible emanation whatsoever. This is the view of the Negroes themselves, who say that the spirits merely go on living; they have no access to any “divine” sphere whatsoever, they are not always assumed to be more powerful than when they were alive, they have no existence outside the terrestrial world. It is as though this spirit, formed and formed entirely in the body, were, in virtue of its material nature, less corruptible than the body which decays immediately it dies, and were endowed with a further term of life, of varying duration and indeterminate conditions, until the time came for it in its turn to disintegrate. It is interesting to note that the word used by the Dschagga (East African, recorded by Br. Gutman) to designate the most ancient spirits—walenge means literally: the men in little bits. “They are spoken of as being entirely dead, disappeared, their life over.”

Thus the spirits remain in the terrestrial sphere until their final “disintegration”—and that is why they have nothing to say on the subject of the so-called destiny of man, nor yet on the subject of God and similar frivolities; they simply enjoy on certain occasions a greater freedom of movement and a singular faculty of intervention, specially when they can count on the collaboration of a sorcerer or of a medium with whom they
have established communication. I recommend the problem thus posed to your consideration.

Most significant, for example, is the astonishment of M. Lévy-Brühl at the reply made to Captain Rattray by an Ashanti priest (sic), "who," he writes, "had not the slightest conception of even a rudimentary form of hierarchy among the secondary spirits and divinities, nor of their subordination to a supreme deity, etc. . . ." Obviously not—and simply because these spirits are in no way divine. It has been proved so often that there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as a "black religion" that even Lévy-Brühl is obliged to concede this point—and at what length!—in various passages of his latest book, *Nature and the Supernatural in the Primitive Mentality.* But—and it is a big but—his interpretation of these spirits as the "mystical and mythic creations" of the Negroes' imagination, analogous for example to the creations of Greek and Roman mythology, obliges him—necessarily—to speak of animism as though it were a kind of religion or mythology. Quries of good paper are spoiled in this way.

I find further corroboration in the assertion of R.P. Fridolin Bosch, writing of the Bayangwesi (*Anthropos,* 1925): "The black man does not address himself to spirits as to gods, beings whose nature is other than his own." And again: "Scholars and missionaries are in the habit of discriminating between evil spirits, spirits of the forests, mountains, wells, lakes, etc., and the ancestral spirits. After many years of the most minute research I have been unable to find any native sensible of such a distinction or indeed of the existence of such a vague or demiurgic spirit; their concern is exclusively with the ancestral spirits, who are venerated on those sites with which they were formerly associated."

A short parenthesis: I admit that magic contains its share of error, most notable in a number of nugatory practices, ineffectual charms, amulets, etc., and that the unquestionable reality of certain "abnormal" facts often results in entirely erroneous forms of belief, and more so than ever now that the

*Didinga girls arriving at a dance, N. Uganda.* Photo by courtesy of J.H. Driberg.
white men have interfered. It seems to me that for the present it could scarcely be otherwise in such a domain. But this does not invalidate in any way the reality of what we have considered.

The natural-supernatural antithesis does not exist. These apparently contradictory terms are in reality closely united. A thing that is, a spirit, is not supernatural. We should remember the phrase of Van Wing: “In virtue of this element (mfumu kutu) man can enter into contact with another world, can live and act in another sphere, the sphere of magic and spirits. . . .” (It does not follow, nor is it said, that he can always do so.) . . . “Nor is dream an illusion, for it enables man to enter into contact with that world; when he dies he enters wholly therein, and the dead and quick are one. . . .” Here I am reminded of that New Guinea legend according to which there was once a time when the quick and the dead were not separated but lived together on familiar terms.

A last remark before we close this subject: “another point,” writes M. Leroy, “which invites consideration is the success of certain magic practices due to the suggestibility of the savages and the hypnotic powers of the sorcerers. We have seen, apropos of the sense of direction, how the Negroes react to certain stimuli which take no effect on our organisms. Now there is little doubt that this nervous sensibility responds to many other influences as well. The savage is frequently of an excitability that would seem diseased in a civilised society. The effect of his imagination on the progress of a disease, for example, is very powerful. This disposition explains their faith in certain medicines” (and, I would like to add, justifies them) “as well as in certain malignant spells, and even confers on these a real efficaciousness. The assertion that invultuation owes its efficaciousness to the ‘collective representations’ of the tribes where it is practised may be partly true, but this is no argument against its potency . . . having been made possible in the first place by a very special form of nervous organization. . . . The suggestibility of certain savage races can only be paralleled among neurotic subjects.

“. . . On the other hand, the sorcerers are able to effect cures. And here again we meet with the most extravagant distortion of fact. Has it not been established by the experiments of Liébault and many others that the various beliefs concerned with the carrying of disease are founded in experience? If this psychiatrist was able to cure a patient of an intermittent fever by making him carry a bag alleged to contain his disorder and then throw it into the river, is there any reason why ‘primitives’ should not get rid of their headaches by similar methods?”

M. Leroy proceeds to exemplify this in the practices of the lamas who succeed in checking fevers by symbolical representations on a grand scale, of a particularly clamorous and terrifying description, which throw
the patient into a state of excessive excitement "by the twofold action, perturbative and substitutive, of hypnotic therapeusis, applied with great relevance and no less success."

Similar procedure is well known to be common throughout Africa. Witness the following passage from Weeks's *Anthropological Notes on the Bangala*: "Many ngangas (medicine-men and sorcerers) make constant use of the drum and the chant. This music exercises a great influence on the patients. . . . They are moreover calmed by the sound of the drum and rendered docile in the hands of the nganga, who is thereby enabled to establish his diagnosis more easily." The reality and extreme importance of this practice emerge even more strikingly from a very fine description in Basden's *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, which gives an idea of the marvelous power of music over the senses and emotions of the Negro. He describes how the more we listen to native music, the more we become conscious of its vital power. It awakes the most intimate chords of the human being and stirs the most primitive instincts. It demands the entire attention of the executant and takes such complete possession of the individual that, while it lasts, his spirit is almost sundered from his body. Under the influence of this music and the dance that accompanies it men and women are sometimes so carried away that they become oblivious of their surroundings and in some cases even lose consciousness. . . . It is a wild music, the instruments are barbarous. But it is instinct in the highest degree with the essential spirit of music. Basden witnessed these dances and testifies to the extraordinary completeness with which the dancers lose consciousness of their surroundings. Even if one stands immediately in front of them they do not seem to recognize you. Their only reply, if one speaks to them, is a fixed stare. It is only very gradually that they return to their normal state.

In this last section we propose to consider the purely material and experimental technique of Negro peoples, as it appears in their industries and in their practical medicine. We shall be left with no doubts as to their acquaintance with the discursive faculties of the intelligence and their application, nor as to the absurdity of the current belief that their ingenuity in this domain is more a question of luck than of skill. This final section, therefore, will have the advantage of being in some measure a dialectical antithesis of all that has gone before respecting those psychological faculties of divination and clairvoyance that the white man looks on as abnormal and various other "magic" faculties of action and therapeusis. The Negroes are equally skilled in availing themselves of these two orders of mental activity which are contradictory only up to a certain point, and then only in appearance, both being real in the same sense—
though the white man may refuse to admit that two even partially contradictory elements can co-exist or constitute a valid medium of existence, notwithstanding the tolerably comfortable sustenance which the Negroes contrive to extract from them, thanks to their familiarity with the respective exigencies of the two faculties.

The discovery and application of technical processes are quite as experimental and scientific among the Negroes as among the whites, in so far as they are controlled in both cases by the same intellectual principles. Lévy-Brühl seriously puts forward the proposition that their hand (sic) is guided by “a kind of intuition” and that their skill “differs in no way from that of a billiard champion.” This is no better than deliberate misrepresentation. In the shaping of wood, weapons and pirogues, in the weaving of stuffs, etc., the critical faculty must be constantly on the alert to modify certain details, estimate the toughness or pliability of the material employed, etc., in a word to produce an object that may be utilised. In the same way, experimental logic must control the invention of certain objects, such as those rotary missile knives furnished with several blades, to be found in Kassai, and which represent one of the most cleverly conceived and deadly weapons in existence, dreaded above all others by the Belgian colonial troops, the rotation making it impossible to foresee where they will fall and the disposition of the blades reducing any inefficacy to a minimum. A whole collection of these weapons is on view in the museums of Tervueren and Antwerp, of every degree of ingenuity, some more highly perfected than others, which proves that the Negroes have patiently considered and observed their deathly potentialities, the important details of construction, the necessary curvatures, etc., and have constantly modified them in accordance. This is merely one of many examples. Others are to be found in their weaving industry, their gorgeous and complicated tapestries in a kind of velvet made from vegetable matter. Even a moderately exact acquaintance with Negro craftsmanship and with the splendour of so many of its products makes us wonder, and rightly, on what grounds its value has been questioned.

To return to the art of iron-casting among the black people: here we find every sign of a strictly positive and experimental attitude of mind. It is scarcely necessary to refer to the precision and technical excellence of the Benin bronzes. Father Wickaert, writing in *Anthropos*, has described in the greatest detail how iron is manufactured in Ufipa (Tanganyka). The strictest experimental methods obtain. The blast-furnace, 3 metres high, is constructed with great care of chosen clay usually reinforced with braces of seasoned wood and ribbed round with heavy staves bound together. The thickness of the outer wall and the vents are calculated with the utmost precision. Blast-pipes are fitted to the vents and a supply of
lignite prepared, all in the most methodical and rational manner. Then the iron-master loads the furnace, the ore being placed between two equal layers of lignite. He lights the furnace from above, so that the ore is roasted without being melted. After several days, when the furnace has cooled down, the slag and blocks of iron are taken out together. "It rarely happens for a cast to fail, for the iron-master knows his ore better than might be supposed." Then follows the casting proper: the ore is placed in a central oven, surrounded on all sides with coal, the furnace lit underneath in order to provide a violent draught and the fire stoked unremittingly. After a certain time a compact block of iron is obtained.

I am aware that certain magic rites play a part in this operation, magic substances being buried under the furnace, etc. But of all their industries the casting of metals is the one traditionally most permeated with magic practices, this because of the immediate importance it assumed at the time of its discovery. There are moreover many other industries (weaving, etc.) of a strictly technical nature. It may be added that this iron industry is to be found in many other parts of Africa. The Sudanese blast-furnaces, which are slightly smaller, are celebrated.

Even in Kassai, in the heart of the Congo, the iron industry is of an importance and a perfection, as well as an artistic distinction, that are truly remarkable. It has even been asserted by several present-day authorities that the Africans were the first to introduce the art of iron-casting among the peoples of the Mediterranean basin.

From the many industrial processes whose strictly experimental and scientific character is indisputable, I select as typical the following mentioned in a note by M. Leroy writing of the manufacture of salt, that rare and precious commodity, in Upper Ubangi: "Certain special aquatic plants, found in the swamps, are first of all dried and incinerated. The ashes, which are very rich in sulphates, nitrates and chlorides, are spread out on a filter-bed of sand in an earthenware vessel with a perforated bottom. The vessel is filled up with water which percolates gradually as a
saturated solution of nitrates, sulphates and chlorides, all impurities being caught in the filter-bed. Nothing remains but to evaporate this liquid and collect the dry residue, which is greyish in colour (Dr. Huot). Similar laboratory processes are frequently employed in the preparation of certain well-known poisons.”

That the Negro mentality is capable of scientific method and experimental observation appears no less clearly in the practical conduct of their hunting expeditions. M. Lévy-Brühl would have us believe that for the Negroes, as for all primitive peoples, the capital agents of such expeditions are incantations and futile magic formulae. This is mere nonsense. The skill required to construct weapons of the most meticulous precision, their profound knowledge of poisons, expose the absurdity of such a thesis. We have already shown that the concoction of poisons, a most delicate operation as a rule, is of an exclusively practical order.

It should be remembered, in this connection, that it is the custom of the Pygmies to dip their arrows in a most virulent poison: this is an extract of onaï, of the strychnine family, and kills a fully-grown ape in a few seconds, according to my informant, M. Leroy, who proceeds to describe how the Fân specialists, not to mention many others, “prepare and make use of certain poisonous concoctions capable of abolishing at will the faculties of memory and physical movement, or of causing idiocy, madness or death. Nassau tells of a certain powder used in Lagos of so poisonous a nature that it took violent effect in the mere act of contact.”

The medical practices of the Negroes are no less interesting. We have already seen how the methods of the magicians, whether intended to kill or cure, are productive of tangible results. Their acquaintance, moreover, with medicinal simples and herbs is highly developed. Several cases are on record of a medicine man having cured fever with a plant which was no other than the quinquina. M. Leroy rightly reminds us that “the Negilles are particularly renowned in the art of healing and that they are frequently retained by tribal chiefs in this capacity. ‘Just as the white man,’ remarked a certain eminent African scholar to Mgr. Le Roy, ‘knows all that is to be known of the sea, so the A-Koa know all the secrets of the ground and the forest.’ Whoever considers the medical habits (of the ‘primitives’) without any motive of constructing or consolidating a system, can scarcely fail to be impressed by the efficaciousness of their remedies and by their intelligent adaptation of hygiene to climate. This empirical tendency, however it may be criticised, may be ascribed to those prohibitions which as a rule are grouped indiscriminately under the head of taboos and which have given rise to discussion whose extravagance is only equalled by its superficiality.”

M. Delafosse, in his study of the Agni quoted at length by M. Leroy,
speaking of this intelligent adaptation to climate, refers to their constant
concern with cleanliness as a preventive against diseases of the skin and to
their habit "of smearing themselves lightly after a bath with oil or butter,
which prevents the perspiratory acid from causing that erosion of the skin
known as 'Bedouin itch.'"

The Agni can even claim to have invented an ancient preventive
treatment for dysentery: berries of allspice are ground up into a fine pow­
der and placed in a kind of gourd or clyster-pipe perforated at both ends.
The elongated end is then inserted into the anus, while an assistant blows
with all his might down the other end, until the astringent powder of
allspice permeates the system. "We know of no more efficacious measure
against dysentery," writes M. Delafosse, and children are taught to use it
at a very early age.

It is obvious that this method of contending with dysentery, by pump­
ing a carefully chosen and proportioned astringent powder into the intesti­
tine, is the contrivance of a perfectly "rational" and observant mind. M.
Leroy has also a very opportune reference to "abortive practices which
are very widespread and whose efficaciousness is based on a realistic ob­
servation of natural phenomena. The means employed are generally drugs,
cold baths, constrictions, massages, transfixion of the foetus." He further
quotes a very interesting process in use among the Togo Negroes "and
which does honour to their spirit of observation. Having observed that
venomous serpents are immune from their own venom, they came to the
conclusion that there must be some substance in the organism of these
animals which neutralised the effects of the poison, and they tried to ex­
tract and use it for their own purposes. It is not known how this principle
of immunity is extracted or whether it is really efficacious. In any case,
this experiment in prophylaxis seemed to us deserving of mention.

"It may be added," concludes M. Leroy, "that when Lévy-Brühl sets
out to support his thesis of primitive mentality with the alleged reluctance
(of the 'primitives') to consult European doctors, he is treading on very
dangerous ground indeed. . . . In the first place this reluctance is not
general. . . . And have they any reason to be confident? Scarcely, if we
consider how the whites inflicted their services in the first instance. If the
European medicine-man had been in the advance-guard of our civilisation,
instead of having been preceded by every kind of adventurer, convict,
slaver and gold-digger, the savages might have been more ready to adopt
their prescriptions. The equipment of the white man on his first appear­
ance in unexplored territory was more often the musket and the carronade
than the medicine chest. Finally, when his mere presence was found inad­
quate to promote mortality among the natives, a programme of me­
thodical destruction was inaugurated. The most notable contributions of
the white man’s presence and hygiene have been influenza, measles and smallpox.

“There are further reasons for their reluctance (duly hushed up, like those already given, by M. Lévy-Brühl): a love of liberty, the incomprehensibility of a treatment that had to be taken on trust, and the brutality of the colonial practitioner. There seems to me to be ample justification here for the reluctance which M. Lévy-Brühl considers so illogical. I append the following description furnished by a Mo-Souto native: ‘in the hospital your clothes are taken away from you and you never see them again. You are starved, and whenever someone dies his corpse is taken to a special house to be cut up into bits.’ The Ba-Suto work the thing out in precisely the same way as our own poor people at home. Their conclusion is as sound as the premises of their own senses. Take the case of the Pahouin, mentioned by Father Trilles, who failed to appreciate the economy of the white doctor’s formula when he gave him his medicine: ‘Swallow that, you dirty nigger!’ Are we to hold this Pahouin guilty of pre-logicism?”

But M. Leroy omits to make it clear that he would indeed be “held guilty” by the majority of white men if he dared to protest, and invoked as yet another example of Negro stupidity and fastidiousness.

There is no “conclusion” to be drawn from all this. The reader must decide for himself on the merits of all these elements which, for all their apparent heterogeneity, are in fact bound together in a continuous reality. It should, however, be noted that a gradual process of transformation is at work. Massacres on a grand scale, the systematic persecution of sorcerers, “fetishists” and secret societies, the antagonism of officials and missionaries to the most important traditions, to initiative and social ceremonies of all kinds, to the native beliefs and mode of living, the compulsory labour in the service of the white man with its attendant consequences of a similar order, the removal, imprisonment or execution of numerous chiefs who constituted a rallying-point for these traditions and this mode of life—such things cannot fail to give rise to very grave results.

Thus many magic practices (in the fullest sense of that epithet) have been sundered from their vital, real, and, I make bold to say, experimental principle, and tend more and more towards an excess of merely mechanical rites and practices and empty or superstitious formulae. Many observers have also been struck by the increasing apathy and mental torpor of the native resulting from forced labour. This is yet another factor to hasten the transformation of magic and all its derivatives into mere ritual and a formulary which is gradually being drained of all reality.

Finally, the introduction of scraps of western thought, confined for the most part to technical education and religious absurdities, has created
here and there, over and above the wretched and corrupt black petty bourgeoisie, certain individuals permeated with the lowest and most incoherent ideas of white bourgeois society, ideas which, as was inevitable, have only been very imperfectly assimilated. A new order of material needs has been created by the white traffic in rubbishy commodities of all kinds, which results in preoccupations of a nature hitherto unknown and heightens the general confusion.

Everything depends on how long this European exploitation, with its pernicious educational propaganda, will last. We may be sure that a rather different form of society will eventually emerge, for there is no going back once a new order of habits and needs has been established. But for the moment it is impossible to define this new equilibrium of Negro peoples and the future coalition of those various elements which I have endeavoured to describe.
A Negro Empire: Belgium

by E. STIERS

1. A NEGRO EMPIRE: BELGIUM

Belgium, Negro state? This has the air of a joke.

But...! Of the 23,000,000 subjects of King Albert only 8,000,000 are white. The remaining 15,000,000 belong to the black race.

This is because the little kingdom of Belgium has been an important colonial power since the year 1908 and mistress of the greater part of Central Africa.

The story of this conquest is soon told: Stanley, having explored the Congo basin in 1877, entered the following year into relations with a group of capitalists, “The Upper Congo Research Committee,” headed by Leopold II, King of the Belgians.

In 1882 the Research Committee suffered a metamorphosis, emerged as “The Congo International Association,” declared itself sovereign lord of the Congo basin and invited the great powers to recognise its rights. The U.S.A. were the first, in 1884, to acknowledge the governmental authority of the Association. When the tender mercies of the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) apportioned Africa among the nations of Europe the Association was accorded the right to constitute itself as an independent Congo state under the sovereignty of Leopold II, whose Highness proceeded to absorb, on behalf of itself and its collaborators, the entire ivory and rubber traffic of Equatorial Africa.

Much blood was duly shed. The competition of the Arabs established between the Lualaba and Lake Tanganyka being found irksome, a war, all dressed up as an anti-slave-trade crusade, was inaugurated in 1892 and culminated, after three years, in the expulsion of these rivals.

About 75,000 blacks perished in this war, but the ivory route, which used to pass through Ujiji and Zanzibar, was deflected, via Leopoldville and the Atlantic, to its future terminus, Antwerp.

2. THE TRUE MASTERS OF THE CONGO

In theory the Congo belongs to little Belgium, in fact to an industrial feudality—mining, railway and commercial societies, controlled for the most part by the “General Society of Belgium” Bank.
The most powerful of these societies are: the “Upper Katanga Mining Union,” which exploits the copper, tin and radium mines of that province; the “Forminière,” which controls the Kasai diamondfields; the “Railway and Mining Company of the Great Lakes,” which dominates the region between the Lualaba and the Tanganyka; the “Kasai Company,” formerly supreme in this and the Kwango district, where rubber was the chief attraction, but constrained for the past few years to go halves on the swag with the “Congo Oils” of the Lever Brethren.

In Urundi the “Runini Company,” under the chair-comradeship of the socialist ex-minister, Anseele, controls the cotton, coffee and cocoa plantations.

Each one of these societies has absolute authority within the limits of its allotment, whose inhabitants are assimilated to its natural advantages in the great work of exploitation.

The function of little Belgium is to maintain an army to protect the societies when the natives revolt against excessive exploitation and to stump up subsidies when they are in difficulties.

3. The Missions

Next to the great societies the Missions—in particular the Roman Catholic Missions—may be considered as the most powerful body in the Congo.

In the Congo alone (i.e. exclusive of Ruanda-Urundi) there are 2,308 missionaries; of these 1,623 are Roman Catholic.

These latter are strongly organised and exercise authority over no fewer than 662,000 baptised blacks and 417,000 catechumens. They enjoy endless privileges, as for example that of free transport for the supplies of food and material necessary to their establishments. They have numerous schools of their own and are also in charge of the instruction in the technical training colleges, which for the most part are merely camouflaged factories exempt from taxation and served by unpaid labour. Thus they are in a position to swamp all private enterprise. Their leading establishments may be compared, in point of power and wealth, with the great abbeys of mediaeval Europe.

The missionaries, in return for these privileges, serve the government well and faithfully in the twofold capacity of educationalists and political agents. It was their active assistance that prepared the coup d'état of November 1931, which overthrew Musinga, King of Ruanda, and made the way straight for the Belgian exploitation of that fertile region. For we find them, as far back as 1928, working up the young men against the king and his advisers, so that when they found themselves a majority in the Council of Notables, the old recalcitrant chiefs having died off or been suppressed, they did not scruple to proclaim the downfall of Musinga
and the accession in his stead of Ludahigwa, another credit to missionary instruction.

