

THE PASSING TRADITION AND AFRICAN CIVILIZATION

By N. WORK MONROE
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Another thing that is not generally known is the importance to which some of these Negro kingdoms of the Western Sudan attained during the middle ages and the first centuries of the modern era. In size and permanency they compared favorably with the most advanced nations of Europe. The kingdom of Melle, of which the historian Ibn Khaldun, wrote, had an area of over 1,000 miles in extent and existed for 250 years. It was the first kingdom of the Western Sudan to be received on equal terms with the contemporary white nations. The greatest of all the Sudan states was the kingdom of Songhay, which in its golden age, had an area about equal to that of the United States and existed from 750 A.D. to 1591. There is a record of the kings of Songhay in regular succession for almost 900 years. The length of the life of Songhay empire coincides almost exactly with the life of Rome from its foundation as a republic to its downfall as an empire.

The greatest evidence of the high state of civilization which the Sudan had in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were the attention that was paid to education and the unusual amount of learning that existed there. The university of Sankore, at Timbuctu was a very active centre of learning. It was in correspondence with the universities of North Africa and Egypt. It was in touch with the universities of Spain. In the sixteenth century Timbuctu had a large learned class living at ease and busily occupied with the elucidation of intellectual and religious problems. The town swarmed with students. Law, literature, grammar, theology and the natural sciences were studied. The city of Melle had a regular school of science. One distinguished geographer is mentioned, and allusions to surgical science show that the old maxim of the Arabian schools, "He who studies anatomy pleases God," was not forgotten. One of these writers mentions that his brother came from Jenne to Timbuctu to undergo an operation for cataract of the eyes at the hands of a celebrated surgeon there. It is said that the operation was wholly successful. The appearance of comets, so amazing to Europe of the Middle Ages and at the present time to the ignorant, was by these learned blacks, noted calmly as a matter of scientific interest. Earthquakes and eclipses excited no great surprise.

The renowned writer of the Sudan was Abdurrahman Essadi. He was born in Timbuctu in 1596. He came of learned and distinguished ancestors. He is chief author of the history of the Sudan. The book is said to be a wonderful document. The narrative deals mainly with the modern history of the Songhay Empire, and relates the rise of this black civilization through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and its decadence up to the middle of the seventeenth century. The noted traveller, Barth, was of the opinion that the book forms one of the most important additions that the present age has made to the history of mankind. The work is especially valuable for the unconscious light which it throws upon the life, manners, politics, and literature of the country. It presents a vivid picture of the character of the men with whom it deals. It is sometimes called the Epic of the Sudan.

From the brief sketch I have given of the African in ancient and medieval times it is clear that Negroes should not despise the rock from which they were hewn. As a race, they have a past that is full of interest. It is worthy of serious study. From it we can draw inspiration; for it appears that not all black men everywhere throughout the ages have been "hewers of wood and drawers of water." On the contrary, through

long periods of time there were powerful black nations which have left the records of their achievements and of which we are just now beginning to learn a little. This little however, which we have learned teaches us that the Negroes of today should work and strive. Along their own special line and in their own peculiar way, they should endeavor to make contributions to civilization. Their achievements can be such that once more black will be dignified and the fame of Ethiopia again spread throughout the world.

Monroe N. Work

The What-Not Column

(By Robert P. Edwards)

Why is this column called The Whatnot Column?

In the old homes, before the days of the parlor, or the advent of the drawing room, there used to be a front room, where sis' could entertain her beau under the ever watchful maternal eye (unless 'twas occupied by the stoic fathers of the church discussing ways and means, an honor seldom enjoyed by the modern parlor, and rarely, if ever, by the fashionable drawing room).

Memory recalls that among the quaint furniture of this hallowed room there stood in the far corner a series of about six small shelves, the lower large enough to accommodate the family album, and the top-most barely large enough to hold the family daguerreotype. On the intervening shelves were placed odds and ends of bric-a-brac and WHATNOT, which name was given the series of shelves by the old folks at home, and a name that we feel is fitting for the series of questions and answers of WHATNOTS of Negro History and other WHATNOTS of interest.

Who was Hannibal?

Hannibal of Carthage, the greatest general of ancient times, not excepting Caesar, and who was born in B.C. 247, stands out in history as an exponent of military genius and unequalled strategy. He was the son of Hamilcar Barca, who nursing an unquenchable hatred of Rome, transmitted that hatred to his son who solemnly dedicated his life to warfare with the Latin city.

Hannibal attacked the Roman town of Saguntum in Spain, and the Roman Legions preparing to encounter him near Massilia, were astounded when Hannibal and his hosts appeared before Rome to attack the legions upon their own soil. They had passed the Pyrenees, and the Rhone with nearly 100,000 men, and after suffering severe losses in crossing the Alps, inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Romans at Cannae.

For 15 years this great Carthaginian held his ground in southern Italy. Returning to Carthage he met Scipio and his legions at Zamma, where his weary hosts who had crossed and recrossed the Pyrenees, Rhone and Alps were finally defeated after a terrific battle. Hannibal died in B.C. 183.

Who was Henry Highland Garnett?

Rev. Henry Highland Garnett was a great leader of his Race. Born a slave, he so improved his natural intelligence and the advantages opened to him by emancipation, that he became a prominent orator. As a minister of the Gospel he gained great respect and commanding influence over the congregation of Shiloh Church of New York, over which he presided for many years. He died in the early 90s in Monrovia, Liberia, whither he had been sent as United States Minister.

Next Week's "Whatnots"

Who was "The Son of Laughter"? Did a Negro ever preside over The House of Assembly of any State? Was Carthage betrayed? What is the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.A.

Colored Giants Twice Defeat Wellingtons

The Buffalo Colored Giants took both games of their doubleheader with the Wellingtons of Toronto, at Hampden Park, that city, on Civic Holiday, winning the morning session 7 to 5 and the afternoon 9 to 8 in twelve innings.

The games attracted a large crowd and the fans were well entertained with the work of the Giants and their peppy line of chatter.

Batteries, Morning game, Giants, Stevens and Sheppard; Wellingtons, Graham, O'Connell and Beaune; afternoon game, Giants, Davis and Sheppard; Wellingtons, O'Connell and Beaune.

A CREDIT TO MY RACE
(By Robert Paris Edwards)

I care not whether books of fame
Doth laud me to the skies,
I seek not golden paths of life,
By which I might arise,
But greater than the golden paths,
Where fame gives all a place,
I have but a desire to be
A credit to my Race.

I sing, not that the song may die
And not its message leave,
I speak, not that the words dissolve
Their mission unachieved.
When my words help my fellowman,
And my songs find a place
In his sad heart, then I will be
A credit to my Race.

Would that my pen, as Moses' staff,
Could lead men unto God,
Would that my songs inspire the
Hearts
Of weary ones that plod,
O! could I in the sands of time,
My foot-prints leave a trace,
Perhaps 'twould help my brother be
A credit to his Race.

Some day my soul must take its flight
Unto the God that gave,
Some day this humble frame of mine,
Will rest in a lone grave.
Then may my fellowmen enchain
To view its resting place,
Shed just a tear and say "He was
A credit to his Race."

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