

A SOUTHERNER'S VIEW OF THE SOUTH

It seems rather queer to go abroad and discover an American author. Two books have appeared in England during the last year or two, named "The Scar" and "The Scourge." They have been a success, not only in England, but on the Continent; for translations have appeared or are appearing in German, French, and Russian. Yet they are by an American, Mr. Warrington Dawson, of South Carolina; and they deal with localities, questions, and types exclusively and typically American. It is not very creditable to us that this American, writing with unusual power of American scenes and problems, should have an exclusively European audience.

Mr. Dawson's stories are laid in the country districts and small towns of Virginia. In each volume a Northerner, in the first a woman, in the second a man, is thrown into intimate contact with the members of a proud caste of provincial aristocrats, who have been slowly sinking under the burden of grinding poverty, whose poverty-stricken lives are both hardening and narrowing, but in whose strongly individualized natures there dwell qualities and capacities of the highest kind. It is in his studies of these native Southern whites—both men and women, both those who are painfully struggling upwards and those whom an iron fate is slowly forcing downwards—and in his studies of the dark-skinned alien race standing so utterly aloof from them and so intimately connected with them, that Mr. Dawson excels; and it is not necessary to agree with all his conclusions in order to appreciate the value of his work. But almost equally good is the study of the Northerner who dwells South, who has made a real business success, who is in his own fashion devoted to the interests of the people with whom he has spent his life, but whom they at bottom never cease to regard as an interloper; and Mr. Dawson is entirely just in showing how ungenerous and unwarranted part of this attitude is, and, on the other hand, the measure of justification which it has in the hard narrowness that makes the intruder insist on trying to do good to the community in many ways which represent what is either unnecessary or even injurious.

I have no intention of writing a criticism of Mr. Dawson's two books; but it is worth while calling attention to the fact that this author, who writes with power and interest of vital home matters, has his critics and his audience abroad, but has neither critics nor audience at home. He should have both.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Mombasa, British East Africa, April 22, 1909.

[These two novels, "The Scar" and "The Scourge," are published by Messrs. Methuen & Co., 36 Essex Street, W. C., London, England. Although Mr. Dawson is a South Carolinian, he has lived for many years abroad, much of the time in France, where he has been for the last eight years the Paris manager of the United Press Associations of this country. Mr. Dawson's absence in Europe explains why his stories, which Mr. Roosevelt has found so commendable, have not yet been published in his native country. Mr. Dawson is still a young man, having not yet reached his thirtieth year. If Mr. Roosevelt's judgment of his stories should be confirmed by American readers, Mr. Dawson has ample time before him yet to add his name to the growing list of successful American novelists.—THE EDITORS.]