Always well informed by their parishioners as to what is going on in native circles, the "monpères" are of invaluable assistance to the colonial police, which, by way of return, hounds down their native "competitors," fetishists and Kibangist partisans. Thus in 1921-1922 the police occupied the Kibangist villages of Midamba and there—like Louis XIV's dragoons in the Cevennes—neglected no form of excess that might persuade the natives to think better of their faith.

4. A Dying Race

The bulk of the native population of Belgian Congo is of Bantu stock, the only exceptions being the Azandes of Welle, the Watutai of Kivu and Ruanda-Urundi, and a few tribes of Pygmies.

Stanley, at the time of his celebrated expeditions, estimated this population at about 30,000,000 inhabitants. This was perhaps a slightly exaggerated estimate, but it is certain that the Congo at that time was far more densely populated than it is today. An official census shows a present population of 8,803,422 (not counting about 5,000,000 in Ruanda-Urundi).

Taking into account those who evaded the census, a fair maximum estimate of the population of the Congo at the present time would be 10,000,000, plus Ruanda-Urundi. It is a far cry from this to Stanley's figure. The discrepancy is explained by the pitiless exploitation of the blacks in the days of the Free State (cf. the reports of the Congo Reform Association and the Annals of the Belgian Parliament), the frequent famines (notably during the Great War in those regions where every article of food had been requisitioned for the troops and all the able-bodied men, and even women, mobilised for the transport of these provisions and other war material), and above all the profound disorganisation of native life as a result of industrialisation.

5. The Black Proletariat

I referred to the industrialisation of the Congo. In this country, exempt from Europeans as late as 1877 or thereabouts, there were already, at the eve of the present economic crisis, nearly half a million industrial workers. (To be exact: 409,665 in 1932; consequently rather more before that year of unemployment.)

The majority are used in the mines: the tin and copper mines, the Katanga coal mines, the Kasai diamond mines, the Kilo-Moto gold mines; others are employed in the various mills, building-yards and factories grouped about the great centres; others along the railway, on board ship and in the timberworks along the river; others on large plantations as paid labourers.
6. SIGNING ON

How have these hundreds of thousands of men been induced to abandon their traditional occupation of primitive agriculture and lay their services at the disposal of modern industry?

The majority are recruited by the companies' hired crimps, who receive so much per head. These so-called "contractors" sidle up to the native chiefs and promise them presents—gramophones, bikes and old uniforms plastered with braid—in return for their connivance. The chief separates the desired quota from his subjects, usually from among the household slaves. The contractor now takes each one by the hand and urges the thumb into contact with paper; this is known as signing a contract in due form; whereupon he departs with his herd of unfortunates who are still wondering what is happening to them. All deserters are apprehended on a beautiful administrative warrant and punished for breach of contract. Government officials are particularly susceptible to this vocation of recruiting officer.

But the Government knows of an even surer way to jockey the blacks into its service; that is, a tax to be paid in cash. The native can pick his fancy between working to earn the amount of the tax and going to gaol for not paying it.

The workers employed by the big societies are segregated in artificial villages—prisoners' camps in all but name. Their salary is paid partly in cash and partly in rations. The composition and quality of the rations are laid down in an act whose clauses, in the absence of effective supervision, are not infrequently set aside by the societies in the obliging persons of their white agents, who find it convenient to pocket part of the money intended for the purchase of provisions.

Some societies, anxious to encourage the formation of a stable proletariat in the vicinity of their installations, accord certain privileges to whatever workmen consent to bring their wives and children. These "sacrifices" are abundantly rewarded by the additional foot-pounds furnished by the women, who require no salary over and above that paid to their husbands. In spite of these endeavours, the population of these workers' camps remains almost entirely male.

The workers in the big centres such as Leopoldville and Elisabethville may be said to enjoy a rather larger measure of independence. Also wages as a rule are better. In 1931 a Unitra artisan in Leopoldville was earning from 60 to 100 francs a month, without his keep; and a few highly qualified workmen were earning as much as 500 to 600 francs. And a clerk, if he had a knowledge of book-keeping and a few European languages, might receive anything from 1,000 to 1,200 francs.

There is no colour-line in Belgian Congo in the sense that there is in
South Africa—at least no colour-line among workers. All professions, even the most highly specialised, are open to the blacks. This simply means that there is no white working population established in the country. It is naturally to the advantage of the societies to employ blacks at 500 francs a month rather than white men who would demand from 4,000 to 5,000 francs for the same specialised type of work and their noble fairs from Europe into the bargain.

7. DEPRESSION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The slump first began to make itself felt in the Congo in 1930. Since then the plight of the native proletariat has gone from bad to worse. Bankruptcy is becoming more and more frequent, the big societies are cutting down their staffs to the irreducible minimum and some important concerns have suspended work altogether. Consequently there is much unemployment. In Leopoldville at the present time there are from 5,000 to 6,000 out of work and thousands more have left the town to return to their villages. In 1931 there were 6,000 unemployed in Coquilhatville and 4,500 in Bumba. The immediate figures are not known, but are certainly higher than those of a year ago. The same conditions prevail in Elisabethville, Stanleyville, Usumbura, etc. The misery of these black unemployed, who were never able to afford to put by part of their wretched wages, is appalling. Those who were employed near their villages have returned to their families, but there are many who now find themselves stranded 1,000 miles and more from their tribes and dare not undertake so long a journey.

Here is a letter addressed to a Belgian newspaper by a Negro worker in Leopoldville. In its artless style it expresses the plight of these unfortunate better than a hundred pages of description and statistics:

“We read with much pleasure the news you put in your paper and it is correct. To-day there is not much work, the societies have stopped working. Many Negroes are out of work and starving. The police are still here. There are now in Leopoldville 11 Superintendents of police. Nearly every week there is a round-up in the village at four o’clock in the morning with 100 black policemen. Then whoever is found out of a job and has not paid his tax is put into the prison. The women also. The prisoners are made work, they are chained together two by two and fed once a day. The boy who won’t work any more for the white man, because the white man clouts him, is put into the prison. The white man can sack you whenever he likes. The boys get paid between 50 and 200 francs.

“You know now it is impossible to recruit in any district of the Congo. Once there were large tribes that lived very well, everything was governed by the native code and things were prosperous. Now the tribes are de-
stroyed, the men had to go along with the white man, the women, the old men, the little children stayed behind. Now the white men have forbidden any more recruiting. We must wait till the children are grown up. But now, as here, many men are out of a job. They came a long way with the recruiter in a boat. I know workers who have been out of a job for 4 months and could not pay their tax, but these men are only asking to be given work or allowed back to their village—but the Superintendent puts them into the prison, and in this way he has to work for the state and gets no pay.”

Is not this a tragic picture? The original system of dealing with unemployment by gaoling the unemployed reads like a satirical comment on the policeman’s mentality. And yet it is quite regular in the Congo. M. Tchoffen, Minister for Colonies, fresh home from his African tour of inspection, admits once more that such is the case.

At Usumbura, in Urundi, an even more ingenious solution of unemployment has been devised by the colonial officials. When work on the Kivu railway was abandoned early in 1932, thousands of disbanded workmen poured into the town. These have now been expelled by the authorities, handed over to the feudal Watuni chiefs and forbidden to move outside certain prescribed limits. So it happens that the ancient Barundi institution of serfdom, instead of disappearing with the contact of European civilisation, is not only upheld, but positively aggravated, in so far as the Urundi “serfs” were never bound to the soil. This is the intolerable serfdom that native citizens and freedmen are now compelled to endure, in the name of the civilisation that chivvied them out of their villages to swell the proletariat and then flung them aside, unable to feed them any longer.

In all the chief towns, what is more, the natives’ liberty of movement has been greatly reduced ever since the slump. The European quarters are practically closed to them at night. Every native found outside the Negro quarter after sundown is arrested on the spot.

These repressive measures are motivated by the dread of rebellion. And with good cause, for the discontent of these proletarianised and famished Negroes is very great and manifests itself with increasing frequency in assaults on the persons of white men, invariably visited with the cruellest reprisals. Alongside with this there is the revival of the Kibangist movement, while the workers, whose resentment up till now could only flicker up in such spasmodic strikes as that of the Boma boys in 1913, the Matadi dockers in 1920, the Lower Congo railroaders in 1923, the stokers on board the *Leopoldville* in 1930, are now beginning to organise themselves, in spite of pitiless repressive measures.

8. THE NATIVES OF THE BUSH

But the young native proletariat, considerable though it is, is only a minute
fraction of the population of this immense country. Over and above the half-million industrial workers, employed and unemployed, there are in the Congo alone 9,000,000 natives and in Banga-Ruanda and Ba-Rundi nearly 5,000,000, living by agriculture, hunting and stock-breeding. What is the situation of this mass that constitutes the bulk of the Central African peoples?

Its primitive social condition has not made it immune from the calamities of these last years. This is thanks to the Congo Free State and its successor, Belgian Congo, which totally destroyed the old political framework. The powerful confederations of the north (Azande) and south (Baluba, Batetela) were dislocated and their chiefs assassinated (Gongo-Lutete, chief of the Batetelas, in 1895) or deported (Kasongo-Nyembo, emperor (Mulopwe) of the Balubas, in 1916). Only Ruanda and Urundi have preserved a certain cohesion. And now the more compact of these two feudal kingdoms, Ruanda, has been decapitated by the coup d'état of November 1931, machinated by the missionaries, when the old and refractory king Musinga was overthrown and replaced by Ludahigwa, a product of the missions.

This gives an idea of the independence enjoyed by the natives for all their primitive customs. Subjects of the Belgian state, they pay with their taxes and sometimes, as in 1914–1918, with their lives, for the consequences of Belgian policy. Whether as purveyors or customers of the colonial companies they are involved, forcibly as often as not, in the machinery of the world's capitalistic productivity, whose crises, in all their cruelty, are felt in the remotest villages of the bush.

9. MILITARY SERVITUDE

The Belgian colonial army is recruited from volunteers and conscripts. The following is the method of conscription: when the number of conscripts required has been determined the governor issues an order to the various regional authorities to furnish him with so many men. The administration transmits this order to the native chiefs, who select a number of household slaves and personal enemies and send them to the point of assembly. Here they are inspected by the administrator attended by a doctor, the unfit rejected and the remainder sent forward to the chief town. As it generally happens that the number of recruits exceeds the quota specified by the military authorities, it now becomes necessary to draw lots. Whereupon the more fortunate return home, while the others enter upon their seven years of right-about turning and sloping arms.

As for voluntary enlistment—here is an authentic anecdote that gives some idea of the extent of that euphemism.

One day in 1924 or 1925 a long line of blacks, chained together and escorted by a native sergeant and a few soldiers, walked into a post near
Coquilhatville where a white friend of mine was stationed. “What prisoners are these?” he asked the sergeant. “Prisoners!” cried the sergeant, unfeignedly distressed, “them no prisoners, them volunteers!”

The black communities are furthermore required to supply porters for the troops and visiting officials. During the Great War whole tribes, men and women, were requisitioned in this way for the transport of food and munitions. The statistical Year-book for 1922 gave the number of black porters who perished in this work as 15,650 in one year. This is certainly an underestimate.

The blacks are also subjected, in the interests of the public weal, to fatigue duty—construction of shelters, upkeep of roads, etc. Officially this work is remunerated, but we know blacks from Welle who were paid 10 francs for two years’ work.

10. Compulsory Labour

But what galls the Congo natives most sorely is not the yoke of the state, but that of the private companies, protected and abetted by the state’s agents. We have already seen how the villages are stripped of their best men for the recruitment of labour. But even those who survive are not exempt from tribute to the overlords of the Congo. The chief measure of coercion is the money tax, compelling the native to sell either his person or the yield from his harvest to produce the necessary sum. But there is also a system, particularly in the neighbourhood of the cotton works, of hard—I beg your pardon—compulsory labour, which I understand is a very different thing.

In the eastern province the term is one of five days a month, but with the tax to be paid these five days last three or four months before the native can claim to have earned as little as 200 francs. In Welle every native is obliged to cultivate 2 1/2 acres of cotton. This forced crop is bought by the society concessionary of the region at such prices as it, being the sole purchaser, sees fit to stipulate, i.e. the lowest possible.

Various officials, notably M. Orts and Colonel Bertrand, have protested in vain in recent years against this system. Their reports were naturally smothered by the press ring, and the nationalist rags took them violently to task.

Here is the text of a report whose existence was only divulged by M. Vandervelde’s interpellation in the Belgian Parliament (June 1932), the work of M. Rychmans appointed to enquire into the conditions obtaining in the Kasai and Kwango districts:

“In the palm concessions nearly all the able-bodied workers are employed by European concerns; a large number of cutters and common labourers is recruited on the outskirts of these grants. Such recruitment has been made possible in the past only by administrative pressure that
can only be described as excessive. Admittedly, no formal administrative order was issued for such and such a contingent of workers to be supplied, but the invitation was so very pressing as to be the equivalent of an order as far as the natives were concerned—and it was only because they looked upon it as an order that they deferred to it. To-day this pressure is less intense, chiefly because the natives have grown so accustomed to these levies that they accept them in the same way as they do taxation. This is what is called automatic relief. So many men enlist in order that a corresponding number may be set free to return home.”

This account is confirmed, in even more vigorous terms, by a doctor, Dr. Raingeard:

“... To sum up: in 1930, precisely as in 1927, the whole population (of Kwango) is more or less reduced to the slavery of hard labour. In March 1930 I saw three labourers from the village of Vanga dragged forcibly at the end of a rope to work in the factory at Dunda. They had not turned up in the morning because they were suffering from headache. These three labourers were in the second stages of sleeping-sickness.

“Even after elimination of those in the comatose and skeletal stages it may be taken that the entire male population of the region, infirm as well as hale, was forcibly employed by the company, and the work of the men automatically entails that of the women.

“Such methods of civilisation, or rather of exploitation, have bequeathed to future generations a type of black whose main characteristics are an invincible apathy, a horror of work and a loathing of the white man.”

11. THE 1931 RISINGS

It seemed only a question of weeks before such methods would end with a revolution, when the already sufficiently wretched conditions of the slaves of the Kasai company and the Belgian Congo Oils was suddenly aggraved by the slump and a rise in taxation. In 1931, when the catastrophic fall in prices—a drop of almost 75 per cent.—compelled the blacks to work harder than ever in order to earn enough money to meet the tax, this was everywhere increased with a view to replenishing the public funds drained by the subsidies paid to those companies that were in difficulties. From the 30 francs of prosperous times the tax had risen to 40 francs in 1931. As well as this the supplementary tax had increased over the same period by 75 francs. In the district of Lake Leopold II the quantity of fruit that had to be gathered and sold to meet the tax rose from 325 lbs. to 3,700 lbs. in 1931. And as most of the local factories had closed down, the fruit had to be brought to the Kasai markets, representing a journey of several hundred kilometres.

As early as May 1931 great uneasiness began to make itself felt in
Kwango. The administrator of Kibwitt, M. Weechix, hearing that the local Bapendes were gathering in the village of Kinenriele, hastened thither on May 29 with a company of soldiers and opened fire on the assembly, killing more than 10 men. (These facts were revealed by the Communist deputy Jacquemotte at a sitting of the Chamber of Representatives, June 21, 1932.) This massacre was the signal for a formidable insurrection. The factories and relay shelters were set on fire. M. Ballot, a Belgian official, was assassinated and the troops rushed from Bandundu were driven back.

In August, while a large military force was engaged in butchering as many of the Kwango rebels as were still above ground, the tribes of Lukenie (Lake Leopold II district) rose in their turn and routed a punitive column near Dekese. The struggle dragged on into December 1931.

The exact number of natives slaughtered in the course of appalling reprisals will never be known. In Kilamba, the village where M. Ballot met his death, 100 natives were penned in a shed and exterminated with machine-guns. Prisoners were flogged to death (according to the confidential report divulged by M. Vandervelde on the occasion of his interpellation, June 21, 1932) and several thousands perished in the epidemic of dysentery that broke out among the native populations which had fled to the malarial forests.

The insurrection might be stamped out, but it had not been altogether in vain. The excess tax was remitted, and in many districts the normal rate was actually reduced. As it was to be feared that the natives in the cotton districts, unable to find a market for their forced crops, would follow the example of their Kwango brethren, the government, in a panic of solicitude, went forth into the areas hit hardest by the slump and bought up the harvest. Further serious risings, thanks to these measures, were averted in 1932. But it seems only a question of time, when we consider the growing depression and the pigheaded officials forcing the natives to grow cotton that nobody wants, before a new crisis is reached. Already there has been a serious collision in the Kivu between European planters and black workers, who seem to consider that they have sweated in vacuo long enough. In the whole eastern province revolt is brewing. In Ruanda the partisans of the ex-king and the followers of Dungutse, the rebel leader of 1927, are agitating already. Much bloodshed is bound to ensue in these unfortunate regions. But with the support of the oppressed masses in every part of the world, we have reason to hope that good will come of this fresh torment and an increment of liberty and peace for the martyred peoples of Central Africa.

A NEGRO EMPIRE: BELGIUM

1. Name given the missionaries in Belgian Congo.
French Imperialism at Work in Madagascar

by Georges Citerne and Francis Jourdain

1. French Capitalism in Madagascar: Negro Workers Assassinated and their Supporters Imprisoned

From all the French colonies comes the same cry, a cry for help from the natives crouching under the dictatorship of capitalism. For these Negro workers are no more exempt than their fellows in other countries from the bloody cruelties of repression as inflicted by the representatives of our imperialism.

A certain Malagasy, by name Rapaoly, who had been imprisoned for “failure to pay his taxes,” disappeared on the eve of his release. He had walked into the parlour of our administrator Puccinelli. He did not come out of it alive. Puccinelli, whose methods with regard to the natives are those of a prize-fighter, cannot explain the disappearance of the prisoner. The crime stinks. And it is only one of many committed by the tools of French imperialism in Madagascar.

The Aurore Malgache and the Antananarivo section of the S.R.I. (Secours Rouge International) took such steps as were necessary to expose the guilty parties and bring them to book. But French capitalism has a way of shielding its hired agents. Puccinelli is not even indicted, and an odious attempt is being made to substitute an unfortunate half-idiot for the real Rapaoly and to compel the widow, by means of sequestration, threats and brutalities, to acknowledge the impostor.

The bourgeoisie is capable of any and every abomination in its determination to cover up these crimes; not only is the criminal still at liberty, but Paul Dussac and Fantoni, two courageous journalists on the staff of the Aurore Malgache, have actually been sentenced and imprisoned for insisting that the instigators of this scandalous murder should be exposed and brought to account. But the affair has created a stir that continues to spread and is gradually assuming far more serious proportions than at one time seemed likely, as a result of yet another crime perpetrated by an administrator at the expense of a native.
THE RAKOTOMAVO-DAUPHIN AFFAIR

On July 4 the District Inspector, Dauphin, returning from his rounds, met a group of carters at a point on the Arivonimamo road about ten kilometres from Antananarivo. He got out of his car and asked to see Rakotomavo’s pass. When this was not immediately forthcoming, on account of its being securely fastened in the pocket of its owner, Dauphin, furious at being kept waiting, had recourse to our time-honoured colonial procedure and kicked Rakotomavo with such violence in the belly as to stretch that unfortunate native lifeless on the spot. Another carter, Rakotofootsy, received a violent blow on his right arm from a walking-stick and was so totally disabled that he had to be searched for his pass by Dauphin’s military chauffeur.

Dauphin, however, far from being appeased by these acts of murderous assault, contrived to have the other native carters punished with all due administrative rites and ceremonies. For this, as for the Rapaoloy episode, the Malagasies will insist on satisfaction. Already their campaign of agitation and propaganda is in full swing and juridical action is being organised.

Georges Citerne

2. ARBITRARY AND ILLEGAL PRACTICE IN MADAGASCAR

A French magistrate, M. Pierre Enim, speaks somewhere of the “complicated, illogical and incomprehensible status of the autochthonous peoples of Madagascar”: a polite way of denouncing the scandals of arbitrary practice to which the Malagasies have to submit.

When authority, in a spasm of pudency, sets out to veil such practice, it is in the habit of invoking either the Malagasy Code of 1881 (automatically abrogated by the act of annexation and by the Bill of August 6, 1896, making French law applicable to Madagascar) or the French Code, from which are taken certain laws now abrogated. What does not vary is an interpretation of text of such extravagance as to have flabbergasted on one occasion no less an expert than the minister Maginot himself, who had no choice but to declare null the finding of Governor Ollivier assimilating to “outrage on public decency,” “all writings liable to injure the respect due to French authority.” A notable instance of such manipulation was the exploitation of the law against pornography to secure a sentence of two years’ imprisonment on Dr. Ravohangy, whose only offence was to have protested against a decree of Governor Ollivier.

Now it is the turn of the Malagasy section of the S.R.I. to be threatened by this incredible administrative irresponsibility. Here are the facts:

The sentence passed on Dussac for having dared to expose the scan-
dal of the false Rapaoly came into effect on August 5 last (1932). Once rid of this obstructer, it was proposed to proceed comfortably to an elimination of others of his kidney. Punctually therefore on August 4 a plague of locusts descended on the country. A number of cases are investigated forthwith. More investigations on the 19th, more again on the 20th. With what object? With the object of compromising all directors and adherents of this section of the S.R.I. These constabulary exploits were distinguished by all the brutalities associated with the vocation of civiliser, and at the same time by an incoherence that gave rise to some highly comic effects. For example, five hours consecrated to ransacking the papers of a certain Rafazy Abraham, member of the Second International and definitely hostile to the S.R.I., yielded . . . a letter from Citizen Paul Faure and another from Citizen Marius Moutet!!! (Liberal-Socialist leaders).

But to ask us to believe that such gentlemen are seriously viewed as dangerous revolutionaries is carrying the joke too far. This is also the opinion, developed in his paper, the Réveil de Madagascar, of the indignant victim of this raid, "particularly gratuitous," adds the ingenuous Rafazy Abraham, "when inflicted on the representative of a party whose support is a condition of the present Government's subsistence," and he makes bold to hope that "the Socialist Party will take up the matter."

Noble candour!

As a result of these investigations, not all so rich in farcical situations, 400 natives are being indicted under Article 291 of the Penal Code.

Now this article was abrogated on July 1, 1901.

Hence it is in virtue of a law made void in France that a French colony is made to suffer "preventive repression," to repeat the charming euphemism with which a Minister for Colonies once favoured the House (January 30, 1930).

What have all these investigations divulged? Nothing. What is the charge against these workers? There is none, unless they be charged with membership of an association that is legally constituted but proletarian in spirit and whose first concern is to relieve the victims of the capitalistic régime.

