

OUR WOMEN OF LETTERS.

WHAT THE COLORED WOMEN OF AMERICA HAVE DONE AND ARE DOING IN THE FIELD OF LITERATURE.

The Pioneer Workers Among Them—They Touch Not only the Lute, but the Law and Medicine as Well—Reminiscences and Reviews—Paints and Portraits.

Published by The Freeman.

Literary work, to be successfully accomplished, requires leisure and a mind at ease. Women, and especially poor women, seldom possess these requisites. They have little time they can call their own, and the cares and trials incidental to the life of the sex, especially among the poor, leave the mind in a continual state of distraction, caused by the desire and necessity of making ends meet. The women of our race have all the more incident to the lives of other women, and added to these peculiar burdens of their own growing out of their position of the inheritors of the oppression of slavery and its twin sister caste prejudice. Few of them have had time to think or to write out their thoughts, and yet within there are faint glimmerings here and there along the intellectual horizon of our race that those scorned and oppressed ones have talent and a strong inclination in the line of literary work; this is being proven every day. The A. M. E. Review, Christian Recorder, The Negro, The Alumni Magazine, Our Women and Children, The New York Age, Detroit Plaindealer, and Boston Advocate have been largely the means of bringing the reserve corps of writers into prominence. Their work may show but a way of small things, but it shows also cause for hope for the future. In a short time, with so few advantages, so much has been accomplished, what may we not expect in the new era of education and intelligence dawning upon us. We have many women with literary talent fit successors of Phyllis Wheatley, our first African hostess in this country.

Perhaps the laurel wreath might be equally divided between Mrs. F. E. W. Harper and Mrs. F. Jackson Coppin. Mrs. Harper is the oldest and therefore pioneer literary worker of our sex in the United States, but Mrs. Coppin, by her unexampled skill and industry, has accomplished a work almost without parallel when surrounded by like discouraging forces.

Mrs. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, who has just celebrated her 63 birthday in this city, was born in Baltimore. Her parents were free persons, although residents of a slave-holding State. Mrs. Harper is one of the many women who have struggled onward and upward to a useful life, though deprived early of a mother's care. Raised under the careful supervision of her uncle, who took great interest and pride in his talented little niece, she was placed by him at a later date in a cultured Christian family. The family secured the little Frances golden opportunities for improvement which she took advantage of, and becoming sufficiently accomplished at last to take charge of a school in Ohio. Later, she removed to Little York, Pa., and there she made her debut as a lecturer. At a later date, becoming enthusiastic in the cause of the slave, she joined the Anti-Slavery workers, lecturing under their auspices. At the time of John Brown's capture, she spent some time at the house of William Still, consoling the widow and affording her aid in her distress. When the slave was emancipated, Mrs. Harper joined the Temperance movement and is still working with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Mrs. Harper was married to Fenton Harper, of Ohio. At his death, with one little daughter, she faced the cold world, but by a life of industry, she has earned considerable means, raised her daughter to intelligent womanhood and had the pleasure of seeing her graduate as a trained elocutionist. Mrs. Harper has written very excellent articles, two of them, "The Dying Redeeman," and "The Democratic Return to Power," in the A. M. E. Review, with many of her earlier poems deserving special mention and gaining her admittance to the N. Y. Independent.

The Society for the Advancement of Women, The Women's Congress, and other public gatherings of the sex have been honored with papers by Mrs. Harper, that were received with great pleasure and widely quoted.

Mrs. Fannie Jackson Coppin, the wife of Rev. Levi Coppin, editor of the A. M. E. Review, gained an enviable reputation as teacher and lecturer when Miss Fannie Jackson. She was born in Washington, D. C. Mrs. Coppin is undoubtedly one of the most successful educators in the United States, without regard to color or sex. She has perhaps the largest number of pupils under her charge of any woman of color in the U. S. She was educated at Newport, R. I., and later took the course at Berlin, taking upon her young shoulders at an early date the onerous duties of a large school; she has proven a complete success. As a lecturer she has few equals in either race, her latest achievement has been the raising of funds to start an Industrial School for colored children in Philadelphia. She has also a boarding house for pupils from a distance in view, as the next object of her energetic efforts. As a representative of the Ladies' Mite Missionary

Society of the A. M. E. Church to the London Missionary gathering, Mrs. Coppin was received with great cordiality in England, and was treated at home with a pleasant surprise in the form of a grand reception at Allen Chapel, Philadelphia.

