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All Humanity Her Kinsfolk

By Helen Fitzgerald

ZONIA BABER, eminent geographer, educator and indefatigable world traveler, is off again on another long voyage, first to London, thence to South Africa to attend a meeting of the British Society for the Advancement of Science. During her stay she will study the colored races of the South and East of the Dark Continent.

"My major interests are peace and justice for the colored races," declares Miss Baber, and this credo of peace and inter-racial understanding is the essence of many years of study, teaching, travel and sympathetic interpretation.

Zonia Baber makes her home in Chicago, where her public activities are manifold, but in a sense it is merely a "base of operations" and her real home is the great, wide world; her kinsfolk, all humanity.

She is a native of Illinois, a graduate of the Cook County Normal School of Chicago and the University of Chicago, where she won her B.S. Later she became head of the department of geography in the Chicago Institute and associate professor of the teaching of geography and geology in the University of Chicago. Miss Baber possesses the mind of the scientist and the heart of the humanitarian. Her methods of teaching were influenced by both qualities. Knowledge of a subject she demanded of her pupils, but knowledge plus sympathy. For example, suppose a student were assigned, "Peru and Its People." She required him to saturate himself with information, then as nearly as possible become an interpreter of the consciousness of those people—not an alien, viewing them objectively and repeating, parrotwise, a deadly routine of text. The student worked remarkably well. The pupils vie with each other in presenting the best of the countries, nations and races they attempted to represent and interpret.

Such a method of teaching would have been futile had not Miss Baber herself first acquired first-hand a vast fund of knowledge through personal contact with the races and nations in their own environments. She started out on this world-wide quest in 1889, with Bermuda as her first objective. Europe was her next goal. Then came Mexico. A trip around the world followed. She next turned her attention to Jamaica, Cuba and Yucatan. The South Sea Islands, Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand claimed her attention in turn. On all of these varied journeys, and many not here chronicled, she traveled as an individual student and analytical observer. Later she visited Mexico with the Geographic Society; Norway, Sweden and Spitzbergen with the International Geographical Congress; Vienna as a delegate to the Congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Miss Baber's experiences have borne other fruit than purely scholastic achievements in the capacity of educator. She was responsible for the organization of the Geographic Society of Chicago which now has a membership of more than 1500. Professor Chamberlain, head of the department of geology of the University of Chicago, invited the teachers of geography and geology of Chicago and its environs to a conference at the University for the purpose of presenting the needs of these subjects in local institutions of learning and to offer constructive suggestions. Zonia Baber recommended that a geographic society be organized. The idea was endorsed as undoubtedly good, but nothing was done about it. After waiting for several years, Miss Baber who was then head of the department of geography, Cook County Normal School, now Teachers Training College, asked a group of geologists and the progressive principal of a local school, all of whom were actively interested in geography, to a meeting at her home, and proposed that they organize them and there the Geographic Society of Chicago. There was unanimous consent and the new organization was launched. Miss Baber was its second president and is now an honorary life member, a member of the board of directors and of several important committees.

The Society is eminently practical in its functions. One of the first matters considered was a petition urg-

Zonia Baber, World Traveler, Geographer and Educator, Sponsors Credo of Peace and Inter-Racial Understanding

ing that steps be taken "to secure a portable geographic museum for the benefit of the public schools of Chicago."

Another important point was the immediate recognition of the fact that "geography is essentially an out-of-doors science," and field trips were then, and continue to be, a part of its activities. The river and



Zonia Baber

harbor of Chicago have been studied. Excursions have been taken to areas of unusual interest, from the viewpoint of physiography and plant life, such as portions of the Valparaiso moraine, the Des Plaines Valley, the sand dunes of Indiana and Michigan, the Starved Rock area, the Fox and Rock River valleys and the delta of Wisconsin. The Society has also conducted excursions to Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, the Pacific Coast, down the St. Lawrence River and into the Lake Champlain country, the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, the high Smokies of Tennessee, Alaska, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Hawaii.

