

# TWENTIETH CENTURY NEGRO LITERATURE

OR  
A CYCLOPEDIA OF THOUGHT  
ON THE  
VITAL TOPICS RELATING  
TO THE AMERICAN NEGRO

BY  
ONE HUNDRED OF AMERICA'S  
G R E A T E S T N E G R O E S

EDITED AND ARRANGED  
*and written*  
BY  
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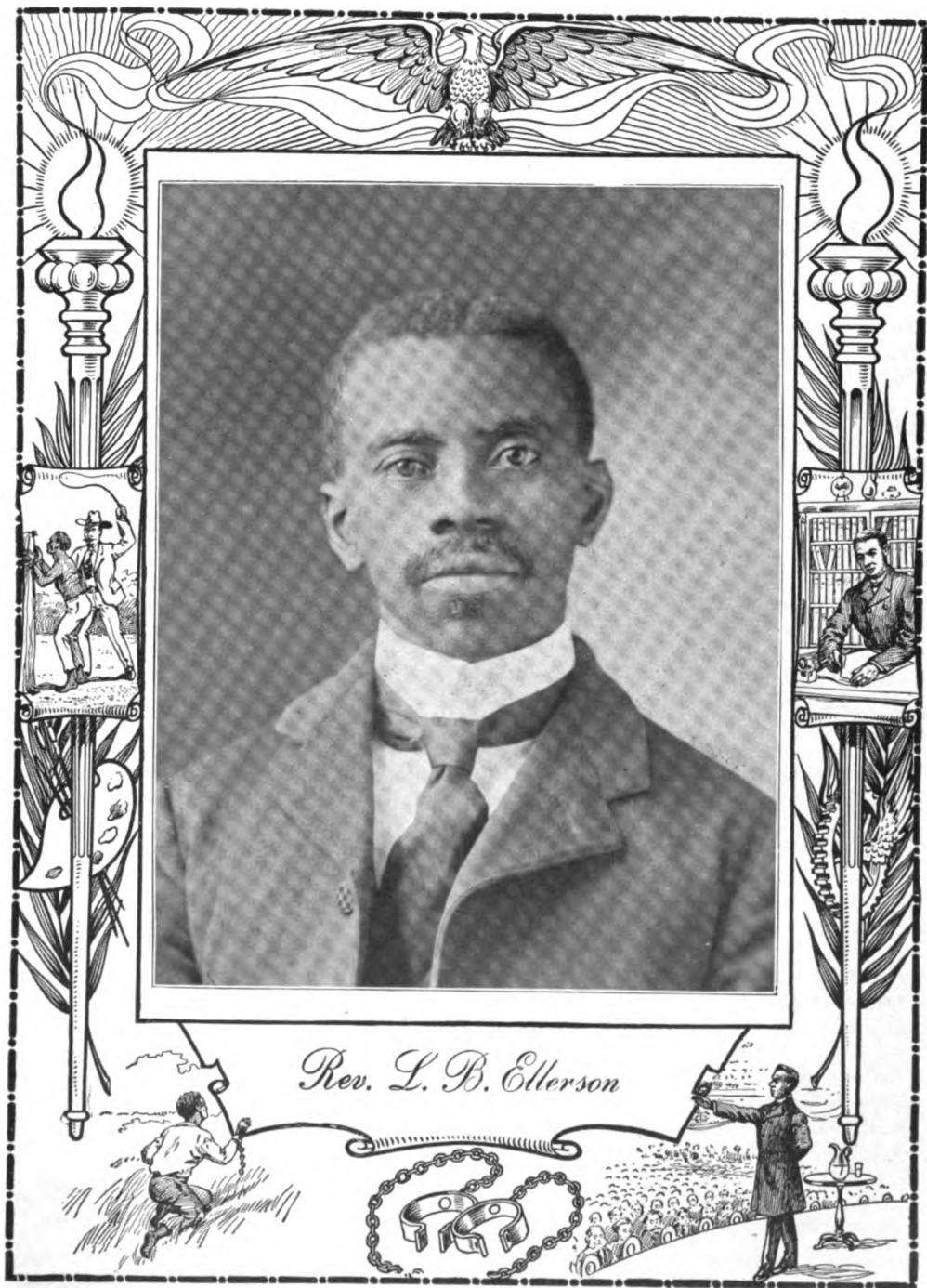
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*Rev. L. B. Ellerson*