Miss Carrie Bragg, who was a few years ago the editor of the Virginia Lancet, was born in Va., and is at present a teacher in Virginia State Normal and Collegiate Institute. Miss Bragg won our admiration while an editor not only by excellent editorials, but by the patience and equanimity with which she bore with her masculine competitors for editorial honors. They seemed to consider it unparalleled temerity for a woman to enter the literary arena and especially their journalistic field and never tired of perpetrating jokes and witticisms at her expense, but she conquered for herself a place, held her own and gained the respect of all.

Miss Bragg is also quite musical. Miss Lucinda Bragg, her talented sister, favored us with an excellent piece of music of her own composition at the time we occupied the position of editor of the Women's Department of the New York Freeman.

Our first attention was attracted to Miss Wells (Iola) by an article on Christmas published in the New York Freeman. The article showed great originality and force, since that time we have read after the writer with considerable interest and with a hopeful view of her future literary career. Miss Wells has already made her non-de-plume Iola a power, and her articles are much sought after. She writes with a vim and sparkle that holds the attention. One always reads her articles to the end and never casts aside the humblest publication after seeing her signature, until one finds what she has to say. Her life has been spent as a teacher although her own school days were of short duration; being eldest of a family of eight and losing both parents with the yellow fever it became necessary for her to earn her own living, and to assist her orphaned brothers and sisters.

So Shaw University parted with one of its most brilliant pupils. Miss Wells is a teacher at Memphis. Her first article of note was written after her ejection from the cars, and, after contesting the suit in all courts, and being at last defeated in the Supreme Court, she wrote the above mentioned article.

Josephine D. (Henderson) Heard was born in Salisbury, N. C., October 11, 1860. Her parents, Lafayette and Annie Henderson, moved to Charlotte, N. C., when she was but one year of age. She was educated in the School of Charlotte, Scotia Seminary, Concord, N. C., and Buttham Institute, N. Y. She taught school in North Carolina and Tennessee. She was married to Rev. William H. Heard, of Athens, Ga., in January, 1882. They moved to Atlanta, Ga., in July of the same year, as her husband was in the United States mail services and had been transferred to the Air Line R. P. O., of Georgia. Rev. M.

Heard resigned from the Government services in April 1883, and was appointed to the A. M. E. Church, of Aiken; S. C. Mrs. Heard, while at Aiken, taught in the Schofield Normal School. In 1885 her husband was stationed at Mt. Zion A. M. E. Church at Charleston. In this city her literary talent became more developed, and she read a poem on the life of Rev. H. H. Cardozo, which attracted much attention and received many comments. She read a poem before the Annual Conference on the death of Bishop J. A. Shorter, and also one in honor of Hon. Fred Douglass. Her last public effort was at the annual commencement of Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio. She has contributed to several leading journals and the A. M. E. Church Review.

Miss H. Cordelia Ray of New York, and her sister, Miss Florence Ray, an excellent lawyer, deserve space in this article. These ladies are refined and cultured women, and their writings one of the highest order. Miss Cordelia's beautiful poems adding much to the success of the A. M. E. Review. They have published since their father's (Mr. Charles Ray) death a small volume in his memory, a fitting tribute from two talented daughters to the lovely, useful and self-sacrificing life of a beloved father. Mrs. Lambert, another contributor to the Review, editor of St. Matthew's Lyceum Journal, and a public school teacher, has won much praise by her beautiful poems and also valuable prose contributions to the Review, and the Plaindealer.

Among German students we have Miss Trazelia Campbell, of Phila. Miss Campbell is an excellent historical teacher and a beautiful player on the harp.

Mrs. Lottie Porter Grimke has written but little of late year, failing health and many cares having prevented active literary work. Mrs. Forten was a contributor to the Atlantic Monthly and other journals some years ago. Several very beautiful poems of this writer were printed in the Alumni Magazine.

