GEORGE WASHINGTON WILLIAMS, HISTORIAN

In the social and intellectual upheaval that followed in the wake of Civil War and Reconstruction, no area of knowledge was more acutely affected by the forces at work, both in America and in Europe, than the study of history. If the economic revolution had wrought great changes in the ways of making a living, the rise of the new "scientific school" of historians had, in a similar manner, called forth an entirely new approach to the whole problem of the study and writing of history. It was as though the new scientific age that had been ushered in by innumerable inventions and discoveries around the middle of the century had pervaded every aspect of man's endeavor and had laid bare the fallacies and discrepancies of his earlier pursuits. Small wonder that the colleges and universities of America began to rethink their offerings in terms of the new age and that young students of the United States began to migrate to Europe in larger numbers to learn, at their sources, the new methods that had been evolved in the older institutions of the Continent. In the fields of the natural and physical sciences, Americans sought the perfection of the German masters; but in the social sciences they were equally as avid in their desire to obtain the new methods and techniques of understanding human relationships.

The large group of American historians who were writing and teaching in the period that followed the Civil War fall into three categories as far as training is concerned: those who obtained some of their training in Europe, of which George Bancroft, John W. Burgess, and Herbert Baxter Adams are examples; those who received their training in America, though frequently under European influence, illustrated in the careers of Woodrow Wilson, William Archibald Dunning, and Edward Channing; and those who apparently taught themselves the principles of historical criticism and methodology, significant among whom were

John Bach McMaster, Charles Francis Adams, and James Schouler. The names in this last group could be multiplied almost indefinitely, for it was a period in American history when the point of view had not yet prevailed that the prerequisite for specialized activity was intensive training and study in the field. Among those who undertook to write history with no formal training was George W. Williams, the first serious historian of the Negro race.

Williams was born at Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania, October 16, 1849.[1] His mother, who was of Negro and German parentage, has been described as possessing "rare intellectual powers" and spoke the German language fluently. His father was a mixture of Welsh and Negro. At the age of three, George moved with his parents to Newcastle, Pennsylvania, where he began his schooling. Shortly thereafter, they moved to Massachusetts, where young Williams studied two years with a private tutor and six years in the public school and academy. There is no evidence of Williams' not making satisfactory progress in his school work, but at fourteen years of age he could bear formal education no longer. It was 1863, and the din of battle was infinitely more exciting to this fourteen-year-old lad of boundless energies than the discipline of the schoolroom; and he ran away from home to enlist in the Union army. Realizing that he was not old enough to enlist in the army, Williams advanced his age and assumed the name of an uncle. The examining surgeon, aware of the fact that Williams' anxiety to fight far exceeded his age, rejected him, but after much pleading he

[1] The facts concerning Williams' early life were taken principally from William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising.* Cleveland, 1887, pp. 549-559. Other accounts are in William E. Smith, "George W. Williams," *Dictionary of American Biography,* Vol. XX, pp. 263-264; *Biographical Cyclopedia and Portrait Gallery of the State of Ohio,* Vol. III, 1884; *National Cyclopedia of American Biography,* N. Y., 1900, Vol. X, p. 511; *Encyclopedia Americana,* N. Y., 1904, Vol. 16, and later editions; Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycroft, eds., *American Authors, 1600-1900,* N. Y., 1938, p. 819.

was permitted to enter. "By his intelligence and attention to the duties of a soldier, he rose rapidly from one grade to another, beginning as private and ending the war as Sergeant-Major of his regiment."[2] During the war, Williams was severely wounded and received an honorable discharge from the service. As soon as he had recovered, he reenlisted and was detailed to the staff of General N. J. Jackson, whom he accompanied to Texas in May, 1865.

Shortly after arriving in Texas, Williams was ordered to be mustered out, but adventure and wanderlust had completely captivated him, and he enlisted in the Mexican army where he advanced from orderly sergeant to Assistant Inspector-General with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the First Battery from the State of Tampico. In 1867, after the execution of Maximillian, Williams returned to the United States and entered the cavalry service of the regular army, "serving in the Comanche campaign of 1867 with conspicuous bravery." In 1868 he left the army for civilian life, "having been convinced as a Christian that killing people in time of peace as a profession was not the noblest life a man could live."[3] After a brief sojourn in St. Louis, he returned to the East where he began to prepare for his life's work.

