

Library Signpost

# Black But Beautiful

By Rev. Benedict Ekmann

Because Opportunity knocks but once, most of us never get close enough to recognize her. But happy is the man who knows the precious stranger and opens the door at her knock.

The former Archbishop McNeil of Toronto was such a man. There was a Russian refugee in his city, intelligent, devout, ready to become an apostle. Toronto was festering with Red activity which was being directed out of New York. Instead of screaming at the Reds from the safe citadel of his diocesan paper, he determined on a wiser plan. Study them. Get their slant. See what they want. Learn from their drive. Win them over by love. Who would be better fitted for this hard apostolate than the Russian refugee, herself an outcast of the Red Revolution?

And so Archbishop McNeil invited the Baroness de Hueck to be his apostle of the Reds. She had not let herself become hardened with hate because of the Red atrocities against her people in Russia. They had killed her father, her brother, and twenty other relatives. But she knew that these her people were hostages of a righteous anger that had lost its head in violence. She would try to understand that anger, would try to make amends for its causes.

You have to know the Baroness de Hueck to come under the spell of her charity. One thanks God that she was not shunted aside by a bishop's secretary, but invited to come in and share, as only she was able to, this portion of the Lord's work. It takes vision to know God's approved workmen, especially in these days of the harvesting of the grapes of wrath.

This appointment by Archbishop McNeil was the "open door" to the great apostolate of the Baroness de Hueck: a work which ranks her with Dorothy Day as one of the great women of the Catholic Church today. First in Toronto, then in Ottawa now in New York's Harlem and always at the invitation of bishops and priests, she has been following the bloody footsteps of the crucified Christ in the slums, to find Him and to wipe away the dirt and spittle and blood from His face.

"No white folks live here, Lady," the Negro janitor said to the Baroness when she applied for a vacant apartment at 34 West 135th Street in Harlem. But she moved in. She was the only white woman in the forty blocks of dusky Harlem. In three years

she has become like a grandmother to thousands of Negroes. She is their "laver of ivory," their "house of gold."

The original single room and bath has expanded into an institution of seven units, which include club rooms for various age groups, a library, a clothing distribution center, and a center for Negro leadership.

Archbishop Spellman loves to come there. He comes unattended; his secretary might not approve of his playing ping-pong with the Negro children. On one visit, when the Baroness was not in, nobody recognized him. One of the girls, hard pressed for assistance in the clothing line, asked him to help. And he did. For a half hour. And no one was the wiser until the Baroness came back.

This woman of God, this modern Catherine of Siena, is coming to Rochester this Sunday (Feb. 1). She is to speak at Blessed Sacrament Hall at 8:30 in the evening. The public is invited. Tickets are 35c, tax included. People who have no tickets may pay admission at the door.

Seeing and hearing Marian Anderson the other evening, I thought how many more Negroes could blossom forth into this loveliness, given one half a break in our halfhearted society. But this will have to be paid for and prayed for in sweat and tears, and more Veronicas like the Baroness de Hueck will have to sacrifice themselves to purify the ugly and to straighten the crooked.

During the concert I was haunted by the memory of a poem of Ruth Pitter's on "The Beautiful Negress." The poet was bowed down by a dark sorrow, and she forgot to search for any beauty in it, until the sight of a beautiful Negress passing by reminded her of beauty in darkness and left her with peace in her soul. I quote it here as a tribute to a rare and noble artist.

### The Beautiful Negress

Her gait detached her from the moving throng:  
Like night, advancing with long pace and slow.  
Or like unhurrying fate she seemed to go.  
By an eternal Purpose borne along.  
An unregretful elegiac Song  
Swelled in her wake, she gathered up my weep  
Into epitome, and left it so.  
Still dark, but made harmonious and strong.  
O solemn Beauty, when upon my way  
You walked in majesty, did not the tear  
Leap up to crown you with more light than day?  
Did not the silent voice within the ear  
Cry: Fly with her to the soul's Africa,  
Night, tragedy the veiled end prefer?

RUTH PITTER

from A Trophy of Arms,  
Macmillan 1939

Sursum Corda

# Optimistic? Why?

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

Now that we read in the newspapers and hear on the radio good news and bad, to say nothing of the news, be it good or bad which we may neither read nor hear, the time seems to have come that will reveal every man's basic philosophy. Ask a man in times of peace, and when there is no great calamity, either actual or threatening, "Are you a pessimist or an optimist?" You will generally get an answer. But the answer will not mean much. How can a man know what he is until the test comes? "These are the times that try men's souls," said Thomas Paine, just before the American Revolution. And these are the times that test men's philosophies, we may say now that we are in a war that makes the American Revolution, and even for that matter the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution seem a minor episode.