Miss Florence Lewis, a teacher in Phila., is a rising star in our literary firmament. Miss Lewis is a contributor to several white journals, and would make an excellent critical writer. She has been an inspiration to other of her literary friends by her sympathy and literary acumen. A good listener, a good suggester, and one always leaves her presence inspired with renewed hope for greater efforts.

Miss Alice Modly, a native of Pa., now a member of the Senior class of the Institute for Colored Youth of Phila., has done some excellent literary work for the Philadelphia Echo during the past year.

Mrs. Mary Ashe Lee, the wife of the editor of the Christian Recorder, author of Tawawa, America, and other poems, was born in Mobile, Alabama, but was raised in Wilberforce, Ohio, and received her entire literary training at that school. Mrs. Lee is the mother of a growing family, with many cares and little leisure. One comes away

from her presence with a longing regret that so much beauty of thought and imagery must lie dormant waiting the accepted time of leisure and opportunity.

Mrs. Lee is not a prolific writer, but we consider America one of the most beautiful and pathetic poems written by our race, and excelled but seldom by the more favored race. Her verses cling to us, twine around our memory, and after seeing and conversing with the author they are still deeper impressed with her personality.



MRS. JOSEPHINE D. HEARD, Of Atlanta, Georgia.



MISS IDA B. WELLS (IOLA), Of Memphis, Tennessee.



The late MRS. MARY ELLA MOSSELL, Of New England.



MRS. FRANCIS E. W. HARPER, Of Philadelphia.



THE LITERARY COLORED WOMEN OF AMERICA.



PERSONAL

Mr. Fred Pelham, of Detroit, Mich., is civil engineer on the Michigan Central railway.

Hon. C. H. J. Taylor, ex-minister to Liberia has gone to Atlanta, Ga., where he will practice law.

Miss Roberta Sherman is the first colored teacher appointed to the public schools of Baltimore, Md.

Prof. J. M. Maxwell, of Louisville, Ky., and principal of one its largest public schools is a fine-art critic.

Dr. W. C. Crum, a prominent colored physician, of Charleston, S. C., has gone to Washington to attend the conference of Southern Republican leaders.

Lieut. H. O. Flipper, of Arizona, Terr., is contributing some interesting letters to the Noyale's Sunday Herald under the caption of "Sonora Antiquities."

Hon. Fredrick Douglass is a candidate for the office of Recorder of Deeds we learn. Mr. Douglass held the office under President Arthur and over a year under the present administration.

Miss Mary Burnet, of the Advocate, and Mrs. H. C. Carolina, of the Little Rock Sun, delivered addresses before the "Arkansas Colored Press Convention," which was held in Pine Bluff, recently.

Mr. R. J. Johnson, of Newport, Ky., is the inventor of a new car heater which bids fair to revolutionize the business. A sketch of the inventor and his invention will appear in an early number of The Freeman.

Edmonia Lewis, in her far-away studio in Italy, is sending her works of art all over the world. She has lately made a statue of St. Charles Borromeo for a gentleman in Brooklyn, and a larger work for the church of St. Charles Borromeo. Miss Lewis' life is one of marked achievements.

Edwin F. Horn, of Chattanooga, Tenn., and whose portrait appears in this number of The Freeman, is a candidate for the position of Recorder of Deeds. Mr. Horn was among the first to mention Harrison's name in connection with the Presidency and we would not be surprised did the mantle fall on his shoulders.

Miss Lucy Wilmont-Smith, of the State University, Louisville, Ky., has been requested by the editor of the Journalist, a paper published in New York and devoted to the interests of newspapers, writers, authors, artists and publishers, to write an article on female writers of the Negro Race for the January number, and she is now endeavoring to make that article such as will reflect credit and convince a reading people of the ability of a rising people.—Our Women and Children.

The next issue of The Freeman will contain an excellent cut and sketch of Miss Smith and other literary women of the race.

THE DRIFT OF SENTIMENT

The Springfield Capital has changed hands. Mr. Turner steps out and Mr. R. O. Lee steps in.

The date for the meeting of the press convention of colored newspaper men at Washington has been changed to March 5th.

It is reported that Mr. Robert T. Teamoh, of New London, has secured a position as a reporter on the Boston Daily Globe.

The Washington Bee makes a special bid to the Baptists to sustain it. Why this Brother Chase? Are you about to embark in to the ministry?