In 1868 Williams enrolled in the Newton Theological Seminary and pursued his studies there until he was graduated in 1874, thereby becoming the first Negro alumnus of the institution. It was a signal personal triumph for this young man who had experienced such great difficulty in disciplining and finding himself at an earlier age. His studies at the Seminary were apparently successful, for he was permitted to deliver an oration at the graduation exercises; and he chose for his subject, "Early Christianity in Africa." It was not a lengthy address, but it reveals an intimate knowl-

[2] Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 550.

[3] *Ibid.*

edge of the historical development of Africa in the early centuries of the Christian era. It reveals, moreover, Williams' interest in African history as a background for the history of the Negro race in America. There can be seen also his proclivity for florid, picturesque language. His ideas and his literary style were already taking shape. The following is a typical passage:

> For nearly three centuries Africa has been robbed of her sable sons. For nearly three centuries they have toiled in bondage, unrequited, in this youthful republic of the West. They have grown from a small company to be an exceedingly great people—five millions in number. No longer chattels, they are human beings; no longer bondmen, they are freemen, with almost every civil disability removed.[4]

Williams had already been licensed to preach, and on the evening following his graduation he was ordained at the First Baptist Church at Watertown, Massachusetts, June 11, 1874. He immediately accepted a call to become pastor of the Twelfth Baptist Church of Boston, and during his tenure there he published an eighty-page history of this venerable institution.[5] The Twelfth Baptist Church was not sufficiently attractive to Williams, and after a year he resigned and went to Washington. In the capital, Williams attempted to launch a journal "devoted to the interests of the Colored people," and although he had the support of men like Frederick Douglass and John M. Langston, he was not successful. Within a few months he accepted a call to the Union Baptist Church of Cincinnati, Ohio. He was installed as its pastor on March 2, 1876;[6] and on the occasion

[4] This oration is reprinted in George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America, 1619-1880.* New York, 1882, pp. 111-114, hereinafter referred to as Williams, *Negro Race.* Upon his graduation from the academic department, some years earlier, Williams delivered an oration entitled, "The Footsteps of the Nation," *Negro Race,* I, p. 111.

[5] There is no copy of this work in the Library of Congress, nor does it appear in the bibliographies of books published before 1900.

[6] A copy of his installation services is in the George W. Williams papers, in the Library of Mr. Henry P. Slaughter of Washington, D. C.

of the church's forty-fifth anniversary in July of the same year he delivered an address in which he traced the history of the church from its beginnings. By this time, most of Williams' writings and addresses displayed an intense interest in the study of history, and already he had begun serious research in preparation for the writing that he was to undertake later.

In the years that followed, Williams' experiences and travels added to his store of knowledge of American life and history and of the Negro. For a while he was storekeeper in the internal revenue department; later he was secretary of the four million dollar fund to build the Cincinnati Southern Railroad. He attended lectures at the Cincinnati Law School, and studied in the office of Alphonso Taft. He was admitted to practice in the Supreme Circuit Court of Ohio on June 7, 1881, in Columbus; and was later admitted to practice before the Supreme Judicial Court in Boston. Meanwhile, Murat Halstead accepted his articles and published them in the *Cincinnati Commercial* under the pen name of *Aristides*. In 1879, after one unsuccessful attempt, Williams was elected to the Ohio Legislature, where he served as chairman of the Committee on the Library and the Special Committee on railroad terminal facilities. He was also a member of the Committee on Universities and Colleges and was instrumental in securing the passage of bills relating to the police power, railroads, and schools.

These Ohio years, 1876-1881, were Williams' busiest. Not only was he pastoring a church, practicing law, writing newspaper articles, and serving in the State Legislature of Ohio, but he had also begun the serious study of history. He tells of this beginning in the preface to the *History of the Negro Race in America.*

> I was requested to deliver an oration on the Fourth of July, 1876, at Avondale, Ohio. It being the one-hundredth birthday of the American Republic, I determined to prepare an oration on the

American Negro.[7] I at once began an investigation of the records of the nation to secure material for the oration. I was surprised and delighted to find that the historical memorials of the Negro were so abundant and so creditable to him. I pronounced my oration . . . and the warm and generous manner in which it was received, both by those who listened to it and by others who subsequently read it in pamphlet form, encouraged me to devote what leisure time I might have to a further study of the subject.[8]