So ask any friend, or as people do now ask your neighbor on the street car or on the corner as you wait for the car, "How do you think things are going?" If he answers, "Bad, and they're going to be worse," ask your second question, "What do you think the world will look like after this war is over?" If he says, "Civilization will never be the same again. It looks as if nothing but barbarism can come out of this bloody business," ask him just one more question and then, for pity's sake stop. The third and crucial question is, "Why do you think as you do? What is the basis of your judgment?" If he can give you a rational answer to that, you have his philosophy. You can put him down as optimist or pessimist.

And now for ourselves. If some persistent person, with or without encouragement from us, puts us over the jumps as we, in imagination have put the other fellow over the jumps, what shall we say? Whatever we say we shall reveal not only our philosophy but our theology. An atheist or an infidel can have a philosophy of a sort and it will be only a philosophy, that is to say an outlook on life based upon human reason and nothing more. But a Christian and especially a Catholic has an outlook on life determined not alone by the exercise of reason, to which he is entitled like any other man, but by his idea of God, Divine Revelation, the continuing existence of Christ, and in brief by the whole content of the Bible and Sacred Tradition. It makes an enormous difference in your philosophy if you believe in God, and all the other facts of Revelation. St. Paul said of the pagans that they are "without hope" because they are "without God in the world." There you have the determining factor in a man's philosophy. If he thinks there is no God, why shouldn't he think that the bottom is about to fall out of civilization? What's to hold the world up? What's to prevent man from smashing what man has constructed? If man came out of the jungle, what's to prevent man's going back to the jungle. If some vague indeterminate thing called "Nature" dragged him up out of the mire, why cannot the same vague indeterminate thing plunge him back into the mire? The only answer is that it can and that it looks just now as if it would.

In that supposition we are leaving God out of the picture. We are going on the theory that there is no God. It's a hard theory to go on, and an impossible supposition to make because all our thinking had been done and all our experience has been gathered in a world in which there is a God. But blot God out—so to speak. Suppose there were no

Churches or synagogues or temples. Suppose no man or woman had any faith or said no prayers. Sweep all religion off the face of the earth. Sweep it away clean not leaving, as they did in Russia, some millions of simple people who couldn't be touched by all their twenty-year long anti-God campaign. Get rid of religion once and for all and forever. Then what will you have? You will have the only kind of world that could justify pessimism.

But now take the other view, the religious view and specifically the Christian Catholic view. "God is in His heaven," said Browning. Yes and God's on His earth. Man may do his terrible worst to get back to the jungle but God will intervene. If man did come out of the jungle, up from barbarism, savagery, animalism, it wasn't by any vague indeterminate law of Nature, unless by the law of Nature you mean the Providence of God. The God Who made man can remake man. The God Who created the world can interfere with man's attempt to destroy the world. The God Who watches over the rise and development of human society and of civilization can prevent the annihilation of civilization. He can, and no one else can. Man can no more create civilization than he can create himself. If man did as the materialists say, evolve out of the amoeba in the prehistoric slime, man can slip back into some post-historic slime. The only theory on which you may say "Onward and Upward" is that there is a Superintending Intelligence. But when you say Superintending Intelligence you say God.

Now, back to the war. We Catholics are optimists. And we have a basis for our optimism. We don't believe that chaos will come again on this globe because God Who created Cosmos out of Chaos did so for a purpose and the purpose would be frustrated if the work of Creation were undone. Man may think that he is directing the course of the world and determining the destiny of the race. If he were doing so, if he could do so, neither you nor I nor any man could say confidently that the world will be made right again. But the Director of the Universe is not man but God. We can rely upon God. So we are in philosophy and theology optimists.

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# Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Jan. 28, 1937, Edition

Catholic Press Month opened with a diocesan-wide campaign to increase the number of readers of the CATHOLIC COURIER.

That it was wrong to say as had been charged in some quarters that the Catholic Church was conducting a world-wide campaign against Communism principally because the Holy See was concerned with supporting Fascism was refuted as Commonweal editorial, was quoted in refutation of statements made in the Christian Century and The Nation.

"Catholicism as a working basis for the lives of many Catholics has lost its meaning today," declared the Rev. Donald M. Cleary, addressing the Catholic Action League of St. Alphonsus' Church. The priest stressed the point that Catholics should be informed about their religion to become better prepared to meet the ever increasing opposition to the Catholic Church.

The Rev. Joseph Haffey, moderator of Boy Scout Troop No. 29, was directing plans for the solemn Investiture Ceremony in St. Mary's Church, Elmira. Meeting in St. Stephen's parish house, Geneva, mothers of boy and girl scouts formed a social advisory organization known as the Scout Mothers' Auxiliary.

