

**TALES OF DARKEST
AMERICA**

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Tales of Darkest America by Fenton Johnson

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TALES OF DARKEST AMERICA

BY

FENTON JOHNSON

Published by
THE FAVORITE MAGAZINE
3518 South State Street
Chicago, Ill.

Several of these stories appeared originally in *The Favorite Magazine* and are gathered together as testimonials of the life of the race to which I belong.

FENTON JOHNSON.

The Story of Myself



HAVE gone through the Valley of Despair groping for the light that would aid humanity and caring little for the means of obtaining sustenance. I have borne the taunt of being an idealist but somehow I enjoyed idealism since it was fire and food for humanity.

I struggled through school and through the university, my star the star of the Muse and my hope the opportunity to follow the star of the Muse. When my school days had faded I went South to teach those of the race to which I belong and after a year of abject poverty, not even receiving my meagre salary of forty dollars a month, I returned to Chicago and struggled to obtain a foothold in literature.

It seemed to me like trying to walk the Atlantic ocean to obtain recognition in the literary world and especially when one was attempting to present the life of the race to which I belong. After what seemed to be a hopeless struggle a woman of infinite kindness and sympathy gave my first collection of poetry the material form of a book called "A Little Dreaming," which brought me recognition from that very good friend of literature, Dr. Albert Shaw, Editor of the American Review of Reviews, and his remarkable literary critic, Jeanne Robert Foster.

I moved to New York and through the kindness of another I attended the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia University and published privately two new volumes of verse, "Visions of the Dusk" and "Songs of the Soil." Both met with very enthusiastic reviews on the part of the press, and resulted in my return to Chicago and the beginning of my struggle in journalism.

It was during the memorable struggle at Argonne Forest that I founded *The Favorite Magazine*. I had nothing save a meagre allowance from a relative but I was determined to have a magazine and conceived the idea that I could accomplish a large number of reforms and the creation of a new literature through a magazine of my own. I went without meals and postponed paying room rent until I had saved ten dollars and went to a printer whose heart was very large and paid the ten dollars as a deposit on my first issue.

Then I took a dummy and went among my friends and solicited advertisements. At night and during spare moments I wrote the material for the issue and followed that custom until recently. In addition to that I exhausted all the names in the English language for non de plumes to go on the different articles, short stories and poems I wrote for *The Favorite Magazine*.

It was about that time that I met the woman of my dreams and when one meets the woman of his dreams he marries that woman despite the obstacles that might lie in his path. Although I had a magazine that had nothing but determination and imagination to back it and seventy dollars a month to live on, I married. It was not long after that I had nothing but the seventy dollars to support myself and my wife because *The Favorite Magazine* died with everybody recognizing its death but myself and my friend, James H. Moody, who had been with me from the beginning of the struggle.

It seemed to me as if I was about to face the bankruptcy court because I had a nine hundred dollar debt staring me in the face and no means of liquidating it. Everybody including my family turned a deaf ear to my pleas to save *The Favorite*

Magazine, although there came appeals from many throughout the country that the magazine should be continued.

An aunt died during those dark days of mine and although her death is one I have mourned a long time I inherited a small sum from her and the name of it saved the magazine and saved me from bankruptcy. Mr. Moody and I renewed our campaign for advertisements and subscriptions and the same kind printer brought out the new Favorite Magazine.

I worked as hard as ever and struggled in every way to obtain funds for the purpose of meeting the deficit. One incident I can never forget as long as I live and that is the case of Conkling, Price, Webb & Company, a bonding firm that refused me surety bonds to draw from my aunt's estate so that I could save the magazine from an impending refusal on the part of the poorly paid printer. The only cause given me was "that colored people's estates were too risky."

After that the struggle was more intense than ever. I had no funds to develop a very young proposition and no means of obtaining funds. I was confronted also by the wave of radicalism that was trying to engulf the race to which I belong, but I refused to sell my soul to the agitators of Bolshevism and brought unpopularity to the magazine among a certain class.

When the estate was settled I made a journey to New York and after a speech on "The Co-operation of the Races" I founded The Reconciliation Movement. I used all the money I had in developing this movement which was to me not only the solution of the race problem but also the problem of law and order.

It has been dark days trying to make The Reconciliation Movement successful in a country that until this moment seems to care little for any movement of that sort. No one but myself and James Moody knows the suffering that I have undergone and how near I am to what all of us dread, starvation.

As I write this in the little furnished room that my wife and I call home, I wonder if the Reconciliation Movement is not a grand dream; The Favorite Magazine a foolhardy venture and I, myself a failure. I wonder if I was wise in trying to follow the star of the Muse in America or if I should have gone to England or even Paris and cast my lot where I would not have had to climb over the barrier of race.

I know that I am facing ruin and starvation. I know that my dream of a magazine is about to end in the cold gray awakening because of the heavy debt hanging over it and the lack of desire Americans seem to have for the reconciliation of the races. I know that my dream of success in literature is fading because every story I have ever offered a standard magazine has returned to my desk and even in the case of the Saturday Evening Post, one story, "The White Slave," returned the day after it was sent.

I have one consolation; and that is that I have lived for the highest good and that I have injured no man, woman or child. All I pray for is that my wife and James Moody will not suffer if this struggle should end in my passing to the other world.

Through the Valley of Despair

THROUGH the Valley of Despair I wandered until I saw shining as a halo, the moonlight, which is a balsam for all troubled souls. The moonlight is at the end of the Valley of Despair and is a bath of blessedness for all who will bathe in it.

O Psyche, come with me through the Valley of Despair and let us bathe in the moonlight forever and a day.