Francis Jourdain,
Member of the League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression.
Appendix 1

Negro: An Anthology

CONTENTS

AMERICA

I

I, Too. Poem. Langston Hughes 3
A Brief Outline of Negro History in the U.S. Edward A. Johnson, LL.B. 4
Slave Risings and Race Riots. Wendell P. Dabney 9
Nat Turner, Revolutionist. From The Liberator 13
Three Great Negro Women. Gladis Berry Robinson 15
Proclamation of Emancipation. Abraham Lincoln, annotated 20
Frederick Douglass—James W. Ford. From The Liberator 22

II


III

Negro Folklore in North Carolina. Anthony J. Buttitta 62

IV

Harlem Reviewed. Nancy Cunard 67
Some Negro Slang 75
Malicious Lies magnifying the Truth. Taylor Gordon 78
America’s Changing Color Line. Heba Jannath 83
Three Thousand Miles on a Dime. Pauli Murray 90
The Colored Girls of Passenack. William Carlos Williams 93

V

Racial Integrity. Arthur A. Schomburg 97
The Growth of Negro Literature. V.F. Calverton 101
Some Aspects of the Negro in Contemporary Literature. John Frederick Matheus 106
Sterling Brown: the New Negro Folk-Poet. Alain J. Locke 111

VI

The Pathology of Race Prejudice. E. Franklin Frazier 116
Race Relations. Jesse S. Dockett 119
Fictions in Race Relations. Rayford W. Logan 122
Education and the Negro. Morris E. Orgel 125
Negro Education in the South. James W. Ivy 127
The Negro Student in the U.S.A. Gabriel Carritt 138
A Southern Boy. Ben Jamin Smith 140
A Letter to Ezra Pound 141
A Note on Contempo and Langston Hughes 141
A Reactionary Negro Organisation. Nancy Cunard 142
The Negro and the Supreme Court. Walter White 152
Negro Newspapers in New York City. William E. Clark 158
The Future of the Negro Youth in Business. George X. Callender 159
Why the American Government does not protect its Colored Citizens. Edward A. Johnson, LL.B. 160
The Negro in the present appalling Trade Depression. From Opportunity 161

VII

Things I Remember. W.S. Connolly, B.A. 167
The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana. Dr. Sarah Frances Chenault 170
Where Color Prejudice is not a Creed. Hitting Back. Henry W. Crowder 172
Lynching, Terrorisation, Injustice. Rev. Clarence Wimley 176
Furies of Florida. William Pickens 178
Facts from the American Press 181
The American Moron and the American of Sense. Nancy Cunard 197

VIII

Freed but not Free. D.E. Tobias 201
Men still sold for $50 in the South. Wilson Jefferson 208
Hoover and the Mississippi Flood. Albert Deutsch and Hy Kraviv 209
Flashes from Georgia Chain Gangs. From Georgia Nigger. John L. Spivak 210
The Wickersham Report 223

IX

The Negro National Oppression and Social Antagonisms. B.D. Amis 225
Marxism and the American Negro. Will Herberg 229
A Word as to Uncle Tom. Michael Gold 233
Blacks turn Red. Eugene Gordon 236
Afro-American Editor is for Communists. From The Liberator. 241

X

Scottsboro—and other Scottsboros. Nancy Cunard 243
Lynching in the Quiet Manner. Josephine Herbst 269
Speech on the Scottsboro Case. Theodore Dreiser 271

XI

Over 6,000,000 Negroes can vote in the U.S. 273
The Black Belt 274
Who are the Friends of the Negro People? (Speech on the Nomination of James W. Ford). C.A. Hathaway 275
James W. Ford accepts. From the New York Daily Worker 279
Sketch of the Life of James W. Ford. From The Negro Worker 279
Communism and the Negro. James W. Ford 281

NEGRO STARS

The Best Negro Jazz Orchestras. Robert Goffin 291
Louis Armstrong. Poem. Ernst Moerman 295
Notes on the Musical and Theatrical Negro Stars. Floyd Snelson 297
The Negro Theatre—A Dodo Bird. Ralph Matthews 312
Rose McClendon. Robert Lewis 317
Florence Mills. U.S. Thompson 320
The Dancing of Harlem. John Banting 322
An Example of Success in Harlem 323
Josephine Baker 329
Looking Back on my Life. John C. Payne 331
A Negro Film Union—Why Not? Kenneth MacPherson 335
The Record of a Negro Boxer. Bob Scanlon 339
From Jack Taylor 343

MUSIC

AMERICA

The Negro on the Spiral. George Antheil 346
The Musical Genius of the American Negro. Clarence Cameron White 351
Negro Creative Musicians. Edward G. Perry 356
Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals. Zora Neale Hurston 359
Cotton Fields, and Musical Score. Harry Miller 362
Plantation Singing. From the Afro-American 363
John Henry. Guy B. Johnson, Ph.D. 363
Negro Songs of Protest. Lawrence Gellert 366
A Note on Blues. Ildefonso Pereda Valdés 377
Hot Jazz. Robert Goffin 378
Lamentation Nègre. Musical Score. Vance Lowry 380
Way Down South where the Blues began. Musical Score. W.C. Handy 382
Creed. Musical Score (words by Walter Lowenfels). Henry Crowder 386
Steel Drivin' Sam. Musical Score. Porter Grainger 388
Different Appreciations of Jules Bledsoe 389

CREOLE

Garde Piti Mulet Là. Musical Score. Creole Folk Song 394
Folk Music of the Creoles. Maud Cuney Hare 396

WEST INDIES

Negro Music in Porto Rico. Maud Cuney Hare 400
The Biguine of the French Antilles. Madiana 401
Jamaica Negro Musical Instruments. Frank Cundall 402
Jamaica Negro “Digging Sings.” Helen H. Roberts 404
Carry Me Half A Hoe. Musical Score 405
Tanda, Haytian Méringue. Musical Score. Henri Etienne 406
Canto de Xangó. Musical Score 406
The Song of Xangó. Mario de Andrade 407

AFRICA

‘Cause I dey Laugh. Musical Score. Harry Quashie 410
African Songs of the Chewa Tribe in British East Africa. George Herzog 412
Four Melodies of Chewa Songs. Musical Score 413
Three Zulu Songs and Musical Score. Reuben T. Caluza 415
Nine West and East African Songs. Musical Score. Transcribed by E. Kohn 416
Bakongo Songs (Congo). Musical Score. Sent by George Antheil 419

POETRY

By NEGRO POETS

Close your Eyes. Arna Bontemps 423
Depression. The Poet. Jonathan Brooks 423
The Black Draftee from Dixie. Carrie W. Clifford 425
From the Dark Tower. For a Lady I Know. Incident. Countee Cullen 425
That other Golgotha. For a Certain Ph.D. I Know. Thomas F. Fletcher 425
Thus speaks Africa. To Prometheus. Walter E. Hawkins 426
Appoggiatura. Donald J. Hayes 426
Florida Road Workers. House in the World. To certain Negro Leaders. Always the Same. Goodbye Christ. Langston Hughes 427

WEST INDIAN POETRY

Cane. Black Woman. Nicholas Guillén 428
The Conquerors. Until Yesterday. Regina Pedroso 428
When the Tom-Tom beats. Jacques Roumain 429
Old Black Men. Celibacy. Georgia D. Johnson 429

POETRY BY WHITE POETS ON NEGRO THEMES

Southern Sheriff. Nancy Cunard 429
Credico Hittin’ de Grit. Jean de Journette 430
Miss Sal’s Monologue. Alfred Kreymborg 431
Night out of Harlem. Norman MacLeod 432
The Scorpion. William Plomer 432
The Black Crow. Carl Rakosi 432
Elevator Men. Florence Ungar 432
Song of the Washboard. Ildefonso P. Valdés 433
Poem. Louis Zukofsky 433
APPENDIX 1

WEST INDIES and SOUTH AMERICA

JAMAICA
Jamaica, the Negro Island. Nancy Cunard 437
Labour Conditions in Jamaica. A.A. Colebrooke 450
Obeah, the Fetishism of the British West Indies. H. de los Dias 452
West Indian Negro Proverbs. Frank Cundall 455

HAYTI
Summary of the History of Hayti. Jenner Bastien 459
Hayti under the Yankee Heel. Jean L. Barau 465
Hayti. Grace Hutchins 468
People without Shoes. Langston Hughes 468
A Note on Haytian Culture. Ludovic M. Lacombe 470
The King of Gonaives. Jacques Boulanger 471

CUBA
Racial Prejudice in Cuba. Gustave E. Urrutia 473
The Situation of the Negro in Cuba. M. Pérez-Medina 478
Negro Workers starving in Cuba. Charles Alexander 483

BARBADOS
The Negro in Barbados. Gordon O. Bell 484

TRINIDAD
Folklore in Trinidad. Olga Comma 486

GRENADA
“White Trash” in the Antilles. H. Gordon Andrews 488
Influences which determine the Future of the West Indian. Wilfred A. Redhead 493

VIRGIN ISLANDS
Virgin Island Negroes. Hazel Ballance Eadie 494
Virgin Islands. From the Afro-American 496

GUADELOUPE
The Child in Guadeloupe. E. Flavia-Leopold 497

BRITISH GUIANA
The Negro and his Descendants in British Guiana, Part I. Hildred Britton 500
The Negro and his Descendants in British Guiana, Part II. A.A. Thorne, M.A. 505

BRAZIL
Black and White in Brazil. Benjamin Péret 510
The Negroes in Brazil. Ildefonso P. Valdés 514
A Letter on the Social Role of the Half-Caste. V. Latorre-Bara 517
NEGRO (1934) : CONTENTS

URUGUAY

Proclamation of Emancipation in Uruguay 518
The Negro Race in Uruguay. Elemo Cabral 518
Rituals and “Candombes.” Marcellino Bottaro 519

EUROPE

Slavery Papers. Edgell Rickword 524
Missionaries in Africa. Newton A. Rowe 535
Pushkin and Peter the Great’s Negro. Harold Acton 539
A Glimpse at some of the Obstacles to Negro Progress. Holman Jameson 544
There is no “White Superiority.” Anthony Butts 548
Colour Bar. Nancy Custard 551
Race Prejudice in England. From The Negro Worker 554
Colour Bar Notoriety in Great Britain. Prince A. Ademola 556
Manifestation of British Empire Spirit 557
From the European Press 559
Sambo without Tears. Georges Sadoul 570
Murderous Humanitarianism. The Surrealist Group 574
Races and Nations. Léon Pierre-Quint 575

AFRICA

I

Ethnographical Map of Negro Africa. Raymond Michelet 584
African Empires and Civilisations. Raymond Michelet 585
African Exploration. Arthur A. Schomburg 603
The Solidarity of the African Race. Prince A. Ademola, B.A. 609
Ethiopia Today. George Padmore 612
A Short Historical Survey of Madagascar. J.J. Rabearivelo 618
A Note on Leo Frobenius. Ezra Pound 623
Negro Influence in Morocco. Professor E. Westermarck 624
The Best Friend in Dahomey. Professor M. Herskovits 627
Pre-British Gold Coast. Tete Kwezi Orgle 634
Klao Date, Kroo Proverbs. Dr. Thorgues Sie 637
Ewe Proverbs and Riddles. Alaga and Zagbet. R. C. Nathaniels 637
Hausa Writing 642
Baronga Proverbs 644
A Letter about Arusha. Norman Douglas 645
“Clicking” in the Zulu Tongue. A.V. Lester 647
A Zulu Wedding. E. Kohn 648
From an African Notebook. William Plomer 649
The Young Race of the Veld. Beatrice Hastings 651

II

NEGRO SCULPTURE AND ETHNOLOGY

37 Plates of West African Sculpture 656
The Term “Negro Art” is essentially a non-African Concept. Ladislas Szeci 679
Bambara Sculpture. Carl Kjersmeier 682
The Ancient Bronzes of Black Africa. Charles Ratton 684
Eight Drawings of Congo Masks from Tervuren Museum. Raymond Michelet 696

47 Plates of Congo Sculpture 706
Some Museums containing African Art 732
Magic and Initiation in the Ubanghi-Shari. B.P. Feuilloley 734
“Primitive” Life and Mentality. Raymond Michelet 739

III

White-Manning in West Africa. T.K. Utchay 762
The kind of Christianity we have in Akan and Akwapi Districts. H. Kwei Oku 769
Britain and the Africans. Ladipo Odunsi 772
Extracts from “The Anglo-Fanti.” Kofina Sekyi 774
Liberia: Slave or Free? Ben N. Azikiwe 780
Black Civilisation and White. George S. Schuyler 784
Under King Leopold’s Domination 788
Experience of a Black Man with the Missionaries 790
Letter from Nigeria 791
Letter from a Worker in South Africa. From The Negro Worker 792
Letter on South Africa. Ivan Navarro 793
Extracts from a Pamphlet circulating in Belgian Congo 794
A Negro Empire: Belgium. E. Stiers 795
French Imperialism at Work in Madagascar. G. Citerne and F. Jourdain 801
Kenya. Johnstone Kenyatta 803
Pass Laws in South Africa. George Padmore 807
How Britain governs the Blacks. George Padmore 809
White Man’s Justice in Africa. George Padmore 813
Imperialist Terror in South Africa. E.T. Mofutsanyana 818
The White Man is killing Africa. Raymond Michelet 822

It will be noted that some only of the articles carry the author’s photograph. These are the writings of Negroes or of those of Negro descent.

EDITOR’S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My thanks and appreciation are particularly due to my chief collaborator, Raymond Michelet, who worked with me during the two years of collecting and editing this Anthology. And to Edgell Rickword, who facilitated and greatly aided in the work of production and proof-reading. N.C.
Appendix 2
Contributors to NEGRO Whose Work Beckett Translated

Jenner Bastien: Haitian historian who owned a pawn shop in Cap-Haitien.


André Breton (1896–1966): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Edited Littérature, official organ of dadaist movement; founder and leader of surrealist movement who wrote its most important manifestoes and essays, including The Surrealist Manifesto (1924); member, Communist Party 1927–35. Major works include Nadja, a poetic novel based on his own love affair, Les vases communicants, and Surrealism and Painting; co-authored Immaculate Conception with Eluard. Beckett translated several of his poems for This Quarter’s surrealist number (September 1932), which Breton guest edited. Despised Cunard’s rich, fashionable world.

Roger Caillois (1913–78): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Wrote novels, scientific essays, and autobiography as if they comprised a single genre. His numerous books include Dream and Human Societies; Man, Play, and Games; Man and the Sacred; The Mask of Medusa; Pontius Pilate; The Necessity of the Mind; and The Writing of Stones. Published “Guerre et Démocratie” in La Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française (February 1953) along with Beckett’s “Mahood,” an excerpt from The Unnamable. Elected member of Académie Française.

Rene Char (1907–88): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Wrote surrealist poetry (e.g., Le Marteau sans maitre, 1934; The Hammer without a Master, set to music by Pierre Boulez, 1954); coauthored Ralentir travaux with Breton and Eluard. A Resistance leader during World War II, he wrote antiwar poetry (e.g., Seuls demeurent, 1945) and prose (e.g., Feuillets d’Hypnos, 1946; Leaves of Hypnos).

Georges Citerne: French writer.

René Crevel (1900–35): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Helped Breton found surrealist movement; joined French Communist Party in 1934. Most significant surrealist writer whose books (ten in all) were primarily fiction, including Are You Crazy?; Babylon (illustrated by Max Ernst;
translated by Kay Boyle); *Detours; Difficult Death* (foreword by Salvador Dali); *My Body and Me*; and *Putting My Foot in It*. Also wrote *Mind against Reason* (an important surrealist document) and books on Dali and Klee. After failing to reconcile Communism and surrealism, committed suicide in the manner depicted in *Detours*. Beckett translated his “Everyone Thinks Himself Phoenix . . .” for *This Quarter’s* surrealist number (September 1932).

Paul Eluard (1895–1952): Identified in *Negro* as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Founder (along with Breton and others) and leading surrealist poet. Beckett translated a dozen of his poems for *This Quarter’s* surrealist number (September 1932); the translated poems were reprinted in *Thorns of Thunder: Selected Poems by Paul Eluard* (1936). Coauthored *Immaculate Conception, Notes sur la poésie*, and a surrealist dictionary with Breton. Later wrote poems of the Resistance. His *Misfortunes of the Immortals* was illustrated by Max Ernst; a book of love poems, *Facile*, was illustrated with photographs by Man Ray. *Capital of Pain* (1926), a book of surrealist poetry, may have suggested the title, “The Capital of the Ruins,” for Beckett’s postwar radio talk on St. Lô.

B[ernard] P. Feuilloley: Identified in *Negro* as “Lecturer in the Paris School of Anthropology.” Wrote mainly on the religion, rituals, and ceremonies of French Equatorial Africans, much of which he witnessed; took photographs that illustrate his *Negro* essay.

E[mmanuel] Flavia-Leopold (1896– ): Martiniquais poet and professor, Collège de St.-Bét, Haute Garonne. Books include *Adieu foulards, adieu maras: chants pour la terre créole; Soleils caraibes. Poèmes. En ce temps de la terre. toi qui n’était que do lumière; and Vers ta lumière, o Bernadette, mon âme s’élève*. Translator of Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer.

Robert Goffin (1898–1984): Belgian poet, music critic, and Avocat à la Cour d’Appel in Brussels and member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. Called “the first serious man of letters to take jazz seriously enough to devote a book to it.” His books include poems (*Jazz Band and Oeuvres poétiques*); critical studies (*Aux Frontieres du Jazz; Horn of Plenty: The Story of Louis Armstrong; Jazz: from the Congo to the Metropolitan*); works on Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Verlaine; and *The White Brigade* (on the German occupation of Belgium, 1940–45).

Francis Jourdain (1876–1958): Identified in *Negro* as “Member of the League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression.” Member of Communist Party active with the Popular Front. Artistic decorator, art critic, painter, and architect who wrote books on French genre painting, children in art, the Ile Saint Louis, a history of Madagascar (with Robert Foissin), and studies of Pierre Bonnard, Albert Marquet, Renoir, Alexandre Steinlen, Toulouse-Lautrec, Maurice Utrillo, and Felix Vallotton.


Henri [Alfred] Lavachery (1885–1972): Identified in *Negro* as “Assistant Curator (Independent Collaborator) of the Royal Museums of Art and History of Belgium.” The figures illustrating his *Negro* essay are from his private collection. An ethnologist with a doctorate in classical philology, he wrote *Art Nègre* (1930) and, with André Noblecourt, *Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* (for UNESCO, Paris, 1958); as well as numerous scholarly works: on Easter Island;
CONTRIBUTORS TO NEGRO 171

Mexican, Oceanic, and Peruvian art; pre-Columbian American art; and Thor Heyerdahl in the Pacific.

Raymond Michelet (1912–): Cunard’s lover, coworker, and “my principal contributor” to Negro, including three long essays, an “Ethnographical Map of Negro Africa,” and “Eight Drawings of Congo Masks from Tervueren Museum.” French artist and self-taught Africanist. His “Primitive Life and Mentality” was reprinted as African Empires and Civilisation by the International African Service Bureau under the editorship of George Padmore.

Ernst Moerman (1897–1944): Belgian surrealist poet and playwright; works include Fantômas, Poèmes and M. Fantômas(surrealist film), Oeuvre poétique, Tristan et Yseult (play), and Vie imaginaire de Jesus-Christ.

J.-M. [Jules] Monnerot (1909–95): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” May have been primary drifter of “Murderous Humanitarianism.” Martiniquais latecomer to surrealism; strong anticolonialist in early 1930s, and member of Légitime Défense and signer of its antibourgeois, antiassimilationist editorial. Subsequently veered toward Fascism, opposing Algerian independence, teaching at l’École supérieure de guerre, and running as a National Front candidate for the European Parliament in 1989. Wrote both fiction (L’heure de Fàllandry, La nuit ne finira pas, On meurt les yeux ouverts) and nonfiction (Intelligence de la politique, La poésie moderne et le sacré, Demarxiser l’université, and Sociology and Psychology of Communism).

Benjamin Péret (1899–1959): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Led the way from dada to surrealism, becoming one of its foremost poets; joined Communist Party along with Breton, Eluard, and Unik. Produced fiction, polemical writings (anticlerical and revolutionary), and art criticism as well as poetry. Books include Anthologie de l’Amour sublime; Death to the Pigs, and Other Writings; Le Déshonneur des poètes; and La Parole est . . . Péret. His complete works have recently been published in France, largely due to the efforts of the Association des amis de Benjamin Péret.


Charles [A.] Ratton (1895–1986): Studied the art of the Middle Ages at the École de Louvre, then became “the unquestioned dean of primitive art dealers” (Primitive Art Newsletter). Works from his vast collection were exhibited at his Gallerie Charles Ratton and, most notably, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (“African Art, Ratton’s Collection,” 1935). Organized surrealist exhibition in Paris (1936), where he also founded la Société des Amis du Musée de l’Homme and served as artistic director of Théâtre Edouard VII. Writings include Masques Africains, L’Or Fétiche, and L’usage des colliers en bronze du Benin (catalogue of exhibition he organized at Musée de l’Homme).
Georges Sadoul (1904–67): Surrealist who became prominent member of Communist Party. Prolific film historian and critic, whose books include the five-volume "histoire générale du cinéma" (British Creators of Film Technique, Cinema in Arab Countries, Dictionary of Film Makers, Dictionary of Films, French Film) and Jacques Callot: The Mirror of His Time. Served Hours Press in Paris, in Cunard’s phrase, as an “elastic secretary and general factotum.”

E. Stiers: Belgian writer.

Yves Tanguy (1900–55): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Artist most faithful to surrealist principles, staying loyal to them by helping to form group of “dissidence” surrealists. Contributed to This Quarter’s surrealist number (September 1932) along with Giorgio di Chirico, Max Ernst, Man Ray, and Tristan Tzara. Designed cover for Hours Press publication of Apollinaire by Walter Lowenfels.

André Thirion (1907–): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Left-wing novelist (Black Mass, L’Automne sur la mer, Beatrice, Le Grand Ordinaire), political writer, and memoirist of the surrealist group: Revolutionaries without Revolution, which includes the story of his embracing and then rejecting communism. Worked on clandestine journal, Libertés, during World War II; awarded Croix de Guerre. Later elected councillor for Paris. One-time lover of Cunard’s.

Pierre Unik (1909–45): Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Surrealist poet who, like many others, joined the Communist Party. Served as commentator on Luis Bunuel’s only documentary, Land without Bread (1932), an unsparring depiction of peasant lives defined by poverty, famine, disease, and death. Books include Au Grand Jour (with Aragon, Breton, Eluard, and Péret) and Le héros du vide: roman inachevé.

