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THE BICK WITH ONE HEN

In the January issue of OPPORTUNITY Dr. Alain Leroy Locke published something which he calls a criticism of the Negro books published in 1937. No matter which way you look at it, the piece is an example of rank dishonesty. It is not the innocence of conviction in error. It is a conscious fraud. Dr. Locke knows that he knows nothing about Negroes, and he should know, after THE NEW NEGRO, that he knows nothing about either criticism or editing, both being branches of the same thing. Dr. Locke, conscious of his degrees pents to be a leader, and in his eagerness to attract attention he rushes at any chance to see his name in print, however foolish his offering.

For instance he says in what he calls a criticism of THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD, that the great force of the book was in the folk lore in it as in my other two books. Now, either Dr. Locke does not know Negro folk lore or he lies with malice aforesaid. There is not a folk tale in the entire book. A folk character is mentioned in one connection that does not affect the story in any way. If Dr. Locke knows nothing about the matter, then he should have kept quiet. If he does know better, then he should have felt the obligation of his many degrees to be honest. To his discomfort I must say that those lines came out of my own head. In the final paragraph he says that the book has "condescension" which is just another instance of Dr. Locke's trying to bruise the brains of the public with his personal angle. I know just why he said it and I am going to point it out.

Dr. Locke wants to be a leader. He felt sure that his degrees would guarantee that much at least. But the time has past when Negroes bowed down before mere letters on a piece of paper. And so, Dr. Locke has offered nothing else to see.

Up to now, Dr. Locke has not produced one single idea, or suggestion of an idea that he can call his own. So far he has not had the courage to even champion an idea that belonged to someone else until it was already generally accepted. He waits good to see which way a procession is going, and then when he is very sure, he rushes up to the head of it by a forced march in the dark and says, "Come on, parade, I'm your leader!" He will approve of anything that is already approved of. So lacking in both talent and courage, he has failed to be what which he yearns for -- a leader. Now this brings us to the second clause. When he says that there is 2 "condescension" in THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD, he is complaining that I do not write like Sterling Brown. And that constitutes a crime in his good doctor's present feeling about Sterling Brown. Not that Dr. Locke has any sympathy with either the downtrodden Negro nor the working man, but Sterling Brown is committed to that political philosophy and that is enough for Locke, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX His impatience with everyone who does not agree with Sterling Brown could be likened to the fury of a hen with one lone chick, but in this case, the ideas belong to Sterling so we have to say the chick with one lone hen. Sterling, it seems, consults with Locke, so he must be right. Nobody objects to Sterling Brown having his own political viewpoint. He is free to write volumes and volumes about it. But not between the covers of my books. My great crime is that I did not consult Dr. Locke. Seeing that all of the great critics of America approved of the book Dr. Locke certainly would have approved of it if I had consulted him. And God help those who go ahead and succeed without consulting him!

An instance of Dr. Locke's insincerity. I remember well at Howard University that he was one of the leaders in a hullabalooe against the singing of Negro spirituals. That was before so many people in high places had praised them. Now he tooches his lips all out and shivers with ecstasy when he speaks of "those beautiful and sensitive things." I remember his trembling with emotion over "the faithfulness to Negro
2. religion, "Which is anything you want to call it but the truth. But nobody was going to catch Dr. Locke not chiming in with anything so popular as that.

Dr. Locke is abstrusely a fraud, both as a leader and as a critic. He knows less about Negro life than anyone in America, and if what he did in The New Negro is a sample, he does not know anything about editing and criticism either. You can tell by reading what he writes that he intends to be a great big fraud. It does succeed in being a fraud but not a big one. He intends to pass off his "personal" touches as criticism. He is a public turn-coat and ought to pointed out as such. He has set himself up as an opinion-passers without having the material for the opinions. I will send my toe-nails to debate him on what he knows about Negroes and Negro life, and I will come personally to debate him on what he knows about literature on the subject. This one who lives by quotations trying to criticise people who live by life!!

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