

But if anything should happen to me, I would like to have our slaves set free.”)

Yet even the Civil War section suffers from the book's persistent dodging of conflict and controversy, its unflagging commitment to a thesis of harmonious progress. The unit on the Civil War is introduced by the following statement (page 183): “As our country grew, people in different parts of it came to have different ways of thinking about some of their problems. These differences led to quarrels and finally to another terrible war. This was called the War between the States. But when the war was over, men and women in all parts of the country worked together again to make America great and strong.” (Cf. page 192, “This was is now known as the War between the States or the Civil War.”)

It should be no surprise then that the Negro drops completely from view with the Emancipation Proclamation, not to reappear at all except in the Carver story. Here again the ugly realities of race relations are completely obscured. It is explained several times that Carver had great difficulty finding a school he could go to and a college he could go to, but there is no explanation of why he had difficulty. Tuskegee is described (page 251) as “a college in Alabama especially for Negro students,” with no further explanation. The only general statement about the conditions of life for Negroes is a statement imputed to Carver (page 251): “Many people of my race are poor. They have little to eat.” The only statement suggesting a “race problem” is quoted from a citation in praise of Carver (page 253): “‘You have done much for the white people as well as for the Negroes,’ he was told. ‘You are a bridge between the two races.’”

While recognizing the authors' praiseworthy effort to include an outstanding Negro, I question whether Carver is the most appropriate figure to use. Carver deserves to be held up for emulation on account of his moral qualities, but the contention that his scientific work was distinguished or had any substantial effect on Southern agriculture is by and large a sentimental myth. Moreover both his Tuskegee connection and the story line of his life are implicit arguments for Booker T. Washington's questionable philosophy of race salvation through humility and hard work.

The basic fault of this book, as of many others, is its effort to purvey a sweetness-and-light picture of American history that is both false and vicious in its effects. Children, both black and white, need to know that through the institution of slavery Negroes were a major element in American life from the very beginning. They need to know what slavery was like before the Civil War and what it has been like to live under the “new peculiar institution” of segregation and discrimination since the Civil War. They need to know that Negroes, despite the handicaps imposed upon them, produced leaders who fought for justice and equality. For the purposes of this book a figure like Frederick Douglass would have been much more representative of what has been best and most important in American Negro life.