Pierre Yoyotte: Identified in Negro as a member of “the SURREALIST GROUP in Paris.” Martiniquais latecomer to surrealism; member of Légitime Défense who signed its antibourgeois, antiassimilationist editorial; Africanist who taught at the École Normale Supérieure when Beckett was a lecturer there. Active in anti-fascist struggle; thought to have been killed by the Gestapo in 1941.
Appendix 3

Extant French Originals of the Beckett Translations

As Cunard details in *These Were the Hours*, “at least three-quarters of the material I used in *Negro*” was destroyed during World War II (see introduction, n.66). Of the seven extant French originals that I have been able to locate, six are in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; the seventh, the only poem that Beckett translated for *Negro*, is Ernst Moerman’s “Armstrong,” which was published in Moerman’s collection, *Oeuvre poétique* (1970). Except for Feuillolely’s, which is handwritten, the essays are all typed, but they contain corrections and changes of various kinds, and are obscure or uncertain in places. I reproduce here the authors’ final intentions to the extent I can discern them, ignoring material clearly meant to be deleted.

(A) René Crevel, “La Négresse Des Bordels”

(“The Negress in The Brothel”).

Les métaphores, fussent-elles du plus strict XVII. donc sans recoin où nicher une poussière d’équivoque, n’en trahissent pas moins leurs auteurs, et, avec ces auteurs, qui les admire.

Ainsi, la France de Guizot (l’homme du poétique conseil: enrichissez-vous) celle d’un Poincaré dont la barbiche tabou, d’une petite érection impérative, met terme à la dégringolade de francs, la France de ceux-là et des autres, revêt-elle d’expansion coloniales, de revanche, et, une fois par semaine, après la messe, de douceur de vivre, alors même que son légendaire bas de laine, peu à peu se métamorphosait en bas de soie artificielle, toujours et encore, demeurait assez économe de mots, images, sentiments et idées pour continuer à ne vouloir reconnaître son poète (?) classique de l’amour en nul autre que Racine.

En effet, une nation dont la morale pratique n’a cessé d’obéir au grand principe “un sou est un sou”, comment n’aimerait-elle point à se rappeler qu’en un temps reconnu comme celui où s’exprima le mieux son génie, le peintre officiel des passions, admis à la cour du grand Roi, dans la théorie des princesses, les unes larmoyantes, les autres vindicatives, mais toutes uniformément chargées de falbalas jamais ne reconnut par la bouche de leurs majestueux amants, que des objets de désir.

Une expression de cette farine devenue monnaie courante, on imagine à la suite de quelles piétres pratiques, l’amour a bien pu, dans l’idée que s’en font les hommes, se ramollir, se recroqueviller, au point de supporter en béquille, le qualitif divin, par exemple.

La rage possession s’obstine à voir jusque dans la créature préférée, une simple chose à prendre. Et certes pour que les affirmations “Tu es à moi” “je te possède” et les asquiescements [sic] “je suis ta chose”, “prends moi” soient devenus des cris reflexes de
la jouissance, il fallait bien qu’une inégalité eût été, une fois pour toutes, admise entre et par les éléments du couple. D’où notion d’un amour-esclavage. Cet amour-esclavage, avec ce qu’il sous-entend de remords de la part du maître-abuseur et de rage de la part de l’esclave-abusée, deviendra vite amour-enfer. Alors, à nous, les formules incandescentes.

_Brûlé de plus de feux que je n’en allumais_, malgré le ton de haute époque, cet alexandrin pyrogène n’en sent pas moins son cochon grillé.

Obéissance due par la femme à l’homme et l’homme à Dieu, on suit la chaîne des asservissements.

La communion que les êtres se défendent, apparaît à la lumière de leur désespoir défrayant, une interdiction que, seule, peut lever la vertu d’un sacrement, le libertin se convertit. C’est le triomphe des Maintenon. Et encore ces russées commères ne peuvent-elles malgré leurs conformismes social [sic] et religieux, viser qu’à des mariages morganatiques.

Et voilà comment on se fait des idées, des idées chrétiennes, lesquelles, depuis vingt siècles, à coups d’arbitraires restrictions, (même lorsque Dieu s’appelle _Etre Suprême, Esprit_, en dépit de toutes les pensées qui se déclarent libres, et des progrès de l’athéisme), prétendant encore mener la monde qu’elles ont tout juste réussi à refouler. Assaisonné à la sauce Jésus, notre héritage méditerranéen dont les morceaux de résistance étaient mêpris des femmes (prostitution—inicapacité civile) et celui des barbares (mission colonisatrice) le mâle blanc n’allait point renoncer volontiers aux privilèges de son messianisme. En France, la ruse normande, de régionale, prit un caractère universel. D’où, un air ventripotent et bonasse. D’où, aussi, depuis les Valois, la condescendance au libre-échange intersexuel des idées, avec en contre-poison, le parti pris de ridiculiser, sous le nom de précieuses ou bas-bleus les femmes instruites. Pour se moquer impunément, il n’y avait qu’à s’abriter derrière cette bonne vieille traditionelle galanterie française. Donc flirt, marivaudage et autre niaiseries mondaines.

Objets _de_ et _à_ conversation, comme étaient objets de désirs leurs soeurs moins fortunées, les belles dames riches et philosophicardes furent, elles aussi, frustrées. Parfois, elles pouvaient se croire les plus belles cartes en mains. L’atout, hélas, n’était point coeur. Le coeur (à quand la psychanalyse des jeux?) ne sortait quasi jamais. A moins d’être barrée comme une Récamier, le moyen de supporter le contrainte qui les desexuait, sauf recours aux hypocrisies de l’adultère, lequel, dans notre code caduc, demeure, au moins quant à la théorie, punissable d’emprisonnement.

A tout cela ne saurait trouver son compte pas une femme, même légitime, puisqu’on a vu des penseurs qui la faisaient (tels Rousseau, Diderot) à la patriarcale, mais avaient dans leur jeunesse, épousé des créatures, dont, venue l’heure du succès, ils n’étaient pas socialement trop fiers, délaissier leurs compagnes pour des expéditions mondiales.

Ainsi, notre civilisation analytique a consacré parallèlement le double règne du bordel! où l’on baise du salon où l’on cause

La suffisance masculine veut des putains à foutre et des petites, moyennes et grandes cérébrales à respecter ou à moquer, selon le cas.

Revers de la médaille: Baudelaire, le jour qu’il veut pénétrer son Egérie officielle, Madame Sabatier, la présidente (qu’on l’appelait) n’arrive à rien. La présidente faisait partie du système spirituel et non du système physique. Et pas moyen de passer d’une cosmogonie à l’autre. Bonne fille ou ambitieuse, même avec le feu au derrière, elle ne
tint pas rigueur au poète de son impuissance. Mais lui, on imagine qu’il ne dut pas sortir trop satisfait de chez la dame bas-bleu. Mais il sait encore où aller : chez Jeanne Duval, sa maîtresse, la prostituée, sa concubine. Alors malgré sa conscience hypocondriaque, il pourra se sentir supérieur à la femme, sa femme et jouer son rôle de mâle. Et quel bonheur pour quelqu’un qui aime à faire sa prière, comme il l’avoue dans Mon Coeur mis à nu, de prévoir les critiques mielleux, qui sans oublier de le blâmer, le plaindront de cette liaison avec une fille dont il était sûr de l’inferiorité a priori, et doublement puisque la société ne saurait avoir le caprice de bien considérer une putain (et de une) de couleur (et de deux). Ainsi, le poète s’envoie soi-même une de ces épreuves, que l’unanimité se plait à imaginer don de la Providence à qui se doit par vocation littéraire de souffrir jusqu’au lyrisme. La vieille image de la croix à porter a fait son temps, ou, plutôt si cette image est réprise [sic], que ce soit à seule fin de constater comment et combien, jusque dans ses escroqueries les mieux inventées, l’humanité avoue, puisque le fils de Dieu, a pour père terrestre un charpentier, donc un fabricant de croix, ce qui en conscience signifie que les parents taillent, scient, rabotent, varlopent, le malheur de leurs enfants. Le symbole chrétien demeure la preuve la plus éloquente du plaisir, de l’intérêt que les vieux ont à torturer les jeunes; les hommes, les femmes; les riches, les pauvres; les blancs[,] les noirs.

Charme inattendu d’un bijou rose et noir. Baudelaire aime la chair foncée, le sexe aux touchants replis de Jeanne Duval. Système Taylor et division du travail: que l’autre, la cérébrale Madame Sabatier, se contente d’un amour éphémère et pense qu’elle a la meilleure part.

Or voici malgré les bobards dostoïewskiens sur la résurrection des filles de mœurs légères, déjà la condescendance, la politesse fabriquée et même un goût physique un peu particulier pour les putains nous semblent autant d’hypocrisies qui sanctionnent l’ordre établi, car il s’agit ni de pitié, ni de l’hommage que pourrait bien signifier à l’égard d’une créature socialement déchirée un bel envoi de sperme, mais de la très élémentaire justice (ici simple oubli des injustices codifiées) qui devrait permettre de ne pas même prendre en considération cette déchéance sociale. Or, puisque cette attitude est pratiquement impossible dans ces états capitalistes où tout est affaire de classe (les peuples colonisés, donc la masse des hommes et femmes de couleur étant assimilés au prolétariat) il importe de réduire à néant l’idéologie imbibée de justice sociale. Et si en attendant, est rencontrée, désirée, baisée, voire épousée quelque négresse de bordel que nulle honte ou vanité ne soit tirée d’un commerce dont l’intimité n’a besoin d’excuse ou de visa, puisque s’en trouve au moins donné l’avantage d’un plaisir épithéal à ne point dédaigner.

Dès lors, voici réduit à ses justes proportions (le grotesque pur et simple), ce conflit que la littérature voulut pathétique entre la peau et l’âme, et qui aboutissait toujours au triomphe de l’Église, et chez Baudelaire comme chez les autres.

Négresse de Baudelaire, bordel à domicile, de même que, pour les Croisés, les dames turques furent le bordel sur le tombeau du Christ (ce qui vaut bien le soldat inconnu sous l’Arc de Triomphe).

Le ciel bleu, le soleil, pour les natifs des horizons spleenétiques, ça chatouille là où je pense.

La France coloniale de St. Louis au duc d’Aumale (lequel soit dit en passant, donna son nom et ses titres de noblesse à l’une des trente-deux positions, très particulièrement en honneur de la géométrie bordelière) du duc d’Aumale à Liautey, toute la France coloniale, la passée, la présente, la future, avec son cortège de vérolés
et de massacreurs-missionnaires, se devait donc n'est-ce pas Victor Hugo? de chanter les Orientales: Sarah belle d'indolence se balance.

La maquerelle très européenne et fière de l'être, tape dans ses mains: "Sarah, Sarah, allons vite au salon". Une Africaine belle d'indolence, quel joyau dans sa collection et comme ça vous relève les blancs avachissements des autres chairs? Et quel objet de désirs. L'objet des désirs nous y voici revenus et plutôt deux fois qu'une, car la créature, par définition, objet de désirs, est devenue, grâce à la mise en scène de l'amour vénal et organisé, un objet dans le décor des désirs. La négresse des bordels métropolitains, aux yeux des consommateurs pertinents, est à sa place, aussi bien à sa place que sa soeur de bronze porteuse de l'électricité, à l'orée des escaliers à tapis rouge et tringles d'or, expression si parfaite du contentement de soi que ne cessèrent d'éprouver le XIX° et le XX° naissant.

Et qu'elle n'ait pas le mal du pays. Là-bas, dans le continent original, avec ses nègrillons de frères, des administrateurs, des généraux, et qui sait? peut-être ce maréchal qui a mérité réputation d'empereur romain, jouent à "je ne t'encule et tu me suces". Pourquoi la colère secouerait-elle une famille qui a si bien réussi. Vraiment ce serait à vous ôter l'envie d'aller porter sa goutte militaire, sa goutte religieuse aux sauvages.

Le Français qui a découvert le voyage et l'art de voyager s'il aime à quitter ses frontières, c'est que dès la douane, et à plus forte raison, hors de son continent, de sa continence, il sent tomber l'uniforme des contraintes (D'où le succès de Morand, Dekobra, et quelques autres).

Mais que telle ou telle raison l'empêche de quitter son pays il a pris assez de goût à l'exotisme pour que les barnums de ses plaisirs et débauches lui servent ces curiosités d'importation lointaine qui le dépaysent et lui donnent illusion qu'il se renouvelle. D'où succès des bals martiniquais, des airs cubains, des orchestres de Harlem et de tous les tam-tam de l'exposition coloniale. Les noirs sont, aux blancs, des occasions, des moyens de se divertir, comme leurs esclaves, aux riches romains du bas Empire. Plus même besoin d'aller en Afrique. La prostitution à quoi le capitalisme livide contraint les noirs des deux sexes, aux abords de toutes les places Pigalles des grandes villes offrent ces ressources que les oasis, en levant des interdictions des hontes européennes, donnait vers 1900 à l'Immoraliste d'André Gide.

Quant au Français moyen qui ne veut pas se dépraver, se sent-il en rut de pittoresque et de libération, il va se payer une classique nègresse de bordel. Or, une fois dans la chambre, avec celle que son argent lui permet de posséder, si au lieu d'emprun d'un morceau de sa nauséabonde personne, ce sexe, exquis négatif de celui trop fécond de Madame son épouse, il se contentait d'y accoler l'oreille, comme il a coutume de procéder avec les coquillages qui portent en eux le bruit de la mer, peut-être malgré son tympan revêché, entendrait-il une rumeur confuse encore, mais inexorable déjà qui annonce l'effondrement des forteresses capitalistes, des cathédrales aux bordels.

Alors les montagnes, les fleuves, les océans ne seront plus des symboles limitatifs entre les races. Le vieil adage "Vérité en delà des Pyrénées, mensonge au delà" sera incompréhensibles aux chartistes caducs et les paléontologues ne tenteront même pas d'expliquer comment
le sordide et inexorable impérialisme poussa l’insolence jusqu’à vouloir nipper de ses vieilleries, la splendeur nue des peuples noirs.

RENÉ Crevel


Au delà du Cameroun et à 2000 kilomètres de la côte, est l’Oubanghi-Shari, peuplé par environ 1.000.000 de noirs appartenant à quatre grands groupes: les Banda, les Mandjia, les Sara, et les Baya.

C’est des Banda et des Mandjia entre Fort-Sibut et Fort-Granfel, Bouka et Bria, dont il sera question ici, comme étant ceux que j’ai spécialement étudiés, au cours de trois séjours.

En étudiant de près les “primitifs”, on s’aperçoit bien vite qu’ils sont poussés dans le chemin de l’Évolution par un courant très puissant: la magie.

Il ne s’agit pas là, cependant, de la magie telle qu’elle est conçue par le cerveau plus ou moins surexcité de quelques braves gens, croyant ce qu’on leur a enseigné, dans les lieux où l’on étudie la pseudo-religion, au sujet du “diable et de ses diableries”; non, la magie est autre chose. C’est (et je reprends là les conceptions des “primitifs”) l’art de vivre en union intime avec la nature, de posséder ses secrets et de s’en servir dans un but altruiste ou égoïste.

C’est un chef décole initiatique qui, un jour, m’a mis sur la voie en me parlant des deux puissances opposées qui agissent au cours des cérémonies magiques:

1.0 la magie positive ou sorcellerie.
2.0 la magie négative ou tabou.

Voici les paroles du chef magicien:

1.0 “Faire une chose, accomplir un acte, prononcer telles paroles, afin que ce que l’on désire arrive”; magie positive.
2.0 “Ne pas faire, ne pas prononcer telles paroles, ne pas accomplir certaines actions, afin que ce que l’on redoute ou que l’on ne désire pas, n’arrive pas”; magie négative.

On a trop parlé de la loi du tabou pour que j’en parle moi-même ici et nous nous occuperons donc seulement de la magie positive ou sorcellerie, dans son expression, d’envoûtement et dans les rites de l’Initiation, telle que je l’ai vue pratiquée.

Voici un cas des plus troublants. [J]e le rapporte tel quel, d’après les notes de mon carnet de route:

[Un après-midi après 40 km de piste, je m’arrêtai près d’une petite cimère, m’apprêtant à dormir.

Soudain un de mes porteurs me vint me secourir et dit:

“Ecoute, on appelle au secours!”. Je prêtai l’oreille et je discernerai en effet, semblant traverser un rideau d’arbres, des cris d’angoisse poussés par une jeune voix.

Suivi de quelques-uns de mes hommes, je me précipitai, et bientôt, cachés encore par un taillis épais, nous vîmes un spectacle extraordinaire.
Une quinzaine de noirs, debout, formaient cercle autour d'un homme et d'un jeune garçon, debout également, étroitement unis, poitrine contre poitrine, attachés qu'ils étaient avec des lianes à caoutchouc.

Un autre noir, qu'à ses ornements particuliers je reconnus pour un magicien, faisait, au-dessus des têtes de ces derniers, des mouvements semblables à des passes magnétiques et prononçait, à haute voix, des formules magiques, pendant que d'un petit tam-tam rituel, parlait des sous d'une monotone troublante.

[O]n apporta au magicien une calebasse pleine de graines que de sa main gauche il aspergea du sang, d'une foule noire qui gisait sur le sol hors du cercle.

[1] Le magicien prit une poignée de ces graines et les porta aux lèvres de l'homme lié. Celui-ci happa le mélange, la tourna plusieurs fois dans sa bouche, puis la cracha dans une petite écuelle qu'on lui tendit.

Alors, le magicien, voulut faire absorber le contenu de l'écuelle au jeune garçon, mais celui-ci, foraisant en proie à une terreur mortelle, s'y refusa obstinément.

Force resta pourtant au magicien—force ou puissance magnétique—et le garçon absorbait les graines.

Quand il les eut avalées, on délia les deux êtres et le tam-tam résonna un peu plus fort, accompagnant une mélodie aux accents étranges que psalmodiaient les assistants.

Brusquement, on entendit de forts miaulements, semblables à ceux des chats sauvages de la brousse.

Il partaient de la bouche du jeune garçon.

Je sortis de ma cachette. Après un premier mouvement de panique, comme je parlais la langue de la région et que mes gens et ces noirs se reconnaissent du même clan, tous revinrent vers moi. J'obtins même du magicien la promesse qu'il m'expliquerait cette cérémonie.

Nous nous dirigeâmes tous, vers un petit village.

[J]'appris que ce village caché en pleine brousse faisait office de centre d'initiation. Comme on ne m'a pas demandé d'en garder le secret, voici traduites, littéralement les paroles que j'ai notées:

"Une croyance très répandue chez nous est que des hommes peuvent être possédés par certains êtres malfaisants que notre langue est seulement intermédiaires entre l'homme et les animaux, qui vivent invisiblement (sauf pour les initiés) un peu partout dans la nature et qui, comme lieu de prédilection, adoptent, quand ils le peuvent, l'estomac des hommes. Ceux qui sont possédés par ces êtres ne s'appartiennent plus.

"Dès la tombée de la nuit, ils sont, par leur démon intérieur, poussés à tourmenter les gens.

"Tout le monde a une peur terrible de ces possédés. On les fuit.

"Nous, magiciens, nous avons le pouvoir de les délivrer, mais il nous faut trouver un autre individu qui puisse servir de réceptacle à l'être invisible (le widwa) et d'où celui-ci ne sortira que si le nouveau possédé peut se faire délivrer.

"La scène de cet après-midi, était une cérémonie d'exorcisme au cours de laquelle j'ai pu faire passer, au moyen de rites spéciaux, le "widwa" du corps de l'homme dans celui du jeune garçon.

"Ce dernier, orphelin de père et de mère, voué par cela même à toutes les misères, deviendra un objet de respect, tout en semant la terreur dans le cœur de ceux qui ne voudront pas lui donner à manger quand il en manifestera le désir par des miaulements.

"En effet, il ne pourra plus parler, mais seulement miauler, car l'être qui a élu domicile en lui lui a ôté, même pas sa présence, la possibilité de prononcer des paroles
humaines. C’est pour son bien que nous avons choisi cet enfant, car il ne manquera plus à présent de nourriture, tous lui en donneront, ne serait-ce que par crainte de sa vengeance.

“L’action de délivrance s’est produite quand l’homme ayant trituré dans sa bouche les graines que je lui ai offertes et les ayant imbibées de sa salive, le “widwa”, demeurant en lui, a voulu en manger et a été entraîné avec elles dans la bouche de l’enfant quand l’homme les a crachées.

“Du fait que l’homme et le garçon étaient attachés étroitement, il y avait entre eux communication plus facile et la délivrance de l’homme était rendue plus aisée.

“Voilà tout ce que je peux te dire. Quant aux raisons pour lesquelles ces choses peuvent se produire, c’est mon secret et je ne puis te le faire partager.”

Les notes ci-dessous au sujet de l’Initiation magico-religieuse, apporteront quelque lumière à ce problème si complexe.

(c) LE 29 NOVEMBRE 1932. HENRI [A.] LAVACHERY, “ESSAI SUR LES STYLES DANS LA STATUAIRE DU CONGO” (“ESSAY ON STYLES IN STATUARY OF THE CONGO”).

M. Georges Hardy a beau dire, dans son livre sur l’Art Nègre, que toute tentative du genre de celle que j’entreprends ici est prématuroée, je ne puis qu’y persévérer avec toute la modestie qui convient. Certes, toute généralisation est aventureuse, surtout si l’on réfléchit à la connaissance rudimentaire que nous possédons de l’archéologie africaine. D’autre part, il faut bien que dans ce domaine des styles de la statuaire noire, problème capitale pour l’art de ces pays, l’un ou l’autre se risque à proposer quelques classifications générales et passe sur le danger d’être tôt contredit.

Les erreurs sont peut-être aussi utiles que les vérités, du moment qu’il s’agit de défircher une matière presque vierge. Le chemin que l’on trace dans la forêt, même s’il ne mène qu’à un leurre, est malgré tout une percée, parmi des plantes, au pied d’arbres inconnus.

Le Congo “colonialement” le Congo Belge, se prête assez bien à une vue ensemble. C’est un tout qu’enserre non sans rigueur la courbe du fleuve et de ses grands affluents, la chaîne des lacs, la savane de Rhodésie. La statuaire de ses régions, que je ne veux considérer ici qu’au point de vue purement morphologique et technique, présente à première vue une grande variété de formes complexes. Puis, peu à peu, à l’observation, celles-ci se rangent en quelques classes bien distinctes, entre lesquelles existent des zones assez courtes, d’interpénétration.

