

## BOOKS

### THE MAN FARTHEST DOWN.

**The Man Farthest Down:** A Record of Observation and Study in Europe. By Booker T. Washington. Doubleday, Page & Company, Garden City and New York.

No one has ever satisfactorily defined style. Perhaps the best definition is that it is the absence of style. I feel the force of this negative definition whenever I read one of Dr. Booker T. Washington's books. He just says things. Anyone who has heard him speak must feel the same way, that there is no effort, no striving after effect, that he is just saying the simplest sort of things. He can tell a story which throws his audience into laughter, and you laugh and wonder why. I recall his telling a pig story. All there is to it is that your pig is safer if your neighbors also have pigs, and yet I have seen an audience convulsed with laughter at his telling of it.

Nowhere more than in this latest book is this artless art apparent. The author was several months in Europe; he wanted to see how the poor folks were living; he especially wanted to compare their chances with those of his own people at home, and he tells us in a most interesting way what he saw and what his conclusions are. He had an able companion with him in Dr. Robert E. Park, to whom he makes grateful acknowledgment, and the reader will many times be reminded that the traveler was fortunate in having such an associate.

As might be expected, the investigator of the condition of the poor in any country could not escape the land question. Speaking of an interview with a Sicilian peasant, the author tells us that on asking the man what he would do if he had some money, "the old man's face lighted up and he said promptly, 'Get some land and have a little home of my own.'" "Many times since then," he adds, "I have asked the same or similar questions of some man I met working on the soil. Everywhere I received the same answer." And again he says: "Upon inquiring I found it to be generally admitted that the condition of the population was due to the fact that the larger part of the land was in the hands of large landowners." Yet, incidentally, the author seems to show that he has not seen the way of preventing this continuation of the curse of the "larger part of the land" being "in the hands of large landowners." Is it not as true of Sicily and Hungary as it is of Alabama, that if the large holdings, generally held by absentee landlords, were properly assessed and taxed, the owners would be willing to sell to those who do the toiling? And is it not as true there as here that such a tax would not only relieve the poor from

the taxes directly or indirectly imposed upon them, but would provide ample means for various public needs?

Two conclusions of the book are of great interest and importance. One of these is that where improvement is found, it has come from improving at the bottom. This is a lesson which we have hardly begun to learn in America. We think we have learned it, but we have not. One has only to see the slums of cities and the schools of rural districts to become convinced that we are not emphasizing improvement at the bottom. So far we have done more talking than acting in this line. Speaking of the marvelous advance in Denmark, the author says: "While other nations have begun the work of education and, I was going to say, civilization, at the top, Denmark has begun at the bottom. In doing this Denmark has demonstrated that it pays to educate the man farthest down." Again he says: "Where the Poles are advancing, progress has begun at the bottom, among the peasants; where they have remained stationary the Polish nobility still rules."

Another conclusion of interest and importance is that on the whole the Negro is better off in our Southern States than is the peasant in most parts of the continent of Europe. "The condition of the colored farmer," says the author, "in the most backward parts of the Southern States in America, even where he has the least education and the least encouragement, is incomparably better than the condition and opportunities of the agricultural population in Sicily. And as to city conditions, he says: "I have been more than once through the slums and poorer quarters of the colored people of New Orleans, Atlanta, Philadelphia and New York, and my personal observation convinces me that the colored population of these cities is in every way many per cent better off than the corresponding classes in Naples and other Italian cities I have named." When we read such testimony as this and know the condition of many of the rural Negroes and poor whites in this country, and know the awfulness of our city slums, we can only exclaim, God help the likes of these across the sea! And yet, it is well for us to know, and not without encouragement, that our problems are no harder than those in other regions. For the author shows furthermore that in some parts of Europe the race question is as constant and insistent as it is with us, and he adds, for example, that "Apparently it is just as easy in Hungary as in America for selfish persons to take advantage of racial prejudice and sentiment in order to use it for their own ends."

The temptation to quote from the book is too strong. It is full of pithy sentences as well as of wise counsel. I have not in this review mentioned half of the subjects and passages which I had marked for notice. I can only express the hope that the book will be widely read, especially in

the South, where the comparisons of conditions most naturally apply.

