

WINS THE THIRD SPINGARN MEDAL

H. T. Burleigh, Composer, Awarded Advancement of Colored People Prize

Washington, D. C., May 26.—The third Spingarn medal was awarded here last night to Harry T. Burleigh, the distinguished composer of songs, at a meeting in the First Congregational Church held under the auspices of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The Spingarn medal is awarded annually to the man or woman of African descent and of American citizenship who shall have made the highest achievement during the preceding year in any field of elevated or honorable human endeavor; the candidate being chosen by a committee of award which includes Bishop John Hurst of Baltimore; William Howard Taft; John Hope, president of Morehouse College, Atlanta; Dr. James H. Dillard, the director of the Slater and Jeanes funds, and Oswald Garrison Villard, of the New York Evening Post. Their choice is not limited to any one field, whether that be intellectual, spiritual, physical, scientific, commercial, educational or any other; so the winning of the Spingarn medal has come to be the greatest distinction which can be conferred upon an American negro. The medal is of gold of the value of one hundred dollars, and is donated by Dr. Joel E. Spingarn, the chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, formerly professor of comparative literature in Columbia University, at present in training for his major's commission at Madison Barracks, N. Y.

Harry T. Burleigh, the winner of the medal for 1916, is a composer whose songs have for two or three seasons past been sung by a list of prominent singers which would make any composer's mouth water, from John McCormack to Kitty Cheatham. One song, "Deep River," has probably appeared on more concert programs during the past season more times than the work of any other contemporary composer, and across the ocean Burleigh's "The Young Warrior," with words by the negro poet, James Weldon Johnson, translated into Italian and orchestrated by the great Zandonati, has become a sort of patriotic anthem of the present war.

Mr. Burleigh's compositions include about a hundred songs, a few festival anthems for church chorus, and a volume of plantation melodies which he compiled in the effort to save them from falling into oblivion. The small group of songs by which he is best known include "Deep River," "The Gray Wolf," to words by Arthur Symonds; a superb setting of Walt Whitman's "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," "The Soldier" and "Jean."

Is Best Work
"The 'Five Songs of Lawrence Hope,'" writes a critic in the Boston Transcript of March 10, "probably represent Mr. Burleigh's best work. Here are haunting melodies, accompaniments rich in detail, yet not overwritten, striking bits of delineation, and much skill in the wedding of music to words."

Regarding "The Soldier," A. Walter Kramer in Musical America wrote: "Wars produce a mass of inconsequential literary and music stuff. The present European conflict is no exception. * * * But I think that this Burleigh setting of Rupert Brooke's inspired lines will be among the important art-products of the great war, when the record is made."

And these creative achievements have necessarily been snatched from a life of routine musical toil by which Mr. Burleigh has earned his daily bread. Since 1894 he has been soloist St. George's church, one of New York's most important congregations; and for seventeen years he has sung at the Temple Emanuel as well.

Lived in Pennsylvania
These achievements become doubly significant when one realizes how Mr. Burleigh has worked his way forward almost without aid, handicapped by color as well as poverty. It is related how Mr. Burleigh as a boy in Erie, Pa., contracted pneumonia from standing in the snow outside the drawing room window of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, where his family was in service, in order to hear Rafael Joseffy play, and was given a chance to open the door for the guests when later Teresa Carreno played at the Russell home in consequence. Working there as a stenographer until he was twenty-six, in 1892 he came to New York and out of 500 applicants was given a scholarship in the National Conservatory of Music, where he studied for four years. By teaching singing during his last year there together with assisting the secretary, the mother of the well-known American composer, E. A. MacDowell, he was able to liquidate his indebtedness to the founder of the institution.

During one summer he worked at a hotel in Saratoga in order to make enough to carry him through until the following Christmas. But when in 1894 the young musician, standing upon the threshold of his career, secured the position of soloist at St. George's in competition with sixty other applicants, his path became much easier. His talent for interpretation of his own folk songs soon became widely known and he was in demand to sing in concerts and in the musical programs of the leading mansions of fashionable New York and elsewhere. The achievements last year which won Mr. Burleigh the Spingarn medal are but the mature fruitage of a long life of consecrated labor.

This is the third year the medal has been awarded. The first was presented to Dr. E. E. Just, of Howard University, for original researches in biology. Governor Whitman making the presentation in New York. Last year the Governor of Massachusetts presented the second medal in Boston to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, of the Tenth Cavalry, U. S. army, for his services in reorganizing the constabulary of Liberia.

George W. Guthrie's Services Next Week

Pittsburgh, May 26.—Funeral services for the late George W. Guthrie, ambassador to Japan and former mayor of Pittsburgh, will be held next Thursday in Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church. Upon arrival here the body will be taken to the home of Mrs. James P. Brown, sister of Mrs. Guthrie. All arrangements have not yet been completed but it is probable that the body will lie in state in Memorial Hall on the day preceding the funeral. The services will be in charge of the Masonic order of which the late ambassador was a member.

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