Je distinguerai trois grandes écoles.
1) L’art de la Côte qui comprend le Sud du Congo français, l’enclave de Cabinda, le Mayumbe, le fleuve jusqu’aux premières cataractes, l’Angola.
2) L’art du Kasai qui se diviserait lui-même en deux branches puissantes, souvent confondues:
   a) L’art des Bayakas et des Batékés.
   b) L’art des Bushongos, des Bena Lulua, des Bapendes, des Badjoks, etc.
3) L’art des régions de l’Est ou des Balubas.
Les statuaires de ces régions sont les aboutissements, d'autres diront la décadence, de formules anciennes dont il est à première vue difficile de distinguer les données plastiques. Néanmoins telles qu'elles sont, outre qu’elles expriment des sensibilités bien vivantes, elles méritent d’être jugées, et même admirées en soi, sans que le fait d’être le produit de la décomposition d’arts probablement plus grandioses ne les entache d’une diminution originelle. Ainsi trop longtemps, a-t-on jugé de l'art byzantin parce qu’il est la fleur, d’une splendeur un peu vénéneuse, éclos sur un art grec pourri d’influences asiatiques.

Retenons aussi que ces statuaires sont bien rarement les ouvrages de véritables professionnels. Bien qu’il existe souvent des castes de sculpteurs et que chaque tribu, et parfois chaque village nous apparaissent attachés à un ou à plusieurs types nettement caractérisés, les bonnes œuvres et les médiocres se proposent à nous sur un plan d’égalité parfaite. Le bric-à-brac est énorme, et nous devons d’abord apprendre à le classer. Et même devant les œuvres maîtresses, il nous faudra toujours nous souvenir que la préoccupation du beau y fut presque toujours dépassée par celle de l’utile: Utilité religieuse, devoir et crainte devant les ancêtres, avant tout fixer là, par cette image et si possible, en elle, toute la malveillance des redoutables inconnues des éléments, de la nuit et de la mort.

Méfions nous encore de ce que j’appellerais volontiers la tentation d’une évolution trop stricte des formes. Sommes-nous sûrs que la forme la plus dépouillée, même la plus sèche, soit la dernière venue, et que la plus pleine, la plus riche se trouve la plus ancienne? Je crois, bien que résistant moi-même le plus souvent fort mal à la tentation citée plus haut, que ces évolutions plastiques, dans un style donné (dont nous supposons le canon dogmatiquement fixé) existent dans l’espace beaucoup plus que dans le temps.

Aussi chacun des styles les plus purs du Congo nous apparaissent entourés de leurs harmoniques barbares, statues malvenues, d'autres desséchées jusqu'à l'évanouissement de la plastique, d'autres enfin tellement éloignées du type central pur, qu’elles en arrivent à créer une sorte de style secondaire, d’aspect primitif et qui, à le considérer, risquerait de nous tromper sur les origines véritables du style principal. Car ces formes résolument décadentes semblent souvent plus “ primitives” que les plus anciennes, chaque fois que nous perdons de vue la longue ascendance illustre des arts noirs contemporains.

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ART DE LA COTE.

Si l'on réunissait dans la même salle d’un musée d’ethnographie, des exemples de statuaire ou des masques provenant de la côte atlantique, depuis le Benin, le Yoruba, le Dahomey jusqu’à l'Angola en passant par la côte du Cameroun, le Cap Lopez, le Congo français, l’enclave, de Cabinda, et l’Hinterland le long du fleuve jusqu’aux premières cataractes—on serait frappé d’une ressemblance entre les ouvrages de nombreuses tribus.

Le chef [NB: pencilled in left margin, pointing to “chef” are the words “head / yes!!”] des personnages a l’importance que l’on sait, importance propre à toute la statuaire noire. Et c’est par la tête que cette ressemblance s’affirme particulièrement.
Le visage est d’un réalisme, je dirais même d’un naturalisme, qui touche au portrait. Les maternités du Mayumbe, les charmes médicaux à miroir, les figures tombales comme celle reproduite ici, les ivoires, sceptres ou manches de chasse—mouches, de la même région sont caractéristiques à cet égard. On ne peut dire ici qu’il s’agisse d’un poncif car le sculpteur semble conserver vis-à-vis de son ouvrage toute la liberté d’imiter les caractéristiques d’un modèle qu’il aurait sous les yeux. Ce même réalisme peut s’étendre au corps tout entier, mais seulement dans les pièces les plus anciennes. Pour les autres, si les mains, les jambes et les pieds cherchent encore à imiter la nature, le torse est souvent réduit à un volume dont il ne subsiste [sic] que la masse essentielle, traitée avec sécheresse. On a longtemps prêté à l’influence des comptoirs portugais qui donnaient aux noirs des images religieuses d’Europe à copier, l’existence de ce souci souvent mesquin, d’imiter la nature.

Ainsi prêtait-on jadis aux Portugais aussi bien, l’introduction des méthodes plastiques et techniques qui font la gloire des bronziers du Benin. Ce n’est pas vainement que je rapproche les deux points extrêmes du segment de la côte atlantique que je considérais tout à l’heure.

Le réalisme du Loango est étroitement apparenté au réalisme des œuvres les plus anciennes du Benin, (certaines têtes du musée de Berlin, la tête de jeune fille du British.) Et encore, il y a déjà dans ces ouvrages certaines stylisations où se révèle l’appauvrissement de la vision et un goût décoratif qui serait le prodrome de la décadence.

Ce serait là de nouveaux arguments en faveur d’une origine d’importation étrangère, si nous ne possédions pas les ancêtres de l’art des Binis. Je veux parler des sept têtes de terre cuite, et de la tête de bronze retrouvées à IFA, aux bouches du Niger par l’expédition Frobenius de 1919.

Ces chefs-d’œuvres énigmatiques, (dont lénigme est peut-être percée à l’heure qu’il est, à la suite des nouvelles découvertes de Frobenius en 1932, dans le désert de Lybie), représentent indiscutablement des Africains, mais de races différentes. Ils sont d’un style tellement pur, d’un faire tellement parfait, on y sent si bien la main de grands artistes qu’il serait absurde d’y voir l’œuvre ou l’influence des traitants ou même des missionnaires portugais.

On peut supposer—et des éléments culturels, religieux corroborent la leçon des œuvres d’art—qu’à une époque imprécise le pays d’Ifa, fut le siège d’une culture dont l’art avait atteint un sommet que dépassent, à peine, les plus beaux monuments de l’art égyptien. Cette école d’Ifa aurait rayonné tout au long de la côte, transmettant notamment en matière d’art des principes très stricts qu’enseignaient une observation et une imitation, une référence continue au modèle vivant.

Nous pouvons suivre cet enseignement à la trace, depuis le Niger jusqu’en Angola. Nous le retrouvons abâtardi, chez les Yorubas contemporains, au Dahomey. Chez les Ekois de la côte du Cameroun, il a conservé longtemps une vitalité qui s’affirme dans des masques expressifs, profondément humains. Des mêmes principes, énervés par une sorte de grâce décadente se retrouvent plus loin dans les masques Pongwés du Gabon, enfin dans les figurines souvent exquises que sculptaient, il y a quelques décades encore, les Bavlis du Congo français, les Vatchivokoës de l’enclave portugaise de CABINDA.

Chez ces derniers, l’imitation des détails du vêtement des Portugais du XVIe Siècle, la cuirasse et surtout le morion, conduisit les artistes, lorsqu’ils n’eurent plus les modèles sous les yeux à entourer notamment la tête de leurs personnages de coiffures d’une fantaisie aussi étrange que décorative.
Nous voilà revenus au Congo belge, à sa région maritime dont nous ne pouvons séparer l'Angola portugais. Le réalisme, d'importation plus lointaine encore dans le temps que dans l'espace, manifeste le plus continûment dans les têtes des personnages sculptés.

Un formalisme grossier régente trop souvent la forme des corps des grands charmes de villages, des fameux fétiches à clous. Le torse rudimentaire est supportées par deux jambes fléchies sur les genoux, supportées par des pieds énormes à peine esquissés, mais du hérissé de clous, des sachets, des figurines magiques qui lui enserre le cou, jaillit souvent un visage aux traits délicatement sculptés, nez et oreilles parfaitement modelés, bouche expressive, aux belles lèvres vivantes, dont le dessin transparaît au travers des couches épaisses du ngula pourpre.

Cette formule d'un corps humain, un cylindre central, abondamment sexué, que décorent les tatouages ou les sacrifices [sic] de la tribu, des bras grêles ornés de mains imparfaites, qui se séparent à regret du tronc, des membres inférieurs réduits à l'état de supports rabougris, nous la retrouvons d'un bout à l'autre de l'Afrique noire. Certes il y a des tribus où la recherche et le soin de reproduire la beauté du corps humain intégral se sont maintenus. Mais, ce sont là des survivances d'un passé dont malheureusement beaucoup de points sont encore plongés pour nous dans les ténèbres.

**ARTS DES BATYAKAS, DES BATEKÉS, ETC.**

La transition entre l'art de la Côte et celui de l'hinterland est loin d'être brusque. Notamment chez les Batekés, qui s'étendent dans la région de Léopoldville et profondément, à la même hauteur, sur la rive française, un certain goût naturaliste survit, mais mieux dans les détails que dans le modèle. Cependant on y trouve déjà le nez sans caractère se dégageant droit entre deux sillons obliques, et les oreilles réduites à un demi cercle, dressé non loin de l'œil.

Les effets des invasions de l'Est et de la conquête les réunissent historiquement aux Bayakas depuis des siècles. Mais autant la plastique bateké semble sage, ennemie des effets expressifs, autant la bayaka est pleine d'exces, de violence et il faut le dire de réelle fantaisie.

Le nez des masques, des statues des bayakas est particulier. Il se relève en trompe, a la façon de celle d'un éléphant qui barrit et il n'est pas loin de rappeler, simple coincidence je me hâte de le dire, le nez du dieu Chac, qui décrit les angles des temples mayas du Yucatan.

Dans le second volume dédié par le Musée du Congo de Tervueren à l'étude des collections ethnographiques, les transformations du nez bayaka ont été étudiées en une série de dessins, allant d'un nez presque normal à celui qui se recourbe au point de toucher le front. Les pièces les plus récentes semblent être celles où l'exubérance de la fantaisie décorative se manifeste avec le plus de violence. Race forte, ardemment cannibale, restée dans le fond indomptables, les Bayakas expriment dans un art détaché de ce que les critiques épris de naturalisme appellent "la vision normale", une robuste sensualité, condition de la joie de vivre.

Visages réduites à des schémas, autour d'un nez majuscule, troncs cylindriques, membres presque amorphes soulignent la magnificence ingénue des sexes traités avec minutie.
Une polychromie violente où domine la pourpre du ngula accentue l'impression d'ardeur et de force.

Mais les masques des grands maîtres des Sociétés secrètes, en face du grouillement breughélien de ceux que portent les simples initiés, affectent une simplicité et une grandeur qui ne se réside pas seulement dans leurs dimensions plus qu'humaines. Sans doute, devons-nous y voir les survivants du style le plus ancien, apparenté à la simplicité vivante encore dans l'art batekö.

Style, dont les caractéristiques se seraient comme usées dans la répétition. Je ne puis que constater sa parenté étroite avec le style de la statuaire des autres tribus du Kasai toutes proches.

L'ART DES BUSHONGOS, ETC.

Les effigies des chefs bakubas, par la beauté de leur bois, la fini des détails apparaissent à certains comme les œuvres d'art les plus parfaites qu'ait produit le Congo belge. Mais il m'apparaît comme certain, que l'art bushongo et en général celui des tribus du Kasai est plus décoratif que statuaire. La figure humaine si largement employée n'y joue le plus souvent que le rôle d'un élément important du décor. Malgré certains traits vivants, d'un caractère poussé parfois jusqu'à la caricature, cet art est peut-être l'un des plus conventionnel qui soit en Afrique. Cela nous apparaît surtout dans les mille visages tous taillés sur le même patron, des fameux rhytons de bois qui furent la grande folie des premiers amateurs d'art africain. Les canons de la statuaire bushongo sont aussi stricts que ceux qui règlent l'ordonnance des velours de raphia, des boîtes à fard, des grands tambours, en un mot, de tous les objets qui ne portent que des combinaisons de droites groupées sur des fonds unis ou travaillées, suivant une géométrie d'une signification invariable. Nulle émotion, très peu de références naturelles, de belles formules appliquées avec froideur, mais avec élégance.

Vos bakubas se ressemblent tous : même forme de crâne dolicocephal è, même gros nez épais, même bouche aux lèvres strictement ourlées.

Seul Mikope M. Bula, le dernier venu du Musée du Congo à Tervueren, est un peu différent des autres, parce que l'ovale de son visage est plus aigu. Mais il a les mêmes yeux en forme de grain de riz ou de cauri, les mêmes traits. Ces statues que nous savons avoir été faites à des siècles de distance semblent sortir des mains du même artiste.

Il en va de même avec les goblets à tête humaine, mais ici le détail des formules varie de tribu à tribu, telle fait le nez pointu, telle autre l'œil bridé, telle l'oreille en simple ourlet courbé, tout en respectant le style général et la masse dans son ensemble.

Cette cristallisation des formes est bien le signe d'un art qui serait un aboutissement d'autres plus anciens. Quels sont ceux-ci ? Il apparaît impossible d'en décider à l'heure actuelle. D'après les traditions populaires recueillies par MM. Torday et Joyce dans leur remarquable monographie sur les Bushongos (Bruxelles 1911—Annales du Musée du Congo) ceux-ci seraient venus du Nord-Ouest, c'est à dire de la région du Shari. Apparentés aux races soudanaises, ils auraient eu au début de leur histoire un chef blanc de peau, un Berbère, supposent les auteurs cités. De fait, la civilisation matérielle et morale des Bushongos montrait un niveau très supérieur à celui de leurs voisins. De fortes traditions subsistaient qui étaient déjà en décadence à l'arrivée des Blancs. Historiquement se vérifie donc ce qui se manifeste dans l'art.

L'influence des artisans d'élite qu'étaient déjà les Bushongos à une époque reculée a dû être considérable autour d'eux.

Il n'est pas possible dans le cadre d'une étude restreinte et qui ne peut être
largement illustrée de montrer en quoi toute la statuaire de la région qui s’étend depuis la Djuma, affluent du Kasai, jusqu’à la Lualaba, vit sur la formule bushongo en l’adaptant parfois à certains naturalismes locaux, comme chez les Bapende, ou la stylisant à l’excès comme font les Basongé.

Avec ceux-ci, nous atteignons les limites de ce qu’on pourrait appeler le style du Kasai. Les Basongé touchent aux Benalulua dont l’art est tout particulier. Il semble difficile de le rattacher à celui du Kasai ou à celui des Balubas.

De tous, il est sans doute le plus riche en figures commémoratives, maternités ou chefs barbus, casqués, porteurs d’armes, de boucliers, couverts de colliers et de tatouages cicatriciels, d’une abondance et d’une somptuosité décorative extraordinaires.

Ces effigies royales font inévitablement penser à celles du Benin, mais sauf de très rares exceptions, ces dernières sont bien plus conventionnelles que les statues Bena-Lulua. Celles-ci à vrai dire, n’ont que la tête qui échappe à une formule, mais celle-ci est si particulière, si nettement caractérisée qu’on pourrait presque voir des portraits. Le nez parfois excessif, semble rappeler parfois celui des Bayakas. Mais on ne peut établir aucun rapport entre l’art de l’un et de l’autre endroit. Il est certain que c’est du style baluba que celui des Bena Lulua se rapproche le mieux si nous considérons le coupe générale du visage. D’autre part, les conventions suivies pour l’élaboration de la forme du tronc et des membres ne sont pas sans rappeler certaines de celles qui sont en usage dans certaines parties du Soudan.


La région d’art qui s’étend à peu près sur le territoire de la province du Tanganyika-Moero est une des plus riches régions d’art de l’Afrique et l’une de celle où la forme humaine est le plus souvent représentée. Les figures commémoratives d’ancêtres, les sièges à cariatides, les figurines dites “mendiants” dont l’usage a donné lieu à une gracieuse légende forte discutée, les cannes de chef à nombreuses figurines, les petits ivoires ancestraux, les masques cérémoniels, monoxyles, sont les sujets les plus répandus.

Comme les arts du centre que nous venons de passer rapidement en revue, l’art baluba qui est soumis à des règles académiques strictes. Il y a une formule, et presque une seule, pour l’établissement de la tête, la construction des yeux et du nez, celle de la bouche, des joues, du menton. Il semblerait, au contraire que pour le corps et les membres, les conventions cèdent souvent à la confrontation par l’artiste, de son œuvre avec les références naturelles. Et ces torsos arrondis où les muscles jouent, d’où les seins jaillissent, ces cuisses puissantes sur lesquelles s’appuient les cariatides, ces bras élégants, dont les mains sont souvent allongées et belles, confèrent à tous ces ouvrages balubas, une expression et une vie en un mot une plasticité qui n’apparaîtrait plus dans l’art du Congo, depuis (et partiellement encore . . .) certaines figurines de la région littorale de l’Atlantique.

La statuaire baluba apparaît donc comme procédant d’une statuaire plus ancienne, beaucoup plus savante dont elle serait comme un reflet lointain. En vérité, je ne vois que la sculpture égyptienne qui puisse en Afrique nous fournir les éléments techniques et conceptuels qui auraient fécondés les dons réels et profonds des Balubas.
Cette influence de l'Egypte n'est évidemment qu'une hypothèse bien frêle. Elle aurait mis d'autre part des centaines et des centaines d'années à pénétrer, on pourrait dire par osmose jusqu'au cœur du continent noir. Ou bien il aurait suffi de quelques statues d'une seule peut-être, transmise par quelqu'errant pour apporter à des techniciens habiles toute une part des secrets d'un art grandiose et profondément raffiné. Il est certain qu'il est exceptionnel de retrouver en Afrique en dehors de la vallée du Nil, la grandeur et la grâce à laquelle atteignent certaines figures d'ancêtres, certaines "mendiantes[",] certaines cariatides de tabourets, chez les Balubas. Quant au visage de ces statues, malgré l'académisme [sic] qui prèside à son élaboration, ce n'est pas la sérénité synonyme trop souvent de l'absence d'expression, qui l'anime, une vie réelle transparait au travers des formules, et là encore nous devons retrouver je crois la trace d'une fécondation lointaine par l'un des arts les plus définitifs, les plus complets qui fut au monde.

L'exposé rapide, d'autant plus superficiel qu'il ne peut s'accompagner de la riche documentation iconographique qui devrait en souligner les considérations, ne prétend pas à être complet. A l'intérieur des grandes écoles d'art il y aurait lieu de distinguer des variations locales, bien définies, presque toujours d'un intérêt esthétique, extrêmement prenant. A l'extérieur de ces grandes classes des styles principaux, de nombreux centres d'art, moins importants mais d'une valeur réelle existent aussi bien. Je les ai volontairement écartés tout en sâchant que dans l'étude approfondie qui est à faire, il y a lieu de leur réserver une place, de les intégrer dans l'ensemble.

Ainsi en va-t-il de l'art des Bangula, Grands piroguiers qui font des figures sauvages d'un style presque géométrique. Les Mongos qui modèlent des figures primitives en terre, semblable aux ouvrages des hommes du quaternaire. Des Mangbetus, probablement plus Soundanais que Bantus, raffinés, créateurs d'un véritable art civil de l'ivoire, de la poterie, ou du bois qui semble faire tout entier à la louange de leurs femmes aussi voluptueuses que belles. Des Waregas sauvages, ciseleurs d'ivoire dont on ne sait si le style, synthétique à l'excès est preuve de sauvagerie ou signe de décrépitude. Des Badjoks et de tant d'autres qui toute se rattachant aux styles du Kasai ont leur originalité particulière, etc. etc.

Un fait semble donc dominer le problème des styles dans la statuaire du Congo. Nous avons dans la zone africaine qui s'oriente vers l'Atlantique, des populations extrêmement douées pour les arts. Mais la statuaire fille du sens du rythme vivant dans la danse et la musique des noirs, apparaît comme l'expression créatrice la plus conforme à leur génie.

Aux deux extrémités du Congo, ce tout presque naturel, une influence extérieure à [sic] agi pour féconder le sentiment plastique. D'un côté, l'apport mystérieux et souverain du naturalisme noble des têtes d'Iifa, de l'autre, l'infiltration lente ou brusque, de la révélation égyptienne.

Entre les deux, partiellement pénétrées par les leçons du littoral de l'Atlantique ou de la région des Lacs, des arts formalistes plus charmants que grands tendent sans cesse vers la stylisation décorative.
Ces arts que les blancs, il y a quelques décades à peine ont trouvés pleins de vie, sont à peu près morts aujourd’hui.

La civilisation, le christianisme, le travail industriel n’ont fait qu’accélérer une décadence qu’était réelle avant qu’ils descendentissent des navires d’Europe amarrés dans le fleuve.

Mais les dons profonds de la race noire subsistent dans les vivants d’aujourd’hui. Il importe que les maîtres de l’Afrique s’en souviennent à temps et en tiennent compte. Si l’on veut réellement que les Noirs d’Afrique accèdent à ce stade de civilisation où celle-ci n’est ni un jouet dans ses produits, ni un esclavage dans son travail, il faut que l’on facilite et entretiennent la renaissance de leurs arts. Non pas dans les formes anciennes qui sont condamnées avec la culture dont ils faisaient partie, non pas dans les moules européens que les missions ne proposent aux Noirs que depuis trop longtemps. Mais une forme nouvelle, une beauté nouvelle dont la naissance serait sur la terre d’Afrique comme le signe le plus certain que les Noirs auraient enfin retrouvé une forme de bonheur qui leur soit propre.

[signed] Henri Lavachery
conservateur adjoint (collaborateur libre) des Musées Royaux
d’art et d’Histoire de Belgique

(D) ERNST MOERMAN, “ARMSTRONG”

Un jour qu’Armstrong jouait au loto avec ses soeurs
Il s’écria: “C’est moi qui ai la viande crue”.
Il s’en fit des lèvres et depuis ce jour,
Sa trompette a la nostalgie de leur premier baiser.

Terre noire où fleurit le pavot,
Armstrong conduit le torrent, en robe d’épousée, au sommeil.

Chaque fois que, pour moi, “Some of these days”
Traverse vingt épaisseurs de silence,
Il me vient un cheveu blanc
Dans un vertige d’ascenseur.

“All after you’re gone”
Est un miroir où la douleur se regarde vieillir.

“You driving me crazy” est une aube tremblante
Où sa trompette à la pupille dilatée
Se promène sans balancier sur les cordes de violon.

Et “Confessing” donne de l’appétit au malheur.

