A Leader in Constructive Americanism.*

At a time when the hyphen has received more attention than it merits we may recall to our profit the character and career of a man who, with every temptation to foster dissension in our national life, gave his whole energy to the upbuilding of a sane, unembittered, whole-hearted Americanism. The man was Booker T. Washington, whose death a year ago was a loss to our nation as a whole. Though the death of this great and good man is so recent, we may speak with confidence of the work he wrought. He applied himself to one of the most baffling and terrible problems that ever confronted a people; more than any other man he indicated the lines along which the solution of that problem must be found, and more than any other man he contributed to this solution. Well might Mr. Andrew Carnegie write: "History is to know two Washingtons, one white, the other black, both Fathers of their people."

Almost simultaneously two volumes have appeared that discuss the labors and the character of this man. "The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington" is precisely the kind of work that the title suggests. Against the slowly changing background of social, political, and economic conditions that prevailed in the South during the last sixty years it traces the career of Washington. It borrows interest from the fact that its author, Dr. B. F. Riley, is a Southern white man of marked ability who has renounced distinction in other fields in order that he may give his entire powers to the alleviation of the state of the negroes and to the promotion of better racial relationships. The second volume bears also a felicitous title: "Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization." Assuming that the reader is acquainted with "Up from Slavery" and with the course of Washington's life, it analyzes and vivifies various aspects of his work. Such chapter-headings as "The Man and his School in the Making," "Leader of his Race," "Washington: The Educator," "The Rights of the Negro," "Meeting Race Prejudice," "Getting Close to the People," "Managing a Great Institution," and "Washington: The Man" will show the scope and nature of the volume. There is abundant emphasis on psychological matters as well as on the character of Washington's work. This book, like the first, has extrinsic as well as intrinsic interest for us. One of the authors was for eighteen years Washington's secretary; the other is a grandson of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

By reading both books anyone may obtain a satisfactory understanding of the negro leader. The two works supplement each other. Both are illustrated, the latter profusely. The first is provided with an index; the second unfortunately is not. Each work is good in its kind. Errors in details are few; the only one noticed by the reviewer is Dr. Riley's statement that the celebration of America's triumph in the war with Spain was held in 1897.

It was really a momentous occurrence in American history when a negro lad in a West Virginia salt mine overheard two colored laborers discuss a school through which a black youth could work his way. Extinguishing the lamp in his cap that he might creep nearer, he learned that the school was called Hampton and that it was situated in distant Virginia. He at once conceived the ambition to attend it. His prospects of doing so were meagre enough. Born in slavery, unable to read or write until he was well in the teens, long kept by his step-father from the wretched school which at last had been open to him, he had obtained the pitiable beginnings of learning by utilizing such hours as could be spared from days of hard manual toil. Until he had entered school he had been known simply as Booker, but then in accordance with a custom he had assumed a surname, choosing that of a great man of whom he had vaguely heard. At the same time he had taken another step toward more civilized living: he had previously worn neither hat nor cap, but at this juncture had persuaded his mother to make him a cap from a piece of jeans cloth. Now upon hearing of Hampton he began planning and laboring to enroll there. Two years later, after severe difficulties, he made his way to the place and passed his entrance examination — the sweeping of a room — with honors. After a few years in the institution so capably administered by General Armstrong and a few more years in finding himself, he was made principal of a negro school which had theoretically been founded at Tuskegee, Alabama. The rest of his story is known, at least roughly, the world over.

Never did a man accomplish his task under conditions more delicate and trying. It was as if he carried fire through a powder factory.

* The Life and Times of Booker T. Washington. By B. F. Riley. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co. $1.50.
Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization. By Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. $2.

The Southerner, however much he may like *a* negro, is suspicious of *the* negro; and more than once Washington had the bad luck to arouse the spirit of distrust and ill-will. A chambermaid in Indianapolis who refused to care for his room on the ground that she "would not clean up after a nigger" brought him unpleasant notoriety in a section of the Southern press. After he had dined at the White House a negro, who afterward stated that he was in the pay of some Louisiana white men, came to Tuskegee to assassinate him, but fortunately fell ill and was cured of both his physical and his emotional distemper at the hospital of the institute. It is to be noted that these exhibitions of hostility came from those who were actuated by an idea merely, who did not know Washington himself. Though sensitive of temperament, he was too wise to regard the restrictions he so often encountered as in any sense personal affronts; and it is a remarkable fact that he not only had loyal friends among Southern white men, but "was never insulted by a Southern white man." Grieved as he was by unfairness shown to *the* negro, he found consolation in the assistance which *a* negro may readily command. The reviewer heard Washington only once; but, as a Southerner, was gladdened at heart at his assurance to a Massachusetts audience that where a negro has succeeded the success is due nine times in ten to the friendship, encouragement, and help of a Southern white neighbor.