During the time that Williams was living in Cincinnati engaged in the study of law, pastoring a church, and working for the federal and state governments, he found several libraries that were of inestimable value to him in his researches on the Negro. He frequented the library of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio and the private library of Robert Clarke. He began by studying the African slave trade, the founding of the British colonies in America, and took up each important problem bearing on the history of the Negro down to the Civil War. Williams was convinced that enough material was available to write a definitive history of the Negro. He deemed it a worthy undertaking because Negroes had "been the most vexatious problem in North America from the time of its discovery down to the present day; because that in every attempt upon the life of the nation . . . the Colored people had always displayed a matchless patriotism and an incomparable heroism in the cause of Americans; because such a history would give the world more correct ideas of the Colored people, and incite the latter to greater effort in the struggle of citizenship and manhood. The single reason that there was no history of the

[7] The stimulus that the centennial provided for the study of history seems to have been general. Kraus says, "The approach of the centennial in 1876 was another impetus to historical writing. In his diary Moses Coit Tyler betrays his annoyance because his volume on American Literature would not be ready in time. Carl Schurz told Samuel Bowles, the famous newspaper editor, that a Philadelphia publisher had asked him to prepare a political history of the United States in time for the centennial year." Michael Kraus, *A History of American History*, New York, 1937, p. 298.

[8] Williams, *Negro Race*, I, p. v.

Negro race would have been a sufficient reason for writing one."[9]

His many responsibilities of both a public and a private nature were so preoccupying that he decided to give them up and devote all his energies to the work of doing the research and writing of the history. After his service in the legislature, he accepted no more responsibilities until the *History of the Negro Race in America* was published. Few activities attracted his attention in those years. One of his interests that he could not entirely give up was his connection with the Young Men's Christian Association in Columbus, Ohio. Hardly thirty years of age himself, Williams saw in this organization an unusual opportunity to serve the young Negro men of the community. He, therefore, deserted his studies long enough to assist in the improvement of this institution by purchasing a gymnasium, hiring a business manager and a physical education instructor, and raising the standards in general. It seems, however, that the greatest portion of his time in Columbus was spent at the State Library, where he consulted more than five hundred volumes and innumerable newspapers and congressional records,[10] and in the Columbus Public Library.

After Williams had consulted all the materials in Ohio that he presumed to be beneficial to him in writing his history, he went East, where he worked in some of the best libraries in the United States. He spent much time in the Library of Congress, using newspapers, manuscripts, and official documents. In New York City he worked in the Lenox Library, where he enjoyed the pleasant association of Drs. George H. Moore and S. Austin Allibone, themselves careful students of the nation's history. He also worked in the libraries of the New York Historical Society and of John

[9] *Ibid.*, I, pp. v-vi.

[10] In the preface of his *History of the Negro Race*, p. ix, Williams said that he owed more to Miss Mary C. Harbough, "accomplished and efficient Assistant Librarian of the State Library of Ohio," than to any other person.

Austin Stevens, the editor of *The Magazine of American History,* who permitted Williams to work in his office.[11] He purchased some materials, such as those secured from the manuscript library of Thomas S. Townsend of New York. He also traveled in other parts of the country gathering material, as in the case of personal visits into the Southwestern part of the United States to interview officers and men of Negro regiments when the Adjutant General refused to give him information concerning them.[12] In 1881 he was in Deming, New Mexico, from which place he wrote his wife. Because of the excitement caused by Indian uprisings, Williams must have experienced difficulty in securing the information he desired. Using stationery of the General Assembly of the State of Ohio, from which he had recently retired, Williams said,

> A few miles from here yesterday the Indians broke out of their reservation, killed four soldiers and a number of Scouts. They defeated a company of the 9th cavalry and hold their ground up to this time. I had intended to have gone into the field together, but the troops left this morning while I was at breakfast. I have not heard any firing today, so I suppose the fight hasn't opened yet. . . . This is a hard country. The Indians are a class to be pitied. I wish the army could keep them on their Reservations at work. But they prefer death to civilization, and hence they must die.[13]

Williams used the remainder of 1881 and the year of 1882 putting his manuscript into final form. Despite the fact that he had received no formal training in the writing of history, he had doubtless caught some of the new scientific spirit in the recent works that had come out and in the conversations he had with the many students of history and

[11] Most of the information concerning the sources which Williams used comes from the preface of the *History of the Negro Race, I, passim.*

[12] Although these records were closed to Williams at this time, they were made available to him before he published his volume on the Negro troops.