Chant de l’impatience, ta musique noctambule
Se répand dans mes veines où tout prend feu.
Armstrong, petit père Mississipi,
Le lac s’emplit de ta voix
Et la pluie remonte vers le ciel

Vers quels villages abordent tes flèches
Après nous avoir touchés?
Traversent-elles des chevaux sauvages
Avant de nous empoisonner?
Les racines de ton chant se mélangent dans la terre
En suivant les sillons que las foudre a tracés.
Les nuits de Harlem portent l’empreinte de tes ongles
Et la neige fond noire, au soleil de ton cœur.

Je marche, les yeux clos, vers un abîme
Où m’appellent les oeilades de tes notes femelles
Plus inquiétantes que l’appel de la mer.

(E) BÉNÉMIN PÉRET, “NOIRS SUR BLANCS. INTRODUCTION. (FRAGMENT)” (“BLACK AND WHITE IN BRAZIL”).

Si le nègre est, aux États-Unis, un sujet de répulsion, il est considéré, au Brésil, comme une sorte de syphilis sociale, un mal qu’il faut guérir sans l’avouer de crainte d’être mis en quarantaine.

Et cependant, s’il est un pays qu’il a économiquement créé, c’est à coup sûr le Brésil à tel point que, retracer l’histoire des nègres au Brésil ce serait écrire l’histoire même du pays.

[Depuis le second moitié du XVIIe siècle, on commençait à importer du “bois d’èbène” de la Côte d’Or, de la Côte d’Ivoire, du Dahomey, du Nigeria, de l’Angola, etc. pour supplier la main d’œuvre indienne extrêmement rebelle, difficile à capturer et, par suite, encore plus difficile à maintenir en esclavage.]

Depuis ce moment jusqu’à l’abolition de l’esclavage, en 1889, c’est-à-dire pendant trois siècles, trente millions de nègres ont été, selon les estimations minima des historiens brésiliens, importés au Brésil. Et ce nombre ne représente qu’une faible partie des nègres embarqués à destination de Bahia, qui était alors la capitale du pays et son principal port. Selon les mêmes historiens, les navires négriers quittaient les côtes d’Afrique chargés à couler de nègres entassés dans les cales comme des quartiers de viande dans les modernes frigorifiques de Buenos-Ayres. Recevant une nourriture à peine suffisante pour ne pas mourir de faim et la stricte quantité d’eau nécessaire pour ne pas succomber à la soif, ils ne venaient sur le pont qu’une seule fois par jour pendant qu’on jetait les morts par dessus bord, ce qui était la seule opération de nettoyage [sic] quotidienne qui fut pratiquée durant tout le voyage. Les suicides et les épidémies étaient si fréquents qu’il n’était pas rare que le navire arrivât vide en vue des côtes brésiliennes. En tout cas, les survivants du voyage étaient dans un tel état qu’ils étaient incapables de tout travail pendant plusieurs mois.

Une fois rendus sur les marchés d’esclaves ils étaient vendus, généralement aux planteurs de canne à sucre et de tabac qui détenaient à peu près toute l’activité productrice du pays. Traavaillant du lever au coucher du soleil sous la surveillance d’un feitor, sorte de garde-chiourme auxquels les surveillants du monstrueux bagne de la Guyane n’ont rien à envier et qui étaient chargés de stimuler leur activité par
d’innombrables coups de trique et de fouet, ils étaient la nuit venue, enfermés dans la senzala où ils étaient la plupart du temps enchaînés.

Sous-limentes, plus maltraités que les bêtes de somme qu’ils substituaient souvent, séparés de leurs enfants qui, selon le code de l’esclavage appartenaient à leurs maîtres et étaient vendus dès qu’ils représentaient une valeur marchande, était-il étonnant qu’ils s’enfuissent et se révoltassent?

Les fuites furent toujours très fréquentes, si fréquentes même qu’il fallut bientôt créer un corps de police spécial pour rechercher les fugitifs, corps qui était commandé par les capitaines do matto (capitaines de la forêt) dont la cruauté est restée proverbiale au Brésil et qui tuaient tout fugitif dont la prise présentait quelque difficulté. Réfugiés dans la forêt vierge, les échappés formaient des associations qu’ils appelaient quilombos et dont les membres étaient la plupart du temps liés par le serment de ne pas se rendre sous peine de ne plus être acceptés dans aucun quilombo et même parfois sous peine de mort. L’histoire régionale du Brésil signale de ces quilombos de tous les côtés. Cependant le plus important de tous fut celui de Palmares, dans l’actuel état de Pernambouc, qui competa plusieurs dizaines de milliers de noirs fugitifs et dont l’histoire, à cause de son analogie avec la révolte de Spartacus mérite d’être contée.

Le quilombo de Palmares se serait constitué peu de temps après l’expulsion des Hollandais de la province de Pernambouc qu’ils occupèrent pendant un demi-siècle environ, c’est-à-dire dans le dernier tiers du XVIIe siècle. Ayant résisté à plusieurs attaques des Portugais, le quilombo de Palacquit rapidement parmi les esclaves de la région un prestige formidable et la plupart des autres quilombos de la région vinrent se joindre à lui, accroissant encore l’attraction qu’il exerçait déjà sur les esclaves qui ne rêvaient plus que de s’y rendre.

Les membres de ce quilombo s’étaient constitués en une république dont le chef, à la fois chef politique et chef religieux, avait le titre de Zumbi ou N’zumbi (en langue bantou: chef). Mais ce chef n’avait dans la vie quotidienne aucune prérogative particulière. Il n’était chef que lorsque la nécessité d’une direction se faisait sentir, c’est-à-dire lors des fêtes religieuses et des combats. La propriété privée n’existait pas. Les cultures étaient communes ainsi que les produits de la pêche et de la chasse. Les rares indications qu’on possède sur l’organisation familiale de ce quilombo permettent de supposer que les femmes étaient les épouses de tous, mais comme elles étaient moins nombreuses que les hommes on peut en conclure que la famille devait revêtir, chez eux, une forme hybride tenant du mariage par groupe et de la polyandrie.

Le quilombo de Palmares subsista pendant une vingtaine d’années et pendant tout ce temps ne cessa pas de accroître. Il fallut une véritable armée pour le réduire. Les noirs de Palmares luttaient jusqu’au bout et beaucoup, à l’exemple du Zumbi, se suicidèrent plutôt que de se rendre. Seuls quelques centaines échappèrent au massacre et furent ramenés en esclavage.

Les révoltes d’esclaves dans les plantations étaient également très fréquentes mais elles restaient la plupart du temps localisées à la plantation ou elles avaient éclaté à cause de la difficulté des communications entre les noirs des différentes plantations souvent fort éloignées les unes des autres. Les premières révoltes importantes que l’histoire ait enregistrées sont celles de Bahia et de Minas Geraes, à la fin du XVIIIe siècle. Elles furent naturellement réprimées d’une manière sanglante. Puis on assista de 1800 à 1835 à toute une série de révoltes ayant toutes pour théâtre la ville de Bahia, à l’exception de deux: une de peu d’importance à Rio de Janeiro et une autre dans l’Etat de Maranhão. Mais cette dernière ne fut pas comme les autres exclusivement
une révolte d'esclaves. Ce fut plutôt une sorte de Jacquerie brésilienne dans laquelle blancs, indiens, métis de toutes sortes et nègres fraternisèrent contre l'oppresseur portugais.

De toutes les révoltes d'esclaves qui éclatèrent à Bahia, la plus importante fut la dernière, la seule qui eut un véritable programme revendicatif politique et social. Dans toutes ces révoltes, l'élément dirigeant était le noir musulman: les Haoussas dans les premières et les Nagès dans les dernières. À vrai dire les Nagès ne sont pas à proprement parler des noirs musulmans comme les Haoussas mais des noirs qui ont subi l'influence islamique et dont certaines tribus ont adopté cette religion. Il est vrai que leur caractère ethnique est moins nettement défini que celui des Haoussas qui formaient avant l'invasion européenne une nation nettement déterminée vivant sur les rives du moyen Niger, dans l'actuelle colonie anglaise du Nigeria. Les Nagès, eux, vivent encore dans la région de Lagos, Porto Novo, etc. Ils ont une langue qui sert de langue auxiliaire à tous les peuples de la région, — même aux Haoussas, — jusqu'au Niger d'un côté et jusqu'en Côte d'Ivoire d'autre part. Il s'ensuit qu'au Brésil on désignait sous le nom de Nagô tout esclave qui parlait cette langue sans distinguer si c'était sa langue propre ou l'“esperanto” qui lui permettait de correspondre avec la plupart des autres esclaves.

Dans la nuit du 6 au 7 janvier 1835 la révolte éclata simultanément en divers points de la ville de Bahia. Les insurgés, armés de lances, de haches, de pelles ou de pioches se précipitèrent vers l'Arsenal. Malheureusement le mouvement avait été trahi et les insurgés furent reçus par un feu nourri alors qu'ils ne s'attendaient à ne trouver qu'une faible garde. Au lendemain la révolte était éteinte. Au procès qui eut lieu ensuite les chefs des insurgés avouèrent qu'ils avaient projeté de massacrer les autorités et en général tous ceux qui leur résistaient pour instituer une république nègre. Ce fut la dernière révolte des esclaves du Brésil.

Protégé par les lois en vigueur, couvert par l'autorité morale de l'innomable église catholique toujours prête à sanctifier les exactions dont elle profite, il semblait que l'esclavage dut subsister longtemps encore. Cependant, un mouvement contre l'esclavage commençait déjà à se dessiner. Une révolution, ou plutôt une conspiration se formait à Pernambouc en 1817 dont le but était avant tout la création d'une république indépendante dite “Confédération de l'Equateur,” séparée de la métropole portugaise. Cette future république se proposait d'abolir l'esclavage. La conspiration fut découverte avant que les conjurés eussent eu la possibilité de réaliser leurs projets.

Six ans plus tard l'indépendance était proclamée et le nouveau gouvernement impérial qui venait de se former avec l'appui de l'or anglais, comme tous les nouveaux États de l'Amérique latine, participait aux accords internationaux interdisant la traite des nègres. Cependant l'esclavage était loin d'être aboli au Brésil. On peut même dire que depuis le moment où le gouvernement brésilien s'engagea à ne pas importer de nouveaux esclaves, le trafic prit une intensité qu'il n'avait jamais connue jusque là, passant, selon Perdigão Malheiro, d'une moyenne annuelle de 20.000 esclaves nouveaux au début du XIXe siècle à 50.000 environ entre 1845 et 1850.

Ces esclaves étaient, dans leur majorité employés dans la culture sucrière qui était la principale richesse du Brésil à l'époque. Mais le déclin du sucre brésilien avait déjà commencé sur le marché mondial. Ce déclin ayant pour conséquence un appauvrissement continu des planteurs fit que ceux-ci s'accrochèrent à l'esclavage comme à leur dernière planche de salut quoique bientôt la comparaison entre le rendement du travail esclave et celui du travail salarié vint démontrer la supériorité du second sur le premier. Mais les esclaves représentaient un capital dont la valeur s'accrut...
considérablement après les années 50, par suite des entraves que le gouvernement avait été obligé d’apporter à la contre bande des navires négriers et les planteurs esclavagistes qui étaient les meilleurs soutiens du gouvernement impérial s’opposaient à toute mesure tendant à restreindre leurs droits.

Par ailleurs, le planteur utilisant des travailleurs salariés pour la mise en valeur de ses terres n’avait pas besoin d’immobiliser un capital aussi important que celui qui avait acheté des esclaves et pouvait donc concurrencer victorieusement celui-ci. Dès 1830, la comparaison avait pu se faire dans les États du sud où l’on avait appelé des travailleurs européens, provenant surtout d’Allemagne, de Pologne et de France. Aussi, lorsque vers 1850-1860 la culture du café fut introduite dans l’État de São Paulo, les planteurs de cet État firent-ils les plus ardents propagandistes d’une politique d’immigration dont les planteurs de canne du nord ne voulaient pas entendre parler car elle nuisait à leurs intérêts en abaissant la valeur de leurs esclaves. Les premiers espéraient obtenir, avec l’abolition de l’esclavage, une main-d’œuvre “nationale” déjà habituée au climat et par suite plus productive que la main-d’œuvre d’immigration. Et, comme l’empire s’appuyait sur les propriétaires esclavagistes, les planteurs de café devinrent républicains.

L’empire, pressé par le mouvement anti-esclavagiste, décréta en 1871 que les enfants d’esclaves naitraient libres. Le mouvement croissant encore, les États de Ceará et d’Amazonas abolirent l’esclavage sur leur territoire en 1884. Le nombre restreint des noirs captifs existant, dans ces États leur permettrait de réaliser cette réforme à peu de frais. L’année suivante, le gouvernement impérial libérait les esclaves âgés de plus de 60 ans. En fin le 13 mai 1889, la princesse Isabelle, régente de [sic] en l’absence de l’empereur en convalescence en Europe, abolit l’esclavage, libérant 723.000 nègres.

Ces noirs libérés refluerent vers les villes ou les attendait une misère effroyable qui les obliga à revenir bientôt travailler dans les plantations qu’ils avaient quittées. Mais la soudaine libération de tous ces esclaves avait provoqué une crise économique très grave dans tout le pays, crise qui est à l’origine d’ premier mouvement ouvrier que le Brésil ait connu et qui réunit les travailleurs noirs et blancs contre leurs oppresseurs, encore que les ouvriers blancs fissent assez rares à l’époque.

La situation des noirs libérés s’est-elle améliorée du fait de leur libération? En général, oui. Encore y a-t-il des exceptions graves. La république a bien, en 1889, proclamé, comme la Constituante française un siècle plus tôt que “tous les hommes étaient libres et égaux en droit”, mais s’ils avaient ces “droits”, ils n’avaient aucune possibilité de les défendre. Il est vrai que les nègres, au Brésil, sont dans leur immense majorité, que ce soit à la ville ou aux champs, des travailleurs. La petite-bourgeoisie nègre est très rare et la bourgeoisie de couleur plus rare encore, si rare même qu’on pourrait en compter ses représentants: elle ne comprend certainement pas plus de cent familles dans tout le pays. Il s’ensuit que le nègre est toujours considéré, au Brésil, avec un dédain à peine masqué qu’un bourgeois blanc serre la main d’un nègre comme s’il était de sa race, c’est là un sujet d’étonnement pour le nègre. Au contraire, parmi les classes laborieuses, les blancs et les gens de couleur vivent en général sur un pied de stricte égalité. Il est vrai que leur vie est identique, qu’ils travaillent côte à côte soumis à la plus épouvantable sujétion, victimes de la même misère qui oblige une bonne moitié de la population à marcher pieds nus pour que la bourgeoisie puisse passer la moitié de l’année dans les boîtes de nuit de Montmartre.

Cependant dans les États de Rio de Janeiro, de São Paulo et de Minas Gerais, le nègre est généralement un peu plus durement exploité que le blanc. On a cherché par
Peret/Noirs sur Blancs

la à opposer deux catégories de travailleurs comme on a cherché plus tard à opposer les travailleurs étrangers aux brésiliens. Mais si dans ce dernier cas on a obtenu quelques résultats depuis l’avènement de la dictature actuelle, grâce au développement d’une hystérie chauvine qui ravirait nos vieilles canailles nationalistes et grâce aussi au très faible niveau de la conscience de classe des travailleurs brésiliens généralement inorganisés, il n’a pas été possible de créer entre les travailleurs une véritable division basée sur la teinte de leur épidémie.

Au nord (j’entends par là tout le Brésil depuis l’État de Bahia jusqu’à la Guyane française) cette opération n’a pas été possible pour d’autres raisons: d’abord le faible niveau de vie des travailleurs, niveau tellement bas qu’il est impossible (en dehors de l’inévitable division en travailleurs industriels et agricoles) de créer une couche qui serait défavorisée par rapport à l’autre; en outre, dans certaines régions, les travailleurs de couleur forme l’immense majorité des producteurs, les blancs n’occupant guère que les postes de direction et de contrôle.

C’est ainsi qu’à Bahia, il y a un siècle la population qui comprenait 50.000 habitants se divisait en 26.000 noirs purs, 13.000 mulâtres et métis divers et 11.000 blancs. La proportion de ceux-ci dans le chiffre total de la population actuelle n’a que fort peu augmenté. Par contre la proportion des noirs a beaucoup diminué au profit des mulâtres et métis qui forment aujourd’hui la grosse majorité de la population ouvrière de la ville. Ces métis, à Bahia comme dans le reste du pays, se répartissent en caboclos, issus de blancs et d’indiens et en cafusos qui résultent du mélange des races noires et indiennes. Ces deux genres de métis se sont à leur tour mélangés à la race blanche, puis entre eux, d’où une inextricable gamme de couleurs où il est souvent extrêmement difficile de retrouver l’apport des trois races. Quant à donner des chiffres relatifs à la population colorée du Brésil c’est là chose presque impossible vu qu’il n’existe aucune statistique récente donnant des indications sur ce point. Cependant on peut estimer que les noirs et métis divers doivent représenter 25 à 30% de la population brésilienne. Ceci sans parler des Indiens qui occupent les forêts de l’intérieur et dont le nombre avoisine le million. C’est donc 10 millions d’hommes de couleur au bas mot qui vivent au Brésil, 10 millions d’hommes dont on peut estimer que les 4/5 environ vivent répartis dans les cinq États de Bahia, Minas Geraes, Rio de Janeiro, Espiritu Santo et Maranhão. Et de ces 10 millions d’hommes on peut estimer également que les 4/5 sont agriculteurs, travaillent dans des plantations, soumis à un régime qui rappelle souvent l’esclavage.

L’histoire du Brésil, de l’abolition de l’esclavage à la fin de la guerre, est presque exempte d’agitation ouvrière. Il convient d’en rechercher la raison dans le très faible niveau atteint par l’industrie avant la guerre et, par suite, dans la conscience de classe très diffuse du prolétariat brésilien.

Il n’y a lieu de noter pendant toute cette période, qu’une seule révolte populaire: celle des équipages de la marine de guerre qui comportaient une forte proportion de nègres. Cette révolte fut provoquée par les mauvais traitements que les marins subissaient. Le moindre manquement à la discipline était puni de centaines de coups de fouet. Les marins qui montaient deux des plus puissants cuirassés du monde à l’époque, constituèrent un “comité d’action” qui lança un manifeste appelant à la révolte. Celle-ci éclata le 22 novembre 1910. Le chef élu fut un nègre, João Candido Felisberto qui s’entoura d’un état-major, également élu par les équipages, ou ne figurait aucun homme possédant un grade supérieur à celui de second-maître. Les officiers furent chassés et ceux qui résistèrent, exécutés. Les équipages sommèrent ensuite le
gouvernement de les amnistier et de supprimer les châtiments corporels sous peine de bombardement de la ville de Rio de Janeiro dans le port de laquelle les navires étaient ombrés. Le gouvernement capitula, faute de moyens de leur résister. Mais, après avoir désarmé les navires, le gouvernement provoqua une nouvelle révolte 15 jours plus tard et, à la faveur de celle-ci, arrêta tous les chefs du premier mouvement. Plus de mille marins furent déportés dans les forêts et y périrent. Les chefs furent soumis à un régime de torture et de détention renouvelé de l'Inquisition, régime qui dura deux ans, jusqu'à la comparution des quelques survivants devant un conseil de guerre qui les acquitta au moment même ou le gouvernement n'ayant plus rien à craindre d'eux, les amnistiait.

Cependant leur sacrifice n'avait pas été inutile car les châtiments corporels ne reparurent plus jamais.

Pendant la guerre, la croissance rapide de l'industrie, provoqua en même temps qu'une recrudescence de l'immigration provenant des pays neutres un commencement d'exode de la population vers les villes.

La crise révolutionnaire mondiale de 1917 eut sa répercussion au Brésil ou des grèves très importantes éclatèrent croissant en nombre et en importance jusqu'à la grève générale de 1919 qui paralysa totalement l'activité économique des deux plus importants centres du Brésil: Rio de Janeiro et São Paulo. En 1920 le mouvement s'apaisa.

Dans ces grèves, comme dans la révolte de la marine de 1910, le combat n'était plus, comme au siècle passé, mené par une race contre ses oppresseurs mais par une classe ou se trouvaient mélangées les races. Blancs, noirs et métris étaient solidaires contre l'ennemi commun que l'ouvrier brésilien identifiait justement avec le patron. Et, comme celui-ci est le plus souvent étranger, la petite-bourgeoisie, dont l'importance numérique va croissant et qui voudrait prendre une part plus active aux affaires de l'Etat, partit en croisade contre les capitalistes étrangers qu'elle dénonça au prolétariat comme les agents de l'impérialisme anglo-américain, mais en négligeant de montrer que le capitalisme national était retenu à celui d'Europe et des Etats-Unis par les liens d'une étroite servitude qu'expriment mieux que tout autre argument les quelque 50 milliards de francs investis au Brésil par l'étranger. Le faible niveau de culture de la masse lui permit de mener à bien cette besogne et de détourner la colère de la classe ouvrière contre le capital étranger, sauvegardant ainsi la bourgeoisie nationale à laquelle elle était liée. C'est là l'origine de toutes les révolutions "anti-impérialistes" petites-bourgeoises qui ont éclaté en Amérique latine ces dernières années, révolutions condamnées avant de naître à renforcer la domination du capital étranger à moins que le prolétariat intervenant,—comme au Chili,—tente de l'orienter dans la voie communiste.

[signed] Benjamin Péret

(F) LÉON PIERRE-QUINT, “RACES ET NATIONS”
("RACES AND NATIONS").

§1. Les bienfaits de la colonisation.

Il n'est guère possible à un voyageur contemporain de visiter le centre de l'Afrique sans que s'imposent à lui les terribles et complexes problèmes de la colonisation. Il y a
trois ans, André Gide s’est rendu au Congo. Son témoignage m’est particulièrement précieux: Passionné de vérité, Gide contrôle et vérifie, avec une patience extrême, chacune de ses affirmations. Il quittait alors la France, l’“esprit non prévenu”; il n’emportait avec lui que des filets à papillons; il partait pour le plaisir, espérant jouir, dans la volupté et l’oubli, de la nature, du ciel bleu et de la forêt vierge.

Mais dès les premières escales, le pays enchanteur changea d’aspect. A Libreville, c’est la disette. Bordeaux a expédié des conserves, mais elles sont avariées. A Brazzaville, aucune hygiène; les épidémies sévissent: c’est le prologue.

