

Artistic Instinct of Negroes Should Be Developed

PERCY MACKAYE, poet and dramatist, looks for at least a partial solution of the negro problem in the artistic development of that race.

"The consideration of the negro problem," he said recently, "brings up political and social questions which, so far as I can see, are insoluble. There can not and must not be fusion of the races. But here are millions of negroes; they can't be exported; they ought not to be exported; they have as much right to inhabit the earth as we.

"We have erred seriously in repressing the negro's pride of race. Self-assertion has usually been taken as an assertion of political or social position which white men have been apt to regard

as dangerous, as tending toward a desire for amalgamation. As a result it has been denied expression; and we see some negroes pathetically exhibiting the feeling, while in the presence of any white man, that they are looking on a member of a superior race; while with others the racial pride, suppressed, produces a sensitiveness which festers and eventually gives rise to a sullen anger whose consequences cannot be anything but bad.

"The negro and white worlds have existed together in this country for 300 years, and have seldom touched. And there is a great deal of genius in that world that never came into contact with the white race. In certain fields the negroes, as a race, are superior to the

whites—notably in their sense of rhythm. They have much musical talent; they seem to have much raw material in the way of dramatic instinct and acting potentiality; their feeling for crude color might introduce new viewpoints into landscape painting or into settings of the theatre.

"One of the most remarkable artistic developments of late years is that of the interpretive and expressive dance, and in this the negro shows much promise. Choral dancing is still kept up in remote regions of the South back from the railroads. I have seen dancers as graceful in their way as the Greeks or the Japanese. Yet because they were 'niggers' they were ignored.

"In all these fields negroes can find

expression for aspirations and racial pride now stifled. They will bring new creations, new methods, new materials; but they will not always use materials from the life of their own race. It is to be hoped that we shall have much of this; but aside from the question whether a negro can understand a white American or the white man the negro, there is no reason why a negro writer should not be able to catch the feeling of, say, life in the ancient world as well as an American or European of white lineage. Too much should not be expected, of course; the real artist is not in any great majority in any race. But if the negro developed only two or three notable artists it would help to solve many problems of today."

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