[13] George W. Williams to Mrs. Sarah W. Williams, May 7, 1881. Williams Papers.

the archivists whom he consulted.[14] The organization of the materials which he had gathered was a stupendous task. He says that he had "consulted over twelve thousand volumes—about one thousand of which are referred to in the footnotes—and thousands of pamphlets." He divided the work into nine parts containing sixty chapters. A plan of the two volumes follows:

VOLUME I—PART I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS. In this section, Williams discusses Biblical ethnology and the antiquity of the human race. He felt justified in discussing this problem because "the defenders of slavery and the traducers of the Negro built their pro-slavery arguments upon Biblical ethnology and the curse of Canaan." Some consideration is also given to civilization in Africa in ancient and modern times.

PART II. SLAVERY IN THE COLONIES. The establishment and growth of slavery in each of the English colonies is discussed extensively.

PART III. THE NEGRO DURING THE REVOLUTION. In this section, Williams discusses the problem faced both by the British and the Patriots in employing Negro soldiers and the use of Negroes by both sides; the legal status of the Negro during the Revolution and the effect of independence upon the Negro; and the intellectual and material progress of the Negro down to the end of the eighteenth century.

VOLUME II—PART IV. CONSERVATIVE ERA—NEGROES IN THE ARMY AND NAVY, in which he treats the use of Negroes in the armed forces down through the War of 1812.

PART V. ANTI-SLAVERY AGITATION. This section was not an attempt "to write a history of the anti-slavery movement," but rather a brief discussion of the methods and re-

[14] Organizations like the Massachusetts Historical Society were issuing carefully edited works at this time. Individuals like Moses Coit Tyler, William Archibald Dunning, and Herbert Baxter Adams, were publishing some of their best works. Doubtless, Williams consulted some of these works and was benefited by the approach and methodology which these men used.

sults used by whites, free Negroes, and slaves in their efforts to destroy the institution of slavery.

PART VI. THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION. Here the education of the Negro, the various activities of Northern Negroes, and the growth of slavery as a national issue are dealt with. Attention is also given to the stringency with which Negroes were dealt in the decade immediately preceding the Civil War.

PART VII. THE NEGRO IN THE WAR FOR THE UNION. This section treats the early efforts of Negroes to fight for freedom, the factors motivating the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the use and performance of Negroes as soldiers. There is an extensive discussion of the capture and treatment of Negro soldiers by the Confederate Army.

PART VIII. THE FIRST DECADE OF FREEDOM. Reconstruction is briefly discussed, followed by treatments of the problems involved in emancipation. Leading Negroes of the period and the growth of religious organizations among Negroes receive extensive discussion.

PART IX. THE DECLINE OF NEGRO GOVERNMENTS. Here the overthrow of reconstruction is discussed. Williams concludes with a discussion of the beginning of the migration of Negroes to the North and the prospects for Negroes in America and Africa.

At the end of each volume of the *History of the Negro Race,* Williams placed extensive appendices in which he discussed remotely related subjects and in which he added additional information such as lists of African cities, descriptions of African languages, statistics on Negro troops and Negro churches, and official correspondence which he did not consider proper to place in the text of the book.

Williams made no apologies for his history. He was determined to make it a definitive work and to have it judged on the basis of its accuracy and general reliability. The standards which he set for himself were high; and the goal which he set before himself was indeed the goal which any

serious student would have. His devotion to objectivity and accuracy was clearly stated by him when he said,

> Some persons may think it irreverent to tell the truth in the plain, homely manner that characterizes my narrative; but, while I have nothing to regret in this particular, I can assure them that I have been actuated by none other spirit than that of candor. Where I have used documents it was with a desire to escape the charge of superficiality. If, however, I may be charged with seeking to escape the labor incident to thorough digestion, I answer, that, while men with the reputation of Bancroft and Hildreth could pass unchallenged when disregarding largely the use of documents and the citation of authorities, I would find myself challenged by a large number of critics.[15]

Concerning his discussion of the problem of the rendition of fugitive slaves by the Union army, Williams declared that he had "given the facts with temperate and honest criticism. And, in recounting the sufferings Negro troops endured as prisoners of war in the hands of the Rebels, I have avoided any spirit of bitterness." In concluding his preface, Williams made a statement which clearly set forth the principles that guided him in his effort. In part, he said,

