

minds, and most important of all, a spiritual quickening and racial leavening such as no generation has yet felt and known. It has been their achievement also to bring the artistic advance of the Negro sharply into stepping alignment with contemporary artistic thought, mood and style. They are thoroughly modern, some of them ultra-modern, and Negro thoughts now wear the uniform of the age.

But for all that, the heart beats a little differently. Toomer gives a folk-lilt and ecstasy to the prose of the American modernists. McKay adds Aesop and irony to the social novel and a peasant clarity and naïveté to lyric thought, Fisher adds Uncle Remus to the art of Maupassant and O. Henry. Hughes puts Biblical fervor into free verse, Hayes carries the gush and depth of folk-song to the old masters, Cullen blends the simple with the sophisticated and puts the vineyards themselves into his crystal goblets. There is in all the marriage of a fresh emotional endowment with the finest niceties of art. Here for the enrichment of American and modern art, among our contemporaries, in a people who still have the ancient key, are some of the things we thought culture had forever lost. Art cannot disdain the gift of a natural irony, of a transfiguring imagination, of rhapsodic Biblical speech, of dynamic musical swing, of cosmic emotion such as only the gifted pagans knew, of a return to nature, not by way of the forced and worn formula of Romanticism, but through the closeness of an imagination that has never broken kinship with nature. Art must accept such gifts, and reevaluate the giver.

Not all the new art is in the field of pure art values.

There is poetry of sturdy social protest, and fiction of calm, dispassionate social analysis. But reason and realism have cured us of sentimentality: instead of the wail and appeal, there is challenge and indictment. Satire is just beneath the surface of our latest prose, and tonic irony has come into our poetic wells. These are good medicines for the common mind, for us they are necessary antidotes against social poison. Their influence means that at least for us the worst symptoms of the social distemper are passing. And so the social promise of our recent art is as great as the artistic. It has brought with it, first of all, that wholesome, welcome virtue of finding beauty in oneself; the younger generation can no longer be twitted as "cultural non-descripts" or accused of "being out of love with their own nativity." They have instinctive love and pride of race, and, spiritually compensating for the present lacks of America, ardent respect and love for Africa, the motherland. Gradually too under some spiritualizing reaction, the brands and wounds of social persecution are becoming the proud stigmata of spiritual immunity and moral victory. Already enough progress has been made in this direction so that it is no longer true that the Negro mind is too engulfed in its own social dilemmas for control of the necessary perspective of art, or too depressed to attain the full horizons of self and social criticism. Indeed, by the evidence and promise of the cultured few, we are at last spiritually free, and offer through art an emancipating vision to America. But it is a presumption to speak further for those who have spoken and can speak so adequately for themselves.

A. L.

# Harlem Life

Seven Poems by COUNTÉE CULLEN

## Harlem Wine

This is not water running here,  
These thick rebellious streams  
That hurtle flesh and bone past fear  
Down alleyways of dreams.

This is a wine that must flow on  
Not caring how or where,  
So it has ways to flow upon  
Where song is in the air.

So it can woo an artful flute  
With loose, elastic lips,  
Its measurement of joy compute  
With blithe, ecstatic hips.

## To a Brown Girl

What if his glance is bold and free,  
His mouth the lash of whips?  
So should the eyes of lovers be,  
And so a lovers lips.

What if no puritanic strain  
Confines him to the nice?  
He will not pass this way again  
Nor hunger for you twice.

Since in the end consort together  
Magdalen and Mary,  
Youth is the time for careless weather;  
Later, lass, be wary.

## Tableau

Locked arm in arm they cross the way,  
The black boy and the white,  
The golden splendor of the day,  
The sable pride of night.  
From lowered blinds the dark folk stare  
And here the fair folk talk,  
Indignant that these two should dare  
In unison to walk.  
Oblivious to look and word  
They pass, and see no wonder  
That lightning brilliant as a sword  
Should blaze the path of thunder.

## To a Brown Boy

That brown girl's swagger gives a twitch  
To beauty like a queen;  
Lad, never dam your body's itch  
When loveliness is seen.  
For there is ample room for bliss  
In pride in clean, brown limbs,  
And lips know better how to kiss  
Than how to raise white hymns.  
And when your body's death gives birth  
To soil for spring to crown,  
Men will not ask if that rare earth  
Was white flesh once, or brown.

—From *The Bookman*