The Age our New York contemporary, gives Rev. W. B. Derrick, of that city, several severe whacks in its last issue. The reverend gentlemen probably didn't know it was loaded.

The much vaunted daily Talked of by Free Speech and Headlight, of Memphis, Tenn., has not made its appearance yet. It takes something to conduct a daily newspaper, gentlemen.

John Mitchell, of the Richmond Planet, has lately invested in a cylinder press for his paper, and it is run by an electric motor. Mr. Mitchell is the youngest colored editor in the country.

"Our Women and Children," of Louisville, Ky., comes to our sanctum this week brim full of good things. Its matter is all choice and carefully culled, and better still is written expressly for it. Dr. Simmons has enlisted the most eminent literary writers of the race into its service, and one need not be surprised at the good things it contains. "Our Women and Children" is one of the most pretentious magazines of the kind published.

FORTUNES REMEDY.

I am still of the opinion that what we need is an organization, efficiently officered which will meet these discriminations and fight them in the courts and out of them in every State in the Union. It takes money and plenty of it to fight such rights as are denied us. The money needed and the intelligence proper to spend it can only be obtained by active co-operation and effective organization. The forces against us are combining. Shall we remain idle.—T. Thomas Fortune in New York Age.



Pittsburg is to have a school for colored Catholics.

A Colored Catholic convention be held in Washington, D. C., Jan. 1, 1889.

Colored People's Day at the Augusta Exposition was not much of a success.

Two young white men married colored girls in Richmond, Ind., the past year. Such cases are more numerous in Ohio.

Miss Bertha Wilson of 213 3d Avenue was appointed assistant State Librarian in the state of Illinois a few days ago by Secretary of State Pearson.

Bishop Leo Hall of the Catholic church is traveling in North Carolina establishing and organizing churches and schools among colored people.

A colored dramatic company of Jacksonville, Ill., is playing "Lost in London" to crowded houses in that State. Mrs. L. C. Taylor is the star of the company.

The State Normal and Industrial School at Wilberforce University is in full action; eight young men at the carpenters' bench. Mrs. S. C. Scarborough is at the head of the normal school.

It has been rumored by the friends of Mr. James Bohce, that he is having an unprecedented success in his line of business in Europe. He has contracted to fill an engagement for \$20,000 and will endeavor to secure the services of Madame Selika and Mr. S. W. Williams in the spring.

The Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery is arranging to hold a quarter century celebration of freedom in Philadelphia, January 2, 1889. On that date twenty-four years of freedom will have been filled up. There have been invited to speak at the meeting General S. C. Armstrong, Rev. J. C. Price, George W. Cable, Frederick Douglass and Principal B. T. Washington.

A. S. Bailey, a colored school teacher at Seney, Ga., has invented a self-coupling car coupler, which has a new feature of being worked from the top of the car by a rod which runs to the top. This feature removes the usual danger of car coupling. Mr. Bailey read of an accident at Rockmart, the cause of which was the custom of stepping between the cars to couple them, and set to work to find a remedy. He seems to have found a simple and effective one, and he had it patented.

THE DIAMOND.

Brown, the colored second baseman, of the Buffalo's is immense, when he lays aside the team uniform. He electrified Broadway recently by appearing in a blue corduroy coat, black and white striped trousers, yellow gloves, patent leather shoes, with light drab gaiters, a slate colored Fedora hat and a gold headed cane.

OHIO'S INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL.

An excellent school for the mental, moral and manual training of colored youths is located at Bowling Green, O. L. E. House is the principal and is said to fill the requirements of the situation nicely.

In the manual department they are now working in glass under the supervision of Mr. Bonshaw, a skilled workman of Pittsburg. The factory in which the work is done is owned by a company composed of Mr. S. L. Boughton, Pres.; H. A. Newland, Vice Pres.; D. R. Honkey, Treas.; and F. H. Boughton, Sec., and they are manufacturing jars, lamps, etc. There are at present 35 pupils present from different parts of the State. Their success thus far has been gratifying.

Freeman, 5 Jan. 1889, p. 5. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers, infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A12B28495A8DAB1C8%40EANX-12BC69DC9A94FA38%402411008-12BC14F5EFE31050%404. Accessed 26 July 2022.