Zonia Baber has been a leading spirit in this field work. She has been especially interested in Stony Island, and her plea for its conservation is one of the Society's official publications. Through the generosity of Mrs. Culver, the Helen Culver Gold Medal was founded and this, with the Geographic Society of Chicago Medal, has been awarded to distinguished geographers and explorers for outstanding achievements.

Each season lectures are given by such prominent scientists as Sir John Murray, oceanographer; Major General A. W. Greely, Arctic explorer; Sir Ernest H. Shackleton, Antarctic explorer; Captain Roald Amundsen, Arctic and Antarctic explorer; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Donald B. MacMillan and Richard E. Byrd.

Now Miss Baber is a leading member of the Society of Women Geographers, perhaps the most outstanding group of women scientists in that particular field in the world.

With geography as her fundamental subject, Zonia

Baber has chosen specifically the study of the Negro, both from the economic and esthetic points of view.

Perhaps her most unique service for better understanding between the white and colored races was in the capacity as a member of the only mixed commission which ever investigated and reported upon conditions in Haiti under American occupation. This commission was appointed as the result of a request by a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom residing there. The personnel was composed of six members, four of whom were white and two Negroes. Under Miss Baber's leadership, the equal status, official and social, was maintained, regardless of color. During its official life the commission was a unit to be recognized and reckoned with as such. Of course, the difficulties were many. The white members, no less than the Negroes, were made to feel the reaction of race prejudice. The result, however, was a spirit of harmony and fairness within the group, which made it possible to probe the intricate problem of the little black republic in its relation to the American regime.

The logical sequence of Miss Baber's political and economic efforts on behalf of the Negro was an attempt to present a fair and broad esthetic demonstration of the black race's native art. This took the form of Negro in Art Week held in Chicago last year under the auspices of the Chicago Woman's Club and other organizations. Miss Baber is chairman of the race-relations committee of that club, and by her untiring efforts helped to make the event a significant success.

The program was a comprehensive one showing the progress of the Negro in art, from the primitive African to the modern transplanted and evolved product, including literature, sculpture, painting, music and the applied arts.

The examples of primitive African art were from the traveling exhibit of the Harmon Museum of African Art, known as the Biondian Collection from the Belgian Congo, purchased by the Theater Arts Monthly. The object was to preserve and interpret the ancestral arts and crafts of the Negro and make them effective as a cultural background and inspiration for Negro art and culture in America.

The collection is mostly the work of the naturally artistic Bushongo peoples of the Belgian Congo—the Bakuba, Baluba and Bangongo tribes. There are also examples of ivory, West Coast and Nigerian work.

Against this ancestral heritage of the primitive and barbaric, the modern art of the Negro in America stands out with new significance, for not in mere imitation, but in the development of original art forms, lies the value of his esthetic expression.

Eugene O'Neill in "All God's Children Got Wings" and "The Emperor Jones," Du Bose Heyward in "Porgy" and "Mamba's Daughters," Julia Peterkin in "Black April" and "Scarlet Sister Mary" have attempted in drama and narrative to sound the emotional depths and analyze the mental processes of the Negro. Others, no less distinguished in their respective fields, have interpreted for us the black man's music, his song, his vocal presence in sculpture and painting. But Zonia Baber and a few fearless fellow workers have demanded that the Negro be permitted to express himself.

No one can doubt her ability and zeal, her keen sensitiveness to the inhibited genius of the colored race, when he looks into her eyes and observes the strength of conviction expressed in her fine face.

Shortly before her recent departure to Africa, Miss Baber visited Washington to attend the annual convention of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She was a prominent figure there—a valiant champion of peace—that balanced state of consciousness in mankind where race prejudice and national hatred are sublimated in love of humanity. Such, at least, is the ideal.

None who know Zonia Baber and her record of past achievement doubt that upon her return from the ancient cradle of the Negro she will bring fresh knowledge and deeper understanding of him in his native environment to aid her work for justice to all races and peace for mankind.