The susceptibilities and inclinations of his own race had likewise to be reckoned with. After their liberation most negroes thought of slavery as meaning labor and of freedom as meaning immunity from labor. Led astray by ill-advised Reconstruction measures, they were in no frame of mind to do the one thing they were capable of doing — to toil with their hands. Even where they were learning to work, their manner of existence was deplorable. Washington "found the great majority in the plantation districts living on fat pork and corn bread, and sleeping in one-room cabins. They planted nothing but cotton, bought their food at the nearest village or town market instead of raising it, and lived under conditions where the fundamental laws of hygiene and decent social intercourse were both unknown and impossible of application." Furthermore there were parasites in plenty — negroes who were prompt to come "uninvited and armed with huge empty baskets" whenever a picnic was given, and to promise Washington a turkey for Thanksgiving and then borrow a dollar from him wherewith to fatten the fowl. To give such a people self-respect, to lay solid foundations for its progress, was a task from which anyone might shrink. But as Washington himself said in the speech referred to above, he did not mind difficulties; he thanked God, rather, that he lived in an age and under conditions wherein there were problems to be solved. His measures, in the main, were homely enough. He preached soap, toothbrushes, and nightgowns, pigs, and paint. Of the toothbrush, which he made an entrance requirement at Tuskegee, he said: "There are few single agencies of civilization that are more far-reaching." He taught his students to raise and prepare their own food, and to make the bricks wherewith the buildings at Tuskegee were constructed. He insisted on frugality, on diligence, on keeping out of debt. This was partly from prudential reasons, partly as a refutation of the popular belief that negroes, simply because they are negroes, must be slipshod and unsystematic. "He built up an institution almost as large as Harvard University which runs like clockwork without a single white man or woman having any part in its actual administration." By his watchfulness in small matters as well as great he won the confidence of the Southern business man; likewise he astonished Mr. Andrew Carnegie by demonstrating that the building for a library could be erected for $15,000. He founded organizations for the promotion of negro welfare. He engaged in extension work before anything of the kind was done at Wisconsin. He attracted strong support from black people as well as from whites, and by his close touch with negroes everywhere he exerted an incalculable influence upon the rank and file of his race.

He was interested in concrete and practical matters. He saw that the negroes had begun "at the top instead of at the bottom." For this reason, and because "he never forgot that over 80 per cent of his people drew their living directly from the soil," he said little of the things he regarded as non-essentials. In his wish to emphasize the need for the economic independence of the many, he also said little about the cultural opportunities of the few. Because of his silence on these topics he was denounced by radical negroes for cowardice and for truckling to the whites. While the charge was absolutely unjust, the thoughts that it suggests ramify into pathos, into tragedy. "I do not think I exaggerate when I say," declared Washington, "that perhaps a third or half of the thought and energy of those engaged in the elevation of the colored people is given in the direction of trying to do the thing or not doing the thing

which would enhance racial prejudice. This feature of the situation I believe very few people at the North or at the South appreciate." Yet he could be outspoken when the occasion demanded. He protested that negroes should not be charged for equal accommodations on the railroads and at the same time given inferior accommodations. He himself violated Southern laws by riding in Pullmans — a measure for the conservation of his sorely tried strength which met with the approval of the whites. Except in the South he refused to be bound by Southern customs in regard to racial relationships, though he never accepted purely social invitations from white people anywhere, and allowed himself only that degree of social intercourse with them which "seemed best calculated to accomplish his immediate object and his ultimate aims." He urged that negroes be given a just chance educationally, and dwelt upon the connection between ignorance and crime. He pleaded with legislators against the disfranchisement of negroes as negroes, his position being shown by the words: "I do not advocate that the Negro make politics or the holding of office an important thing in his life. I do urge, in the interest of fair play to everybody, that a Negro who prepares himself in property, in intelligence, and in character to cast a ballot, and desires to do so, should have the opportunity." Though in general he thought it was wisest to work quietly and indirectly against the murder of negroes by mobs, he proved both his convictions and his courage when he went to Jacksonville, Florida, in the midst of a race war and denounced lynching.

The success of Washington did not come from transcendent intellectual qualities. These he did not possess. Much of it came from sheer character — from the instinct which caused him to be patient under adversity, to shun even the appearance of exploiting his own name by giving Chautauqua lectures for profit to himself, to write innumerable letters after his journeys to "each and every person who had tried in any way to contribute to the pleasure and success of his trip." Much of it came from his right-mindedness,— from what Mr. Howells has called "his constant common sense." This quality revealed itself in a multitude of ways. It was shown by his judgment in not taking too much for granted in his extension work, in insisting "that the meetings be conducted for the benefit of the ignorant and not in the interests of the learned." It showed in his anxiety that while the North was being educated to give money, the cultivation of wise relationships with the Southern white people should not be neglected. It showed in his use of his influence with Presidents Roosevelt and Taft, "not to increase the number of Negro appointees, but rather to raise the personnel of Negro officeholders." It showed in "his unerring instinct for putting first things first," and for watching minute details without losing sight of large ends. It was supported by a patient, constructive, and optimistic spirit. "Lynchings are widely reported by telegraph," he explained; "the quiet, effective work of devoted white people in the South for Negro uplift is not generally or widely reported." He reminded negroes that the handicaps to which they were subjected "were after all superficial and did not interfere with their chance to work and earn a living." He pointed out the superiority of the condition of the negro to that of the peasant in Europe. And his conception of his own task was that it consisted not "so much in conducting a school as educating a race." To the gifts which were his through character and purpose must be added the qualities of the born leader, the natural administrator. When he bade, he was obeyed; when he set an example, others were inspired to emulate it.

The last years of his life constituted a race against time. He had started his people upon the upward course; he felt that nothing was more vital than that capable leaders should be provided while vast adjustments were still in the making. Already Tuskegee had turned out men and women who had proved they might be relied on,— had proved they were the hope of their race. He was eager that this leadership should be still more rapidly and successfully created. Hence at a time when his strength was giving way under the pressure of innumerable duties he applied himself with even more prodigious energy. There can be no question that his unselfish exertions hastened his death. He left a great work unfinished, but the impulse he gave it was such as neither the black race nor the white will willingly let die.

GARLAND GREEVER.