A peine s’est-il engagé par les sentes où les Européens s’aventurent rarement, en plein Oubanghi, qu’il voit venir à sa rencontre une petite caravane de noirs, le plus lamentable bétail humain qui se puisse imaginer. “Quinze femmes et deux hommes attachés au cou par la même corde . . . à peine en état de se porter eux-mêmes”,avançant “escortés de gardes armés de fouets à cinq lanières”. Dans de tout autres régions, ce sont d’autres colonnes plus misérables encore. Gide interroge. On n’ose lui répondre. La terreur règne partout. Ce sont des noirs qui fuient le portage. Pas de chemins de fer, ni de routes, ni de voies d’eau. Les autorités sont obligées, pour assurer les transports, de mobiliser des indigènes de force et de lancer à leur poursuite des miliciens, qui se livrent à une véritable chasse à l’homme. Dès lors, les habitants s’enfuient, abandonnant leurs cultures. Les familles s’égaient. Chacun va vivre dans la brousse, au fond des cavernes, comme des fauves. Les rapports secrets des administrateurs confirment ces faits. D’un pays riche, de villages florissants, il ne reste souvent que des ruines.

Pendant la guerre de 1914, les indigènes étaient recrutés de la même manière. Le pourcentage de soldats, que chaque province devait donner, était fixé d’avance par l’administration militaire. Lorsqu’un village ne fournissait pas assez d’hommes, il était considéré comme insoumis. Subitement, une escouade de miliciens le cernait. Des coups de feu étaient tirés dans les cases, que, par ailleurs, on incendiait si les noirs n’en sortaient pas assez vite. Alors, apeurés, traqués, hagards, les noirs se livraient. Le troupeau était expédié, sous bonne garde, jusqu’au prochain centre administratif. Les bancals, les infirmes étaient renvoyés chez eux; les autres, dirigés, après peu de temps, vers le front.

Aujourd’hui, le véritable front, c’est le chantier de la voie ferrée qui doit relier, un jour, Brazzaville à Pointe Noire. Là, les outils manquent. Le nègre remplace la machine, le camion, la grue. “Il faut accepter le sacrifice de six à huit mille hommes, a dit M. Antonelli, le Gouverneur Général, ou renoncer au chemin de fer”. Le sacrifice s’élevait en 1929, à 17.000 hommes et il restait 300 kilomètres à construire.

§ 2. La propagande officielle, progrès dans les moeurs.

Je reste souvent stupéfait et douloureusement rêveur devant de telles révélations. Je me demande comment le public peut admettre la propagande gouvernementale lorsqu’elle est si évidemment contredite par la réalité. Guerre de la Liberte et du Droit! Bienfaits de la colonisation! Comment est-il possible que la petite bourgeoisie, que je veux croire de bonne foi, ne soit pas frappée par la puissance d’hypocrisie des mensonges officiels?

Le public manquerait-il d’informations? Non. Mais le régime colonial est dépeint, même par les écrivains les plus courageux, avec une telle circonspection, une telle prudence, une telle volonté de ne pas remonter à l’origine même du mal, que ses abus
apparaissent comme des cas exceptionnels, alors qu’ils constituent un état de choses toléré, admis, normal. Quand Gide parle de nègres enchaînés, fouettés, brûlés, torturés, le public reconnaît qu’il y a parfois excès de pouvoir d’un administrateur, mais il ignore que ces “scandales”, qu’il croit isolés, se répètent tous les jours.

Le saurait-il, qu’il considèrerait ces exactions comme un mal inévitable. Dans sa grande majorité, l’opinion se figure que la cruauté humaine, l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme, la guerre sont dans l’ordre de la nature, et notamment, que les blancs doivent envahir les autres parties du monde et faire travailler pour eux les populations indigènes. Dès lors, la propagande officielle apparaît comme une invention bienfaisante, destinée à adoucir chez le petit bourgeois la vue d’une réalité fatale et trop brutale, qui ferait saigner son coeur. . . .

On ne saurait attribuer trop d’importance au rôle de cette propagande. Ce qu’il y a de changé effectivement depuis un ou deux siècles, c’est son existence. Les gouvernements ont repris, en effet, pour leur compte les déclarations des Encyclopédistes et des philosophes français sur les Droits de l’Homme, les élucubrations sentimentales des anti-esclavagistes.

Ils vantent, aujourd’hui, le caractère civilisateur de leurs méthodes de colonisation dans toutes sortes de sermons, de discours, de publications qu’ils répandent à travers le monde. Cependant, entre ces méthodes et celles des nègres des siècles précédents, il n’y a guère de différences. Ainsi, les transports des nègres, expédiés de Fort-Archambault vers la côte pour la construction de la voie ferrée, ressemblent étonnamment aux transports des “pièces d’ébène”, jadis, vers l’Amérique: les noirs sont entassés, aujourd’hui, sur des cargos, meurent, comme autrefois, par quantités: les uns tombent dans le fleuve et se noient; les autres sont brûlés par les escarbilles des cheminées: d’autres, sans couvertures, transis de froid, la nuit, s’éteignent dans la fièvre 2.

En 1820, environ, un philanthrope exposa publiquement, en France, les menottes, les crapottes, les chaînes, les fouets dont se servaient alors les nègres. Il y eut, à cette époque, une vive émotion dans le public. Aujourd’hui, l’opinion ne s’inquiéterait plus, puisque tout le monde est convaincu, et que les plus jeunes écoliers ont appris que les Européens se rendent aux colonies pour y apporter les bienfaits de la civilisation. Une telle croyance constitue bien un progrès: les indigènes, eux-mêmes, finissent par croire que les blancs viennent chez eux pour les sauver de la damnation et de la misère; ils s’étonnent seulement que l’avènement du royaume du ciel sur terre se fasse attendre si longtemps.

§ 3. Le régime des castes, conséquence de toute colonisation.

On retrouve ces oppositions, adoucies par des homélies humanitaires, non seulement aux colonies, mais dans les anciennes possessions européennes, devenues aujourd’hui des nations indépendantes, aux États-Unis, par exemple. Les Américains de pur sang ont établi une “ligne” infranchissable entre eux et les noirs. Ils les ont repoussés dans leurs propres quartiers comme des lépreux. Malheur à l’imprudent qui s’aventure hors des ghettos: le lynching est la sanction qui le menace, le lynching, nouvelle évocation biblique de la lapidation. Ainsi, les races, nettement séparées les unes des autres, s’étagent, aux États-Unis, en castes successives. Au bas de l’échelle sociale: les noirs et les Chinois; au sommet, les Anglo-Saxons. Cependant, quand une Américaine, comme
Miss Mayo, dénonce précisément la honte et l'abomination de ce régime des castes, tel qu'il est appliqué ... aux Indes, tout le public applaudit: on plaint les pauvres parias, qu'aucun Indou ne doit “toucher”, sans penser naturellement aux noirs qui dans les trains et les tramways des États du Sud, voyagent dans des compartiments spéciaux pour que les blancs n'aient pas à les approcher. C'est que la statue de la Liberté, qui domine le port de New-York, rassure la conscience de chaque Américain. La propagande n'affirme-t-elle pas que les États-Unis sont le premier pays qui proclama les Droits du citoyen? Si l'idéal est sauf, qu'importe les accommodements qu'il faut prendre, parfois, dans la réalité de la vie. Ainsi les préjugés de race se cachent, aujourd'hui, sous une idéologie mensongère, mais ils sont toujours aussi tenaces, aussi cruels, aussi universels.

§4. Les préjugés de race, ou l'absence d'esprit de relativisme.

Chaque groupement collectif se croit seul élu par les Dieux, seul conduit vers la Vérité, seul appelé à dominer la terre pour la plus grande gloire du ciel. Dans ce sentiment de supériorité, il y a cette idée que les autres hommes ne sont pas tout-à-fait des hommes. Ces sont véritablement des “étrangers”. Ont-ils une âme? Une sensibilité? Une intelligence? C'est peu probable. Certains éléments, constitutifs de la nature humaine, leur fait défaut. Ils font partie d’un vague et indistinct troupeau, dénué par la nature, plus ou moins nocif et qu’il s’agit de tenir en respect. Chaque race, chaque peuple, chaque classe sociale a, de tous temps, désigné d’un terme générique de mépris le reste des hommes n’appartenant pas à leur groupe; pour les Grecs, ce sont les “barbares”; pour les Juifs, ce sont les “païens”; pour les classes dirigeantes, c’est la “marmaille” populaire, les “voyous”. Ces croyances correspondent au vieux dogmatisme religieux. Elles s’expliquaient à l’époque où chaque race se figurait être presque seule au monde; où elle se représentait l’univers comme limité à une toute petite portion de notre globe: au-dessus d’elle, le ciel, voûte solide, piqué d’étoiles; caché dans le ciel, un Dieu qui, comme chez les Juifs, se promenait chaque soir, dans le Jardin du Paradis. Aujourd’hui, où la terre n’est plus qu’un point dans l’espace, où nous voyons les civilisations naître, grandir et mourir, l’infini a pris de tout autres proportions; l’espace s’est agrandi; l’idée d’absolu n’a plus la même signification. Ces notions modernes devraient faire pénétrer dans l’âme des conceptions sociales toute nouvelles. Malheureusement, les instincts ataviques des masses n’ont pas évolué avec le développement de nos connaissances. Ce sera cependant l’honneur du 18ᵉ siècle français d’avoir introduit, pour la première fois dans l’esprit, l’idée de relativité: ce qui différencie les peuples, ce sont des circonstances de temps et de lieu, leur éducation, leur degré d’évolution. Envisagé ainsi, à travers l’histoire, le concept de race perd de son importance. Il n’a plus rien d’absolu. Il ne sépare pas plus les hommes que ne les séparent, au sein d’une même famille, leur taille, la couleur de leurs yeux ou de leurs cheveux.

§5. Les préjugés de race sur les droits du plus fort.

Les préjugés de race ne correspondent pas seulement aux conceptions intellectuelles des peuples, ils sont également à une même époque l’expression de leurs rapports de forces matérielles. Les Hébreux, pour qui l’univers ne dépassait pas les confins de la Terre Promise, ont donné l’exemple le plus caractéristique d’orgueil racial. Cependant,
ironie du destin, ils sont devenus les hommes les plus vilipendés du monde. Le renversement de leur situation a daté du jour où ils ont été réduits en captivité. Pour qu’un peuple puisse croire qu’il est le seul représentant de l’espèce humaine, il faut qu’il domine tous ceux qui l’entourent. Vaincu, il se figure qu’il est abandonné de ses Dieux. Son assurance tombe. Les parias s’imaginent qu’ils portent le poids des fautes de leurs ancêtres. L’esclave se sent méprisable parce qu’il est esclave. Réciproquement, le patricien, le brahmane, Rome, par le simple fait qu’ils régnaient sur d’autres hommes, ne doutaient plus de leur supériorité innée. Car il n’y a aucune différence de nature entre les préjugés de race, de nation ou de classe. L’ordre social, international, colonial repose sur cette croyance que tout pouvoir est de droit divin. Croyance mystique que partagent, le plus souvent, l’opprresseur et l’opprimé. Mais chacun d’eux ne connaissait que son point de vue. Nous rions aux dépens des nègres qui considèrent tout gouverneur blanc comme un dieu. Mais nous devrions également nous moquer des blancs, qui ne voient qu’une brute dans chaque nègre. Effectivement, plus le blanc est bête et plus son autorité matérielle est grande, plus il méprise l’indigène. Aussi ce n’est pas le préjugé racial qui amène un peuple à en persécuter un autre, mais c’est, au contraire, le pouvoir de persécution qui engendre le préjugé. La race qui détient la puissance matérielle et celle qui la subit pensent l’une et l’autre que l’inégalité est conforme à la loi divine. Et si cette organisation hiérarchique entre races ou classes a tant de force, c’est précisément parce que les hommes ont la certitude, d’essence religieuse, que les classes ou les races ne peuvent entretenir entre elles que des rapports de subordonné à supérieur.

§6. La résignation des opprimés renforce les préjugés de race.

Le christianisme,—(celui des Evangiles) créa la première grande brèche dans ce système: il établissait l’égalité des âmes, mais il abandonnait les hommes, sur terre, à leur destin maudit, comme si cette présente vie de misère n’avait guère d’importance. Il faut attendre 89 pour que les hommes osent manifester cette pensée, à savoir que les injustices ne sont pas une nécessité ici-bas et que la fonction sociale ou la couleur de la peau ne crée pas nécessairement des privilèges.

Quand les races cèdent aux vieux préjugés traditionnels, elles se laissent peu à peu absorber par la vainqueur. Ainsi, dans l’Antiquité, les Grecs disparurent devant les Romains, e[t] puis, plus tard, les Romains, devant les Barbares. Sans doute, ces races conquises imposaient leur propre civilisation aux peuples qui les dominaient, mais leur résignation à leur propre destin les conduisait néanmoins à la mort. Aujourd’hui, nous voyons, de même, s’étendre peu à peu, sous l’oppression des Européens, les nantis bienheureux de Tahiti et des autres îles de cet archipel, qui bientôt ne laisseront plus que le souvenir de leur nom, comme les Azteques ou les Incas.

Au contraire, les peuples colonisés qui sont assez cultivés pour s’appuyer, plus ou moins consciemment, sur les principes de 89 chassent, tôt ou tard, leurs maîtres. Au contact des blancs, ces peuples croissent, prospèrent et se multiplient. Ainsi les Indous ou les Indo-Chinois rejettentront l’envahisseur parce qu’ils réclament leur indépendance en s’appuyant sur la notion d’égalité. A laquelle de ces deux grandes catégories appartiennent les colonies noires? Hélas! Il faut bien l’avouer: en Afrique, sous un régime de force et d’exaction, les noirs s’éteignent doucement, meurent un à un, en silence, comme de petits ballons qui se dégonflent. Sans doute, des révoltes ont eu lieu au Congo, mais qui restèrent sans portée. Il manque à ces populations noires
une élite, qui s'adapte à la pensée révolutionnaire. Même aux États-Unis,—et contrairement à une opinion couramment répandue,—la supériorité du nombre des naissances par rapport au nombre des décès a tendance à décroître.

§7. L'idée d'homme doit primer l'idée de race.

Pour porter remède à cette situation, des esprits bien intentionnés se figurent qu'il suffit de prouver aux noirs eux-mêmes et au reste du monde que leur race, quoique opprimée, n'est cependant pas dénuée de toutes qualités. Ainsi les amis des noirs s'appliquent à démontrer que les malheureux fils de Cham ne sont pas si paresseux, si menteurs, si grossiers qu'on le pense communément. N'y a-t-il pas parmi eux, nous dit-on, de remarquables musiciens, de charmants chanteurs, des êtres pleins de délicieuses qualités d'ingénuité? Sans doute. Mais quand on aura démontré que les noirs sont les hommes les plus intelligents du globe, les plus généreux, les plus travailleurs, je ne pense pas que leur situation se sera, en aucune façon, améliorée. Les Européens adopteront ce qu'ils trouveront de plus précieux dans leur civilisation; ils n'ont pas hésité, en fait, à infuser dans quelques-uns de leurs arts un sentiments nouveau, emprunté précisément aux noirs; mais cette influence du vaincu sur le vainqueur n'a jamais empêché ce dernier d'exercer jusqu'au bout son pouvoir de domination, d'absorption ou de mort.

C'est une erreur que de vouloir défendre les noirs en faisant ressortir leur valeur. Car quelle qu'elle soit l'oppresser n'en pensera pas moins que l'opprimé lui est inférieur, par le simple fait, je l'ai dit, qu'il l'opprime. Ainsi les Juifs peuvent conquérir les places les plus élevées dans la société, et cela malgré les empêchements qui sont dressés devant eux, ils peuvent manifester du talent ou du génie, la haine qu'ils inspirent ne diminue en rien par ces faits. La seule propagande valable et véritablement féconde doit prendre un caractère plus général; il s'agit de remonter à l'idée d'homme et de continuer les recherches idéologiques entreprises dans ce domaine par les Encyclopédistes. On ne saurait trop leur attacher d'importance. Ce n'est pas hasard que la plupart des intellectuels bourgeois contemporains essaient de dévaloriser la pensée d'un Voltaire, d'un Diderot, d'un Rousseau, et qu'au contraire, en Asie, en Chine, aux Indes, la plupart des jeunes indigènes, qui étudient les lettres françaises, s'intéressent uniquement aux philosophes du 18° siècle. Pour libérer l'homme de sa race, de sa nation, de sa classe, il faut retirer à ces cadres leur caractère immobile et sacré, produits de l'activité collective humaine et qui sont essentiellement perfectibles. Dès l'instant où ils seront adaptés à l'état des nos connaissances historiques, ethnographiques, psychologiques actuelles, ces cadres perdront rapidement tout ce qu'ils ont de tyrannique. Dès que l'homme sera détaché de Dieu, rattaché à la terre, il pourra travailler à améliorer l'organisation sociale, internationale et interraciale. Il pourra tenter des reconstructions nouvelles, se livrer à des expériences en un domaine, qui lui est aujourd'hui pratiquement interdit, comme l'était jadis celui des sciences physiques. N'étant plus entravée dans sa marche naturelle vers le progrès, dans sa croyance au progrès lui-même, l'intelligence fera faire, à leur tour, un bond immense aux sciences sociales. Mais cet avancement ne sera possible que si les intellectuels osent enfin reprendre une attitude nettement anti-religieuse, une attitude qui toute une partie de l'opinion considère aujourd'hui comme celle des "primaires". Cette accusation de primaire, piège merveilleux qui arrête les timides, a été lancée par les survivants des mystiques périmées. L'intellectuel brave doit revendiquer hautement cette
qualité de "primaire", puisqu’elle lui permettra d’abattre les plus monstrueuses survivances de l’esprit du passé.

§8. D’une organisation interraciale à une organisation internationale.

S’il cherche à s’attaquer, en particulier, aux préjugés de race, l’intellectuel abandonnera définitivement tout classement des races par ordre de valeur. On ne pourrait comparer le blanc au nègre qu’en mesurant leurs qualités respectives, entreprise aussi vaine que de vouloir chiffrer l’intensité d’un plaisir par rapport à une douleur. Toute recherche dans cette voie conduirait à renforcer, à exaspérer l’idée de race: les défenseurs des nègres qui travaillent en ce sens, il faut le répéter, font le jeu de leurs ennemis.

C’est, au contraire, de l’atténuation des frontières raciales, (de même que des frontières internationales) que peut sortir un monde social nouveau. Chaque race est spécialisée dans un domaine qui lui est propre. Chacune d’elle apporte au monde quelque chose de différent, d’unique. La collaboration des divers groupements humains s’impose donc nécessairement à l’esprit.

Mais non pas par des croisements de race. Ceux-ci aggraverait, au contraire, les préjugés actuels. Dans un mulâtre qui n’a même un centième de sang noir, l’Américain méprise, non seulement le nègre qu’il représente toujours pour lui, mais encore le bâtard, qui a perdu précisément ses caractères raciaux.

Est-il impossible d’envisager une collaboration entre races qui ne soit fondée* ni sur une pénétration réciproque complète, ni sur une opposition de force, mais sur des rapports d’égalité? Des liens d’amitié et non une oppression? Un commerce pacifique et non une exploitation?

En fait, nous assistons à une évolution frappante: les races d’aujourd’hui, en se libérant, tendent à se constituer en nations. Ce n’est même que dans la mesure où elles se donne une organisation étatiste moderne, capitaliste et militariste que des races opprimées comme les Indiens ou les Annamites semblent avoir quelque chance de s’opposer à l’envahisseur, de lui résister, de le vaincre. Pour échapper à la persécution, les Juifs n’ont-ils pas voulu établir un Etat d’Israël sur le modèle des États contemporains? Certes, cette évolution, qui se déroule sous nos yeux, n’est pas sans dangers. Elle inquiète même les meilleurs esprits dans l’élite des peuples asiatiques. Cependant, ce nationalisme pourrait être empreint d’un caractère révolutionnaire, comme le fut à l’origine le patriotisme français de 89; il pourrait tendre vers la libération de l’homme. C’est en tous cas l’orientation qu’il faut à tout prix lui donner. C’est la seule voie qui ne marquera pas une régression . . .

Une fois toutes les races constituées en nations, le problème de l’organisation interraciale coïncidera avec celui de l’organisation internationale, qui sera, aussi, lui-même, simplifié. C’est alors vers l’idée de fédération des peuples que la raison humaine est obligatoirement amenée: fédération que les juristes auront à construire de toutes pièces. Mais leur travail ne deviendra possible que lorsque les peuples auront renoncé à cette idolâtre idée de souveraineté nationale, qui n’est, elle-même, qu’une autre croyance mystique en un absolu, aujourd’hui vide de sens.


Hélas, à l’heure présente, nous nous éloignons de ces perspectives raisonnables. Les
groupements humains s’opposent plus violemment que jamais. La France rééchafouille une muraille de Chine, sous forme d’un fossé de béton armé au long de sa frontière. Tarifs douaniers, passeports, lois contre l’émigration, contingentements d’hommes et de marchandises élèvent, entre les peuples, des séparations toujours plus graves—tandis que des préjugés de langue, de religion, des coutumes, des souvenirs, des passions, des intérêts particuliers jettent les uns contre les autres Juifs et Chrétiens, Arméniens et Turcs, Flamants et Belges, Serbes et Croates, Irlandais et Anglais... et, dans les autres parties du monde, les peuples de couleur contre la vieille race blanche..., aucun d’eux n’ayant encore compris qu’il n’est pas seul sur terre.

Peut-on espérer qu’en un jour bienheureux et lointain, (si lointain!) nous assistions au concert des groupements collectifs? Ou peut penser, tout au moins, que, ce jour-là, les noirs prendraient, parmi les races diverses, une place remarquable. Ce qui les caractérise le mieux, ce sont, en effet, leurs qualités d’enfant. Or, ne savons-nous pas aujourd’hui, que, par de nombreux côtés, la vie de l’homme, après l’âge de vingt ans, n’est qu’un long déclin et que c’est, avant cet âge, que son imagination, sa sensibilité, sa poésie atteignent leur apogée? Les races ne manquent pas sur terre, qui possèdent des dons d’expérience et de maturité. Peut-être pour l’harmonie du monde est-il nécessaire qu’il y ait, dans un coin de la terre, des adultes qui restent des enfants. Si les nègres venaient à disparaître aujourd’hui, sans doute les blancs regretteraient-ils leur absence, parce qu’ils ne trouveraient plus que très difficilement des chauffeurs pour actionner les turbines de leurs grands paquebots, des hommes de peine pour les travaux les plus durs de leurs usines. Mais je pense que, le jour où les nègres cesseraient d’exister, il y aurait peut-être quelque chose d’irremédiablement perdu sur terre, toute une forme de la sensibilité humaine qui serait abolie. L’hypothèse de la disparition des populations nègres n’est malheureusement pas toute théorique. Au Congo comme aux Etats-Unis, sous la rudesse de leur contact avec les blancs, elles se rarefient. Le péril noir, qu’évoquent les Américains, n’est pas qu’un mythe. Mais le véritable péril noir, c’est l’extinction possible de cette race.