J. H. DILLARD.



## DEMOCRATIC VISION.

**The Vaunt of Man, and Other Poems.** By William Ellery Leonard. B. W. Huebsch. \$1.25 net.

William Ellery Leonard has hitherto been known to readers of scholarly works as a sensitive writer on literature, the translator of Empedocles, and, to a wider public, as the author of an interpretation of the character of Jesus, which is written from the standpoint of literary—and therefore human—appreciation. All lovers of literature will surely unite in hoping that this first volume of his collected verses will introduce Mr. Leonard to a wider and ever-widening public as a poet who is typical at once of the aristocracy of universal culture, and of the democracy of American life.

This combination of sensitive fineness of perception and spirit with a sturdiness which is typically American, or even Lincolnian, is the most significant thing about "The Vaunt of Man." It is a combination which gives the book especial value for those of us who are preoccupied with public affairs, with the chores of our social life—as so many among the serious readers of the day are occupied. For we have, in that very seriousness and social conscience, a point of entry into the spirit of these poems; and we shall find in them the corrective to that stunting of the aesthetic sense which is so apt to come from social preoccupations and which leads a man like George Bernard Shaw into a Philistine attitude toward form and beauty in art as distinguished from its didactic and will-exciting "purpose."

Mr. Leonard is not afraid to use his art for ethical purposes. He is prophet as well as poet, as the following "Remarks" written upon reading of the intended sale of the White Mountains to a lumber company, may testify:

The nations have rebuked us: "Greed for gold  
Costs ye voice, vision; costs ye faith and fame."  
Is this their envy? Shall we gloss our shame  
Writing it "Progress," "enterprise"? Behold  
Our civic life a trade, our rich men old  
Bribing opinion for an honest name,  
And art and letters counted jest or blame,  
When (but how seldom!) they will not be sold.

We traffic with our birthright; our domain  
Of torrents thundering inland shall be dumb—  
We have sold our cataracts to turn our mills;  
And having lifted up our eyes in vain,  
Whence our help cometh, but no more may come,  
Now we would sell the everlasting hills.

"Now we would sell the everlasting hills"—what a fine contempt and anger is compressed into those seven words, and how deserved must the finer spirits among us feel it to be!

But Mr. Leonard has higher work than social criticism. Passing such poems, as the above, and such national poems as his dedication ode to Lincoln, read at the unveiling of the statue in Madison, with its "dear random memories of a father dead," let us glance at his poems of the inner personal life. These are of a peculiarly intimate nature. One feels in reading them that the poet has faced those aspects of nature and life which we may call God, and is impelled to communicate the sense of vocation, calm, and certainty which he has won in his wrestle with the Infinite.

Lo, I own the dream  
Of Plato and the hardness of Kant.  
I have all wealth within me; I will look—

—he tells us; but this world within is not an isolated thing, for our will, our "unconquered will," is "part of the epic of the universe."

The largeness and sanity of the communicant with nature inform all these poems, and a like large temper is apparent in those of them which deal with love. Those and other poems of personalities and of nature have been slighted here, for lack of space; and at the risk of giving a one-sided impression of the book, the reviewer cannot refrain from ending these remarks by quoting a sonnet of ethical—or rather religious—import, entitled, "The Test":

Still at the wheel to labor down the sea  
With battered funnels and with riven flags,  
To overcome the mountain on bare crags  
Above the thunder and the farthest tree,  
To face a flaring city—the mad glee  
And ululations of her reeling masques  
And human drift—are self-sustaining tasks,  
Because they challenge by their majesty.

But in these swamps, behind the hovel yard  
To make my obscene way through stench and flies  
And oozy fibers, and refuse glass and shard,  
And still to keep some token in my eyes  
Of inward dignity and God's good skies,  
This, this is manhood, this is truly hard.

But that it is not impossible, is the burden of the poetry of William Ellery Leonard.

LLEWELLYN JONES.



## BOOK OF ESSAYS.

**Humanly Speaking.** By Samuel McChord Crothers. Published by Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston. 1912. Price, \$1.25 net.

Through Dr. Crothers' latest book with its glancing humor and knightly tolerance, there blows again his free optimism that dispels all fog and freshens the spirit. To be sure, the longer essays—especially those on his travels in Europe—with their too lengthy examples, sometimes trail off down anti-climaxes; and occasionally his favorite translation of financial terms into ethical or aesthetic concepts is over-worked. The essay em-