## REV. L. B. ELLERSON.

Rev. L. B. Ellerson, A. M., was born at Cheraw, S. C., in 1869. Mr. Ellerson's father having died when the son was but an infant, Mr. Ellerson was left to be reared under the fostering care of his mother alone. He spent his youthful days in the public schools of his native town until he was sixteen years old. At that time he was happily converted to Christ and received the impressions that he was called to the gospel ministry. At the same time he united with the Presbyterian Church. In 1886, Mr. Ellerson entered Biddle University at Charlotte, N. C., to pursue such a course as would prepare him for the ministry. He remained at Biddle University until 1893, when he graduated from the classical course with honor, taking the Philosophical Oration. In '92 Mr. Ellerson was the successful contestant for the medal given by the Alumni to the Junior Class. During his course at Biddle, Mr. Ellerson spent his summer vacations, teaching in the district schools of North and South Carolina. In June, 1893, Mr. Ellerson was employed to do missionary work near Asheville, N. C. He continued in this work until September, 1893, at which time he entered the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church at Princeton, N. J., for the purpose of completing his course for the ministry. During the first two years of his course of Theology at Princeton he continued to come South in summer and engage in teaching during vacations. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1896. He and two others being the only colored students in a class of sixty-nine young men. Besides keeping up the studies of the last year, Mr. Ellerson supplied the pulpit of Dwight's Chapel at Englewood, New Jersey. Here he remained until September, 1896, when he came to South Carolina and was ordained to the full work of the gospel ministry by the Fairfield Presbytery, the same Presbytery having licensed him the preceding year.

During Rev. Ellerson's course at Princeton he was at one time engaged to supply the pulpit of Siloam Presbyterian Church at Elizabeth, N. J. At another time he was employed to assist the Rev. H. G. Miller, pastor of Mt. Taber Presbyterian Church, in New York City, during the illness of the pastor. Upon his ordination by Fairfield Presbytery in 1896, Rev. Ellerson was placed in charge of the church and school work at Manning, S. C. Here he worked very successfully preaching and teaching until November, 1898, when he was called to the pastorate of Berean Presbyterian Church at Beaufort, S. C. At the same time he was made principal of Harbison Institute. Rev. Ellerson labored with a marked degree of success on the Beaufort field from November, 1898, to April, 1901, when he was urged to accept a call from the Laura Street Presbyterian Church at Jacksonville, Fla., where he is at present prosecuting the work of his church with success. For a young man of his age, Rev. Ellerson evidently stands high in the estimation of his fellow Presbyters. This is evinced by the fact that he has already filled some of the highest offices in the gift of his brethren. In 1898 he was unanimously chosen moderator of Fairfield Presbytery at Camden, S. C. In 1899 he was made the choice of Atlantic Synod for moderator at Columbia, S. C., and in 1900 he was unanimously elected to represent the Presbytery of Atlantic in the General Assembly which met in St. Louis, Mo.

He has filled each of these offices with credit and ability. The degree of A. M. was conferred upon him by Biddle University, his Alma Mater in 1900.

lion dollars. It is remarkable that this has been acquired in forty years. God's word teaches that nations prosper in material things as they get close to God.

Thus looking upon the brighter side we are led to commend in many things the Christianity of the Negro race and to believe that as a people higher ground is aimed at. Though yet a long way off from perfection, yet ever onward and upward are they tending.

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SECOND PAPER.

**THE NEGRO AS A CHRISTIAN.**

BY REV. L. B. ELLERSON, A. B., A. M.

If it is true that man is naturally a religious being, then it is pre-eminently true in the case of the Negro. If the Negro is anything at all he is religious. It matters not in what walk of life you find him or what may be his personal or individual character, it is a very rare case indeed when you find a Negro who indulges in doubt as to the existence of a supreme being or the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments. With him these are fixed points of belief. But as much as may be justly said regarding the Negro's natural piety, it must be observed and admitted by all who know the Negro best that his religion is very much defective in its practical application to the principles of right conduct and living. And this, we perceive, is the main point at issue, for when we discuss the Negro as a Christian we must of necessity feel called upon to distinguish between his native piety and his applied Christianity. We wish it understood, too, that the general observations made here refer to the masses of Negroes rather than to the individual.