# The Royal Road

By Dolores Hoffman

Look up weary soul to calvary's hill  
Draw grace and strength in doing His will  
The thorns will cut deep; the cross will press down  
But where there's no cross, there will be no crown.

When the black night of sorrow descends to unfold you  
When bitter tears fall and your heart broken too  
O'call you Mary, our Mother of sorrow  
To lead you into a brighter tomorrow.

Who better than Mary, God's own Sweet Mother  
Can bring us peace from her Son, our Brother  
To guide us along the royal road that leads home  
Safe home to the Master no more to roam.

# EDITORIALS

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in church and at home; it is present when a soul is departing this life.

The Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Mother is the Feast of Blessing of Throats, at religious professions; it is used at our churches the Candles on Candlemas Day. Perhaps the union of the two was suggested by the gifts made by Mary when she presented her Divine Infant in the Temple. As she gave for use in the service of God's Temple the turtle dove of two pigeons, so Catholics traditionally have given for the use of God's Church, one or more blessed candles.

Let the recurrence of Candlemas Day remind us of the important part candles play in our religious observances. Let them remind us of how God uses the material things of this world to draw us to a better knowledge and appreciation of the blessings of the spiritual world which are all about us and which are symbolized by the sacramentals of the Church.

# COURIER CRUSADE 1942

Today's issue is the Catholic Press Month Edition of the Catholic Courier. It refers to the letter of Bishop Keane to be read in all churches on Sunday, February 1. Catholic Press Month promotes all forms of Catholic reading, furthers the purpose of every one of our magazines, weeklies, newspapers. Naturally, it points first and foremost at the Diocesan Newspaper as the foundation of all such reading, the indispensable unit which must be the beginning of Catholic reading in the home. No other publication can replace the Diocesan Newspaper; no other publication should be considered until the Diocesan Home Newspaper has its honored place on the home table.

In the Rochester District, Press Month will inaugurate the Annual Courier Crusade. Pupils of our grammar schools and of our high schools will undertake in the spirit of Crusades the spread of Catholic reading through securing subscriptions and renewals for the Courier. Into the homes they will go, not as agents merely, but as devoted advocates of the Catholic Press and of its local representative, the COURIER. It is a Catholic cause, a religious interest, a blessed undertaking. As members of the Church they sponsor this particular Church interest, to get more people to take and read the COURIER.

In the Eastern Diocesan Edition and in the Southern Tier Edition of the COURIER, the interest will be centered not on a Crusade, as in other years, but on 100% cooperation with the Pastor who has arranged for delivery of the COURIER by mail to his parishioners on a 100% basis.

Let Catholic Press Month be to all of us an incentive to more and better Catholic reading. Starting with the regular reading of the COURIER, let all branch out into other lines of our literature, building a splendid edifice of Catholic knowledge and culture on the solid foundation which the COURIER furnishes.

# THE PRESIDENT'S BIRTHDAY

All America will be interested in the coming week in the Birthday of President Roosevelt. All America will be praying that God will bless him as he observes the sixtieth anniversary of his birth. A burden of responsibility such as falls on few men, a daily regimen that leaves little time for rest, a burning zeal for the welfare of his beloved country now under attack by its enemies, are the portion of President Roosevelt as he completes three score years.

Our President's Birthday means more than an ordinary day of celebration. The forgotten man may have had his day, but the forgotten child is with us still! No longer forgotten is this child! The charity of our President and of millions who follow his lead brings out into the limelight this victim of a crippling disease, this child whose hope for us and whose future is in our hands. In every city the friends of this child will have a part in supplying funds to minister to him and his fellows at home and in Warm Springs, and to foster study in our medical schools that will look to the eventual conquering of infantile paralysis.

# GO YE INTO MY VINEYARD!

The call of the Lord comes to all. No man has any reason to stand idle all the day long; no man has any right to waste the valuable hours of the day in idleness. "Go ye also into My vineyard."

Life is to be lived in useful service of God. There can be no sense in wasting its valuable moments, in trifling away its opportunities. There can be no valid reason for waiting until the 11th hour before beginning its work. Now is the acceptable time, now is the time of salvation.

God's reward awaits all workers. His call is sounding out to us now. To us it comes at this present moment; others may not hear the summons until the 11th hour. Rich—the reward He promises to all His workers! Justice and mercy are mingled in that reward. But outside the supernatural and eternal reward, there exists a supplementary happiness for those who are privileged to labor all the day long. Rejoicing in the bountiful provision He makes even for the tardy ones, let us be partakers of the grace promised to those who report early: "Blessed are they who have borne the yoke from their earliest youth!"