

# LITERATURE.

## Life of Booker T. Washington \*

THIS volume is made from a very attractive series of chapters that appeared in *The Outlook*. Another volume, entitled "The American Negro," also written by a negro, has lately attracted considerable attention; but the contrast between the two is absolute. That volume was pessimistic; it could discover no hope for the negro, except by his long subjection to the white race; this book is one of the most cheerful, hopeful books that we have the privilege to read; and the good fortune of the case is that its view is the correct one. The world loves enthusiasm and simplicity; and this is the combination which, with large ability, gives Mr. Washington his hold on the people.

He has not a bit of false pride. He has no shame in telling how he slept, as a boy, feeling and working his way to Hampton, night after night under a sidewalk in Richmond, or how the humblest work was gladly accepted. How thrilling a small event can be made appears in his story of his examination for admission to Hampton Institute, when, a ragged child, he applied to the head teacher. She was slow to accept him, but finally told him to sweep the recitation room. He had learned how to sweep from his mistress after the war, Mrs. General Ruffner, a most excellent and most particular Vermont woman, and three times he swept the room and four times he dusted it. He felt that his future depended on the impression he made by this work on this teacher. She inspected floor and closets, rubbed her handkerchief on the wood work, walls, tables and benches, could find no dust, and quietly remarked, "I guess you will do to enter the institution." Soon she made him a janitor, and he earned his board and part of his tuition. Somehow—it seems inexplicable—from his early childhood, before he had adopted a family name, Mr. Washington had the

resolve to learn all he could. He taught himself to read at night while a little boy filling bags at the salt works. Nothing was too hard or too humble if it only carried him on to school or to further advance. So he graduated at Hampton with honors, went to teaching at his home in West Virginia, was called back as teacher at Hampton, and was then selected by General Armstrong, for whose memory he has unbounded admiration and love, to start a school in Tuskegee.

If ever any one made his own future it was Booker T. Washington. The energy and success that have characterized his work at Tuskegee have made him the best known, perhaps the most useful, man of his race in America. Yet when we speak of "his race," we recall the words; for what right have we to call a man *negro* who is just as much Caucasian? Both races may share the honor of such a noble man. Hard work and good cheer are the characteristics of the man and of his school and of his book. He does not claim to make scholars at Tuskegee, only fairly intelligent, useful men and women. A technical and industrial school like Tuskegee is expensive, but it does its own grand work for those who, if not leaders, supply the sturdy and worthy common people, the ambitious farmers and mechanics of the South. For such a work Mr. Washington supplies the very best example and stimulus. He is himself the product of an industrial institute, its very best product; but he does not undervalue the work of the institutions of a higher grade than Hampton and Tuskegee which, if less in evidence, must supply the larger part of the leaders of the race, the lawyers, the doctors, the preachers, the teachers; and from his school the graduates go to such colleges as Atlanta and Fisk, and from there he has sought his teachers as well as his wife.

It is only what might be expected that Mr. Washington recognizes the immense progress made by those whom we would call his people during the less than forty-five years of his life. As a child he did

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not know a negro boy that could read; to-day there is hardly a town to be found in the South where the majority of children have not been to school. Then they owned nothing; to-day he gathers hundreds of negro farmers every year from the country about Tuskegee, at a conference to tell how they are buying their homes and increasing their wealth. The influences that come from education work for peace between whites and blacks, and for thrift and property. In this work Mr. Washington has taken a strong man's noble part, and we trust that yet another full generation may be his learners. We commend this fascinating, helpful, uplifting book to all readers.

