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BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN  
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# "REMINISCENCES"

**Mary White Ovington Looks Backward  
42 Years. Sits in the Gallery at Henry  
Ward Beecher's Church in Brooklyn  
to Hear Frederick Douglass Speak.  
Argues with Her Escort Over the  
Propriety of a White Woman's Mar-  
rying Mr. Douglass.**

## EARLY IMPRESSIONS

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In one of his early essays, DuBois finds that the white man, under his polite talk, is always thinking the question, "What does it mean to be a problem?"

I have found since I have become known in radical Negro work that colored people, under their pleasant greetings, are thinking, "Why did you take up the Negro cause?" Indeed, as the question is in no way embarrassing to me, they sometimes ask it. I try to answer but it takes a long time to explain. One thing after another occurs to me as a contributory reason. And in the effort to answer this question I find myself reviewing my many years of Negro work. So I have written this story that will take nearly half a year of the AFRO-AMERICAN'S weekly issues.

It will deal with my work, with controversial matters, will talk frankly of colored people as well as of white. Before this I have had an eye on educating the white world. These reminiscences are not meant to educate anybody. They are what I think important bits out of a portion of my life of thought and action. The editor of the AFRO-AMERICAN believes they will interest you. If the questions asked by people all over the country are a criterion, I believe he is right. So my reminiscences begin.

By MARY WHITE OVINGTON

### CHAPTER I

The time is 1890. Two young people are walking down Fulton Street, Brooklyn. The girl, in long winter coat, slips her hand into the man's arm. When night comes this is et-

quette in a city inadequately lighted. The girl is conspicuously blonde, blue eyes, pink cheeks, golden hair; the man—well, if you want to know what the man looked like, see McCormick's statue of Nathan Hale in

### "HE LOOKS LIKE AESOP"



Frederick Douglass—His father was white and his mother black, so his first wife was Negro and his second Nordic in order to pay his respects to both parents.

the New York City Hall Park. He posed for me and it's a perfect likeness.

The couple turn down Orange Street to Plymouth Church. They are going to a lecture by Frederick Douglass, who recently, against the advice of his oldest friends, married a white woman. He gave his explanation to a mixed audience in Atlanta: "My father was white, my mother was black. My first wife was black, by second wife is white. I have paid my respects to both my parents." The two young people are arguing excitedly on this matter. The girl is of New York and Yankee descent. The young man, she realizes for the first time, has roots in Baltimore.

"How could she do it?" the young man says.

"If she wanted to, she had a right to," the girl insists. "It was a personal matter."

But this is what the man will not accept for a moment, and still arguing, the one in defense of the dominant race, the other in defense of the individual, they enter the church.

They sit in the gallery almost over the platform. The meeting-house

heard of him since I could remember. He was coupled with Garrison in my excited thoughts. In imagination I had seen him, after his perilous journey by train and boat, set foot on free soil in Philadelphia, and I had followed him as he preached against slavery in the North and in England. He was one of the great group of men and women who had risked all for freedom.

Here I think was the great difference not only between my attitude and that of my friend, but between my attitude and the attitude of all Southerners and most Northerners. If they knew the Negro at all they knew him as a servant. I did not know the Negro in the flesh. My "mammy" was Irish and quite as devoted, I am sure, as any black woman. We had no Negro servants. Once a year at Thanksgiving time, an old, blind Negro, led by an attractive boy, came to our church and asked for money for the Howard Orphan Asylum. I think we sent him away pleased. Anyway, he always said so. He was the only Negro with whom I had any contact. Otherwise, I knew the race by its heroic deeds.

The Southerner feels that this

### "My Mammy was Irish"



Mary White Ovington

proves his thesis and that he, not I, knew the Negro. But is he right? There are people and nations whom we know that we have never seen. We have not seen Leonidas at Thermopylae or listened to Spartacus. But we know the Greek and the Roman better by reading their history than by confining ourselves to the acquaintanceship of the florists and fruit vendors who come to us from Greece and Italy. I read the story of the slave in his insurrections and his escapes from serfdom, in Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, in Box Brown and Anthony Burns and a host of others. This heroic side of slavery the South hated and feared and denied. So I maintained that I did know the Negro because I knew the pos-

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Plymouth Congregational—Beecher's church in Brooklyn today, and monument to Henry Ward Beecher, whose views on abolition of slavery were not strong enough to hold the Ovingtons.

that, under Beecher's leadership, has heard many anti-slavery speeches, is filled with expectant people. The organ plays "John Brown's Body" and Douglass mounts the platform.

He is a strong, powerfully built man, with a brown skin and a shock of bushy hair. His eyes gleam with that liveliness to things about him common to the Negro. He stands at the reading desk, immovable, unsmiling, looking at the applauding audience. The girl leans forward clapping excitedly. The man leans forward, too, and pays his tribute.

"I don't wonder she married him," he says. "He looks like Aesop."

I had never seen Frederick Douglass before (I did the old person not to resume it) and I was never to see him again, but that night was to me a great event. I had come face to face with one of my heroes. To my companion who had always thought of the Negro as a servant, this unknown colored man was a revelation but I had