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The Home Front

The Black Boys

A COUPLE of weeks ago I was writing about
souls as a road to understanding. All round
us are groups of people who are different.
Dif-ference inspires fear. Fear is dangerous. The realistic
novel goes beyond particularities of speech, dress and
manners. It takes in whole men and women who may be
our neighbors but who are kept alien to us by their
words and ways. We begin to see things from their
point of view. We realize that unlike they are not very
different. Because it provokes us to sympathy and under-
standing a conscientiously written work of fiction may
be worth a dozen books on social theory.

I was saying things like this in connection with a dis-
cussion of Two Solitudes, Hugh MacLennan’s fine
novel about the Canadian French.

Since that time people in this
country have been stirred and
shocked by Black Boy, the au-
tobiography of Richard Wright
(Harper and Brothers, $2.50).

The Negroes are our greatest
unorganized and misunderstood
group. Through this book—
as through a number of others
published during the past year—we
have a window opened straight
into their hearts. It is important
that white folks take a look
through that window and take

William E. Bohn

Our friend, W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, raises a ques-
tion as to whether this is straight biography or fiction
in biographical form. To biographers of Richard
Wright the question is important, but not to us. Wright
is a talented and successful writer. From the vantage
point of his present success and popularity he looks
back and—no matter what were the exact details of
his existence—he sees his biography as a bad and
terrible time. His pictures of the people, whites and
blacks, most epitomize the impression which carried
with him into manhood.

In reading Native Son, I had my suspicions recorded
by the sketch of the Communist leader. The man was
too calmly, too wise, too devoted. Nobody could be as
good as that. Having read Black Boy, I can understand
how Richard Wright came to draw that picture. He came
North bleeding from a hundred wounds suffered by his
rags. What happened to him later on is to be discussed
in a later volume. This one takes him only in the
moment when he departed from Merigold for Chicago.
I can easily imagine how the Chicago Communists
took possession of him and gave him the recognition
for which he yearned. All the world knows from his
Atlantic Monthly articles how that brief honeymoon
ended. Richard Wright is direct, honest, violent. He
 could not long be fooled by anyone.


cmped in the lives of Negro men and women. We must

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