Le bourgeois Français parle avec dégout de l’Américain qui interdit l’entrée de certains cinémas, de certains restaurants, de certains dancings aux Nègres, et proclame que dans la France démocratique le blanc et le Nègre sont égaux. Mais alors comment se fait-il qu’on apprenne aux enfants du Congo que leurs ancêtres étaient des Gaulois, hommes à peau blanche et à cheveux blonds, alors qu’il n’est encore jamais arrivé qu’on enseigne aux petits Français que les premiers occupants de la France étaient des Nègres, ce que pourtant les découvertes de Grimaldi laisseraient supposer.

Je lis en ce moment des journaux rédigés spécialement pour les enfants Français: Cri-Cri, l’Epatant, l’Intépide, Pierrot, le Petit Illustré, qu’on tire chaque semaine chacun à des milliers de centaines d’exemplaires, des journaux que pratiquement tous les enfants prolétaires, paysans, petits bourgeois, achètent chaque semaine s’ils savent lire. Ces journaux je les ai acheté au hasard dans un village de petits agriculteurs, dans la seule boutique du pays, et je sais qu’on les trouve de même dans tous les villages de France, dans tous les faubourgs ouvriers de France. Je n’ai pas choisi les numéraux, et j’ai pu me rendre compte que le Nègre—qui symbolise ici et d’ailleurs en général le,

(G) GEORGES SADOUL, “LE NÈGRE À L’USAGE DES ENFANTS” (“SAMBO WITHOUT TEARS”).

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peuple coloniale de toute couleur est un héros qu’on trouve dans chaque numéro des journaux des enfants, un héros qu’on entend populariser. Voici le [sic] conception du Nègre que ces journaux veulent imposer aux enfants. Cette conception est celle de la bourgeoisie Française a du Nègre.

“A l'état sauvage”, c'est à dire avant d'être colonisé, le Nègre est un dangereux bandit. Voici, nous conte Cri-Cri, un brave homme qui le réduisent en esclavage. Voilà nous raconte l'Intépide un explorateur Anglais, le major Lang (c'est une histoire vraie), qui essaie d'atteindre Tombouctou. Deux chefs indigènes, deux canailles nous dit-on, le prennent pour un espion, lui, un paisible explorateur qui ne venait certes pas préparer la voie à la mitrailleuse et aux missionnaires, et les Nègres le tuent. Voici enfin deux Européens qui traversaient le Sahara en auto-chenille et qui étaient “allés chercher fortune en Afrique”. Une farouche jeune Soudanaise veut les assommer à coups de cailloux.

(Cliché 1) (Caption: à l'état sauvage le Nègre est un assassin.)
Les blancs ont bon cœur et ne peuvent supporter que les Nègres de meurent dans l'état de sauvagerie. Ils n'ont rien de plus pressé que de les coloniser. Pourquoi colonisent-ils? Pierrot, journal catholique vous le dit. Il s'agit de Berbères c'est vrai, mais les Berbères sont après tout des Nègres pour les Français, un peu moins noir, un peu moins sauvage voilà tout. C'est un officier Français, héros sympathique, qui parle:

“Le peuple n'a que trop tendance à s'imaginer que nous venons en Afrique que comme des conquérants alors qu'en vérité nous sommes des bienfaiteurs... Quand j'arrivais dans cette région du Tafilelt où l'ordre commence seulement à régner, les poux étaient considérés comme des animaux sacrés, et comme on s'abstenait de les détruire ils se propageaient les maladies sociales, créé des écoles avec instruction médicale...” etc... etc. Le jeune niais auquel le brillant officier raconte ces balivernes est un aviateur pacifiste. Convaincu par ces discours il devient un pacificateur et va arroser de bombes les demi-Nègres Berbères. Voilà comment on tue les poux, on commence par tuer l'homme, qui n'est pas après [sic] tout lui non plus un animal sacré.

(Cliché 2) Le Nègre une fois pacifié a bien ses défauts. C'est un ivrogne fini.
(Cliché 3) Le Nègre est un ivrogne (Cri-Cri)
Le Nègre est aussi un serviteur ineffroyablement paresseux. Il faut le gourmander pour en obtenir quelquechose. (Cliché 4) Le Nègre est un paresseux, ([L'Epatant])
Mais il a ses qualités: le Nègre est un bouffon destiné à amuser les blancs. C'est le fou des rois Français. (Cliché 5, le Nègre est un bouffon, l'Intépide)

Et c'est sans doute parce que le Nègre est un bouffon que les seuls d'entre eux qui soient réellement toujours admis dans tous les salons Français sont les groomes et les musiciens des Jazz destinés à faire danser les élégants messieurs et dames. Le Nègre a d'autres qualités. On peut en faire un soldat... (Cliché 6, le Nègre est un soldat, l'Epatant [t]... ou même un flic (Cliché 7, le Nègre est un flic, l'Epatant)

(Cliché 8, le Nègre est un esclave, l'Epatant)
Et les Pieds Nickelés après [sic] avoir trinqué avec le gouverneur décorent ces fidèles esclaves. N'est-ce pas ainsi que furent récompensés les ignobles cireurs de bottines de daim blanc que sont les sous-secrétaires d'état Nègres aux colonies, ces Nègres dont la France tire autant de gloire que le bordel tire de gloire de ses Négresses?

(Cliché 9, le blanc est un bon pour le Nègre; l'Epatant)

Mais le Nègre aura beau faire il sera toujours un imbécile tellement inférieure au blanc. Voyez par exemple comme tout un tribu Nègre s'étonne devant ce soldat colonial sympathique et débrouillard qui vient de capturer une autruche par un procédé imprévu. (Cliché 10, Mais le coloniale blanc sera toujours supérieur au Nègre, Cri-Cri)

On voit en lisant ces journaux d'enfants destinés de faire de leurs lecteurs de parfaits impérialistes quelle est l'idée que la bourgeoisie Française entend imposer de l'homme de couleur.

Et si l'on sait que des écrivains aussi distingués et aussi talentueux que M. Maurice Martin du Gard demande au nom des colons la ségrégation, “et spécialement la ségrégation sexuelle” des troupes noires en France on se demande quelle peut bien être la différence entre le traitement que les bourgeois Français infligent aux Nègres et celui qu'ils reprochent aux bourgeois Américains de leur infliger. Cette différence se réduit à une nuance.

Un journaliste quelconque, M. Max Massot, “Le Journal” 1931, s'indignait qu’”un Brahmane Hindou, fut-il membre du haut conseil impérial, ne puisse prendre un bock à côté d’un contremaître blanc”, à Cape Town. Le scandale de la ségrégation aux yeux d’un journaliste Français est donc qu’un bourgeois n’ait pas les mêmes droits qu’un prolétaire. Mais, nous dit-on dans le même article “les 115,000 habitants du Cap face aux 130,000 Européens fournissent une basse main d’œuvre non spécialisée et les serviteurs.” Est-ce bien le Nègre que l’on chasse des cafés du Cap où [sic] les plus basses couches d’une classe? Je lisais cet article dans un café de Nice d’où l’on chassait les chauffeurs d’autocars en station dans le voisinage parce que leurs costumes et leurs allures déplaisaient à la clientèle bourgeoise. Dans ce pays où le prolétariat ne comprend qu’une quantité négligeable d’hommes de couleur, c’est le vêtement qui fait la ségrégation. Et le bourgeois excentrique qui veut pénétrer dans un restaurant ou un dancing bourgeois en habit de charpentier en est aussi surement expulsé que le Brahmane du café du Cap ou de la Nouvelle-Orléans. Voilà la seule nuance qui sépare le bourgeois Français du bourgeois Américain.

Ici l’habit distingue la classe la plus exploitée. Là-bas c’est l’habit et la couleur. Il y a quarante ans la presque totalité de la population noire des U.S.A. était une population paysanne dont le sort ne différait guère de celui des esclaves qu’ils avaient été. Leur couleur, symbole de leur situation économique, les marquait d’infamie, eux qui formaient à peu près à eux seuls la couche la plus exploitée de la paysannerie. Et aussi bien on accentuait ce stigmate pour persuader les “poor whites” dans une situation économique analogue que leur sort était privilégié. Il fallait empêcher l’union de la partie blanche et de la partie noire de la paysannerie pauvre.

Quand les besoins croissants de l’industrie firent entrer les paysans Nègres dans l’industrie en foule sans cesse accrue, la bourgeoisie eu soin d’utiliser la rivalité qu’elle avait créée [sic] entre pauvres noirs et pauvres blancs. Dans certaines régions industrielles Françaises on emploie en quantités massives des Italiens, des Polonais, des Arabes, comme basse main d’œuvre industrielle. Ils sont ségrégués du prolétariat Français, ont leurs quartiers, leurs boutiques, leurs restaurants, leurs écoles, leurs églises et même
pour les Algériens, leurs bordels. On les désigne sous les sobriquets infamants de maccaronis, de polaks, de sidis, de bicots, et ils sont rendus responsables des bas salaires, du chômage et de la vie chère. Ces sales étrangers sont les niggers de la France. La bourgeoisie Américaine et la bourgeoisie Francaise agissent de même avec la basse main d’œuvre, que ce soit la langue ou la couleur qui les distingue. Elle se sert de ces différences ethniques pour diviser le prolétariat.

Si l’on traite en France un Polonais comme en Amérique un homme de couleur, si le blanc vaut le noir, c’est que la question de couleur se ramène à la question de classe. La solution de ces questions est la même. Marx prédisait que les chaînes des Juifs ne tomberaient qu’avec celles des prolétaires. Il en est de même pour les chaînes des Nègres.

J’écris ceci à Moscou, dans ce pays où le prolétariat est dictateur. Les journaux d’enfants que j’achète au hasard des kiosks me montrent non le Nègre ivrogne, assassin, esclave, des journaux d’enfants de la bourgeoisie Française,

(Clichés 11 et 12) d’Un journal d’enfants Soviétique, II, comment le colon blanc luttant à côté de l’enfant noir contre le capitalisme de toutes couleurs. Le journal de langue Anglaise que je trouve dans ces mêmes kiosques, le journal Communiste Américain, demande de voter Communiste en votant à la fois pour le blanc, Foster, et le Nègre, Ford, le premier candidat de couleur d’une élection présidentielle Américaine.

(Cliché 13 American Daily Worker)

C’est que le prolétariat de tous les pays sait, comme l’exprima Lénine, que la lutte des prolétaires est la lutte des races opprimées, dont le Nègre est le symbole, est une même lutte et que la libération des prolétaires est liée à celle des peuples coloniaux. Et c’est pourquoi, malgré les manoeuvres des bourgeois blancs ou noirs, des Candaces ou bourgeois Nègres Américains qui chantent les louanges de la ségrégation, “source de monumentales fortunes” (St[.] Louis Argus, 1931), le prolétariat noir et blanc chante avec des voix tous les jours plus nombreuses cet adorable chant parti d’Amérique et que des Nègres m’ont appris en vue des côtes de Finlande sur le bateau qui nous menait en U.R.S.S.

“Black and white we stand united
Black and white we stand united
Black and white we stand united
All the workers are united
Come!”

(Cliché 14, les enfants de toute couleur luttent côte à côte contre le capitalisme. Sur le drapeau: sois prêt [sic] pour la lutte pour la classe ouvrière. Extrait d’un journal d’enfants Soviétique.)

APPENDIX 3

1. Le jeune homme qui a écopé, lors de ses premières et vagabondes tentatives amoureuses, n’entre-t-il dans le mariage, pour ces raisons de confort et sécurités relatives qui décident à la maison close la fille en carte.

2. Comparez les détails donnés par les Mémoires d’un Nègrier, au début du 19e siècle (Aventures d’un Nègrier; Choses Vues; Plon édit.) et les récits contemporains (Voyage au Congo, d’André Gide; les reportages d’Albert Londres; etc. . . .)


4. Le seul essai de cet ordre, à ma connaissance, c’est le projet de Société des
Nations de Kant et qui remonte à plus d’un siècle. Il est surprenant qu’aucun autre essai n’ait été tenté, car je ne considère évidemment pas le Pacte de Genève comme une construction sérieuse, mais comme une caricature grotesque d’un véritable monument juridique international.
Index

Italicized page numbers refer to illustrations

Adorno, Theodor, xxviii


Aldington, Richard, xiv; Now Lies She There, xiii


Antheil, George, xix

Aragon, Louis, xiv, xviii, xxvii

Arlen, Michael: The Green Hat, xiii

Armstrong, Louis, 4–6, 8, 10, 11–12, 187–88

Bair, Deirdre, xi, xxiii, xxviii, xxxi

Basden, M.: Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 142

Bastien, Jenner, 169; History of Hayti, xxxi, 17, 17–26

Beaton, Cecil, xiii

Beckett, Samuel: contributes to Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War, xvi; dedicates Catastrophe to Vaclav Havel, xxv; in early 1930s, xxvi; friendship with Cunard, xxii, xxvii; as Irish writer, xi; Joyce’s influence on, xxvi; motivation for contributing to Negro, xi-xii, xxiii; politics of, xii-xiii, xxvi-xxviii, xxxi; quality of translations for Negro, xi, xx, xxvii, xxviii-xxxii; quality of writings of, xxxi-xxxii; “revelation” of, xxvi; signs Manifesto by Nobel Prize Laureates . . . , xxvi; and surrealism, xxvii; translates Le Bateau ivre, xxviii; translates part of Finnegans Wake, xxv; translates surrealist poetry, xxv; war’s influence on writings of, xxvi; war work of, xxv-xxvi; Whoroscope wins contest, xxii; writes in French, xxv, xxvi. Works: The Capital of the Ruins, xxvi; Le Concentrisme, xxv; Dream of Fair to middling Women, xxv; Eleuthéria, xxvi; essays on Joyce, xxv; From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore: For Henry Crowder to Sing (poem), xxv; Le Kid, xxv; Krapp’s Last Tape, xxvi; More Pricks Than Kicks, xxv; Poems in English, xxii; Trilogy, xxvi; Waiting for Godot, xxii, xxvi; Whoroscope, xiv, xv, xxvii

Beiderbecke, Bix, 8, 16

Benin: art of, 82–89, 92, 96, 180–81; imperialism in, 82

Benstock, Shari, xvi

Blondel, 109, 117

Bosch, R.P. Fridolin, 140

Boulenger, Jacques, 169; The King of Gonâives, xxx-xxxi, 29–33

Boyer, President (Haiti), 21, 26

Brazil: abolition of slavery in, 45–46, 190–91; the Negro in, 41–48, 187–92; slave revolt in, 42–43, 188–90; slavery in, 41–44, 188–90

Breton, André, xviii, 169; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59
Caillois, Roger, 169; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59
Calloway, M., 125, 126
Catholic church: in the Congo, 150–51; in Guadeloupe, 37–38
Char, René, 169; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59
Chisholm, Anne, xvi, xxvii
Christophe, King (Haiti), 21, 24–26
Citerne, Georges, 169; On French Imperialism . . . in Madagascar, xxxi, 159–61
Clements, Patricia, xxvii
Codio, General (Haiti), 30
Coeurroy, André, 13, 15
Columbus, Christopher, 17–18
Communism, 1–2
Communist Party, xiii–xv, xxvii
Congo: art of, 90–98, 179–86; Catholic Church in, 150–51; museum of (in Tervueren), 94, 95, 183
Congo Museum. See Congo: museum of Crawfurd, J., 75
Crevel, René, 169–70; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59; Negress in the Brothel, xxxi, 69–73, 173–77
Cronin, Vincent, xviii
Crowder, Henry, xiv; on Beckett, xxiii; Negro dedicated to, xvi; relationship with Nancy Cunard, xvi–xvii; works at the Hours Press, xviii. Works: As Wonderful as All That?, xvi, xvii, xviii, xxiii; Creed (to the Memory of SACCO and VANZETTI), xxi; Hitting Back, xxi; Where Color Prejudice Is Not a Creed, xxi
Cunard, Sir Bache, xiii
Cunard, Lady Emerald, xiii, xvi
Cunard, Nancy, xii, xiii, xiv, xv, xxii; achievements of, xiv; as anti-colonialist, xvi; as anti-Fascist, xvi; and anti-racism, xiii–xiv, 1–2; attacked by Hearst press, xxi; and Beckett, xxii, xxiii, xxvii; in Beckett’s work, xxiii; and Communism, xiii–xiv, 1–2; culturally marginalized, xi, xiv, xviii; death of, xxii–xxiii; gives Beckett money, xxiii; and Henry Crowder, xvi–xvii; and Hours Press, xiv–xv, xxii; as icon, xiii; life of, xiii; makes Negro, xix–xx, xxiv, xxxi; and NAACP, xv, xxi; Negro’s achievement, xxxi; Negro’s contributors unpaid by, xxiv; politics of, xiv, xxvii–xxviii; and “Scottsboro boys,” xv, xxii; and surrealist movement, xiii, xiv, xxvii; war work of, xv. Works: The American Moron and the American of Sense, xxi; Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War, xvi; Black Man and White Ladyship, xvi, xvii; Colour Bar, xxii; For Sam: Dec 15, 1963 (poem), xxii; Harlem Reviewed, xxi; Jamaica, the Negro Island, xxi; Negro, xix–xx, xxiv, xxxi; Poets of the World Defend the Spanish People, xvi; A Reactionary Negro Organisation, xxi; Scottsboro—and other Scottsboros, xv, xxii; Some Negro Slang, xxi; Southern Sheriff, xxi; These Were the Hours, xxii, xxiv, 173
Dartignenave, President (Haiti), 30
Delafosse, M., 123, 125
Dessalines, Jean Jacques, 22, 25, 27
DuBois, W.E.B., xxi
Durand, Oswald, 27–28
Ellington, Duke, 6, 7
Ellis, Havelock, xiv
Eluard, Paul, 170; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59
Fairbairn, Sidney, xiii
Feuilloley, Bernard P., 170, 173
Peoples of Ubanghi-Shari, xxxi, 3, 99-107, 177-79
Flavia-Léopold, Emmanuel, 34, 170;  
*The Child in Guadeloupe*, 34-40
Ford, Hugh, xxvii, xxiv; edits abridged  
*Negro*, xx; *Published in Paris*, xxviii
Ford, James W., 2, 54, 55
Foster, William Z., 54, 55
Frazer, James, 117
Friedman, Susan, xvi
Frobenius, Leo, 108, 121

Gide, André, 60, 61, 109, 115, 116
Goffin, Robert, 170; *Hot Jazz*, xxix, 13-16;  
*Negro Jazz Orchestras*, xxx-xxxi, 4-9;  
*On the Frontiers of Jazz*, 6, 13
Gordon, Lois, xviii, xxv, xxvi
Graves, Robert, xiv
Guadeloupe: children in, 35-40;  
history of, 34-40; religion in, 37-38; slavery in, 34

Haiti: and Africa, 27; history of, 17-26,  
27-28, 29-33; slave revolt in, 19-22; United States in, 26, 28, 29-32
Hardy, Georges: *Negro Art*, 90, 179
Hawkins, Coleman, 8, 16
Henderson, Fletcher, 8
Heuzé, Paul, 127
Hines, Earl, 8, 16
Hoily, Arthur, 28
Howard, Brian, xiv
Hurston, Zora Neale, 1
Huxley, Aldous, xiii

Janvier, Louis Joseph, 27
jazz, xxviii-xxxi, 4, 9, 13-16
Jourdain, Francis, 170;  
*On French Imperialism . . . in Madagascar*,  
xxx, 159-61

Knowlson, James, xxiii, xxv, xxvi, xxvii

Lacombe, Ludovic Morin, 27, 170;  
*Haytian Culture*, 27-28

Lavachery, Henri, 170-71; *Styles in the Statuary of the Congo*, xxxi, 90-98, 179-86
Lee, Baron, 8
Le Roy, Mgr., 127
Lewis, Wyndham, xiii
Little, Roger, xi, xxiii
l’Ouverture, Toussaint. See Toussaint l’Ouverture.

Macandal (Haitian slave revolt leader), 19-20
MacGreevy, Thomas, xxiii
Madagascar: French imperialism in,  
159-61; history of, 74-81
Malherbe, Henry, 13
Marcus, Jane, xvii, xxiv, xxxi
Mars, Price, 28
McCormack, W.J., xi, xxiii-xxiv, xxviii
McKay, Claude: *Negro contribution withdrawn by*, xxiv
Michelet, Raymond, xi, xxiv, xxxi, 3, 171;  
*“Primitive” Life and Mentality*, 108-48
Moerman, Ernst, 171; *Armstrong*  
(poem), xxxi, xxix, 11-12, 173, 186-87; —, as translated by  
Beckett, xxviii-xxix
Monnerot, J.-M. (Jules), 171;  
*Murderous Humanitarianism*, 56-59
Moore, George, xiii, xiv

Negro: achievements of, 2, 82-89,  
90-98, 121, 143-46, 179-86; in  
Africa, 49-53, 99-107, 108-48,  
149-58, 159-61, 199-201; in  
Brazil, 41-48, 187-92; music of,  
xix, xxix-xxxii, 2, 4-9, 13-16, 142; as “primitives,” 68, 99,
INDEX 207


slavery, 62; in Antilles, 34, 57; in Brazil, 41–44, 187–90; sanctioned in New World, 17; slave revolts in Haiti, 19–22

Sordet, Dominique, 15, 16

Speck, Hugo, xvii

Stanley, Henry M., 149, 151

Steiner, George, xxvi

Stiers, E., 172; A Negro Empire: Belgium, xxi, 149–58

Surrealism: and Communist Party, xxvii; and jazz, xxix–xxx

Surrealist Group in Paris: Murderous Humanitarianism, xxvii, xxxi, 56–59

Tanguy, Yves, 172; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59

Tervueren, Congo Museum in. See Congo: museum of

Thirion, André, 172; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59

Ti Memenne, Queen (Haiti), 31–32

Titus, Edward (editor of This Quarter), xxviii

Torday and Joyce: Annals of the Congo Museum, 95, 183

Toussaint l’Ouverture, 20–22, 25, 25


Unik, Pierre, 172; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59

Van Gennep, Arnold: Religious Myths and Legends, 124

Wake, Staniland, 75–76

Weeks, J.H., 123; Anthropological Notes on the Bangala, 142

Wirkus, Faustin, 29–32

Yeats, Jack B., xxvii

Yoyotte, Pierre, 172; Murderous Humanitarianism, 56–59