We unhesitatingly affirm that individuals of our race have risen to as true and as high a Christian status as has mankind anywhere. And although we know and confess that the masses of our race have not yet come up to the genuine standard of the New Testament Christianity—even in apprehension—yet it must be observed that their religion contains many features that are highly commendable. Chief among these features are, first, his simple, child-like, unwavering faith in God. Nor can this condition be wholly attributed to ignorance or thoughtlessness, as some might hold; for, indeed, we have produced some men of as rare

ability as move among the human throng; yet it is almost as difficult to find an atheist, an agnostic, or an infidel of any sort among us as it is to find a "needle in a haystack." The Negro believes in the God of the Bible.

Second. Because the Negro is naturally emotional he is usually earnest and fervent in the exercise of his religious worship, as far as that goes. He likes the strong, passionate appeal which for the time being, at least, tickles him into laughter or moves him to tears and sweeps him off his feet in its flight. The earnestness and fervency are all right but too often these run to the extreme and so constitute by far too large a portion of his Christianity.

Third. Again, the Negro's religion is characterized by benevolence. I believe that history has no record of a people who, out of their want and poverty, have given so much to benevolent causes as have the Negroes in this country. Is it not wonderful to reckon the millions of dollars that have been given by us for erecting and maintaining church edifices, schools and other benevolent institutions since emancipation? It is perfectly safe to affirm that no people have exceeded us along this line. But with all of these good things that can be justly said to the credit of our religion, the fair-minded must still admit that when we come to the daily application of the principles and practices of Bible Christianity we are lacking. If this be true, there is a cause. What is it? We believe that the cause was stated in part when we referred to the natural emotional element in our makeup. That element too often causes us to run off with the sentiment, having left the substance behind. Another cause, and, perhaps the main one, is to be found doubtless in the same way in which we find the causes of defects in our race along other lines, i. e., from defective leadership and instruction along this particular line. We would be understood. The crying need of our race to-day is and has been a *competent* ministry to lead and instruct the masses in the application of the principles of right life and conduct from the standpoint of Bible Christianity. To-day the church, especially in our race, is the center of both our social and Christian life. Like priests, like people. All honor to the pioneers who did their best in their circumstances and who served well their day and generation. But this is another age; this, a brighter day—one that demands improvement along all lines, and especially in the pulpit of my race. The pew is advancing, hence the pulpit had better push on. The key to the situation, then, is nothing more nor less than

a more consecrated and intelligent Christian ministry for our race throughout the length and breadth of this land. And we are hopeful; for the "signs of the times" portend the coming of better things. Already bright streaks of gray high up upon the eastern horizon herald the dawn of a new and brighter day. Every branch of the Christian church in our race is putting forth strenuous efforts to supply the pulpits of the race with competent ministers. Let this glorious day be hastened and soon Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to God.

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THIRD PAPER.

**THE NEGRO AS A CHRISTIAN.**

BY REV. WALTER H. BROOKS, D. D.

The Christian religion is eminently adapted to the wants of humanity. It has always had a charm for lowly and oppressed peoples. It was, therefore, the one thing, above all others, which gave comfort and hope to the American Negro during the night of his long bondage.

The story of the enslavement and marvelous deliverance of God's ancient people; of Daniel, the prophet, and the Hebrew youths, whom God protected and honored in the house of their bondage; the psalms of David, the sweet singer of Israel; the inspired narratives of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God; the Biblical account of the faith, sufferings and triumphs of the apostles; and the manifold promises of God, made to all who served Him in truth; and patiently wait for their fulfillment, could not fail in influencing the conduct and life of America's Negro slaves. It was in circumstances like these the Christian Negro, many years ago, sang out his hopes, his sorrows, and his soul-yearnings in melodies peculiarly his own, whose plaintive strains have been echoing around the globe for a generation and more.

The balm of Gilead was never so soothing to the wounds of an Israelite as the Gospel of Jesus Christ was, in the dark days of slavery, to the oppressed and sorrowing soul of the unfortunate Negro. It is not surprising, therefore, that at least one-fourth of the entire Negro population of the country was devout Christians forty years ago, while the entire Negro population was nominally believers in the living and true God, and in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.