> Not as a blind panegyrist of my race, nor as a partisan apologist, but from a love for *"the truth of history,"* I have striven to record the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I have not striven to revive sectional animosities or race prejudices. I have avoided comment so far as it was consistent with a clear exposition of the truth. My whole aim has been to write a thoroughly trustworthy history; and what I have written, if it have no other merit, is reliable.[16]

Williams' intense devotion to objectivity, like that of Edward Channing, was often accompanied by a tendency toward hypercriticism and iconoclasm.[17] For example, in discussing the "Body of Liberties" drawn up by the colony of Massachusetts, he irreverently attacked those historians

[15] *History of the Negro Race,* p. vii.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. x.

[17] Ralph Ray Fahrney, "Edward Channing" in *The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography,* edited by W. T. Hutchinson. Chicago, 1937, p. 302.

who had seen in this document the beginnings of anti-slavery sentiment in Massachusetts. He said,

> There has been considerable discussion about the real bearing of this statute. Many zealous historians, in discussing it, have betrayed more zeal for the good name of the Commonwealth than for the truth of history. Able lawyers . . . have maintained, with a greater show of learning than of facts, that this statute abolished slavery in Massachusetts.

After analyzing the statute and denying that it prohibited slavery in the colony, Williams concludes that "this statute is wide enough to drive a load of hay through."[18] He viciously attacked the slightest inaccuracy which he happened to find in the writings of others, such as in the case of William Wells Brown and William C. Nell whom he accused of having made "a number of very serious mistakes respecting [Benjamin] Banneker's parentage, age, accomplishments, etc."[19] He always thought it unfortunate if a writer cited no authority for a statement, if the point of view expressed in the statement was open to question. He mentioned the fact that Nell had given an account of the "legal death of slavery in Massachusetts, but unfortunately does not cite any authority."[20] It was to be regretted, Williams thought, that in writing of the Underground Railroad, William Still "failed to give any account of its origin, organization, workings, or the number of persons helped to freedom. It is an interesting narrative of many cases, but is shorn of that minuteness of detail so indispensable to authentic historical memorials."[21]

Williams' desire for accuracy was clearly displayed in his effort to determine a date for the beginning of slavery in each of the colonies. Without the slightest feeling of uncertainty, Williams declared,

[18] *History of the Negro Race,* I, pp. 177-178.

[19] *Ibid.,* I, p. 385n.

[20] *Ibid.,* I, p. 430.

[21] *Ibid.,* II, p. 58n.

> The majority of writers on American history, as well as most historians on Virginia, from Beverly to Howison, have made a mistake in fixing the date of the introduction of the first slaves. Mr. Beverly, whose history of Virginia was printed . . . in 1772, is responsible for the error, in that nearly all subsequent writers—excepting the laborious and scholarly Bancroft and the erudite Campbell—have repeated his mistake.[22]

Williams, then, in considerable detail, discussed the historians who followed the mistake of Beverly who implied that the first slaves arrived in Virginia in 1620. He then discussed those historians who concluded that 1619 was the correct date, and then adds, "But . . . we are strangely moved to believe that 1618 was the memorable year. . . . And we have one strong and reliable authority on our side." He said that Stith, in his history of Virginia, fixes the date in 1618. Evidently, however, Williams was not entirely convinced, for in the next few sentences he spoke of the Dutch man-of-war as having brought the first slaves to Virginia in 1619.[23]

Williams' training and experience are reflected amply in his historical methods and writings. Since he had spent the better part of his years as a soldier, minister, and as a student of the law, it was natural that he would emphasize these aspects of the history of the Negro. Doubtless, his best chapters deal with the Negro during periods of great military activity. His study of the Negro during the Revolution is a distinct contribution, based on a considerable number of original sources. Practically nothing had been previously written on the Negro in the Army and Navy during the War of 1812. His chapters on the Negro during the Civil War foreshadowed the exhaustive treatment which he was later to make of the subject; and it was the very first extensive discussion of the whole problem of the use of Negroes dur-

[22]Williams, perhaps, did not know that the earlier editions of Bancroft's *History of the United States* also contained the error and that Bancroft, therefore, also shared the responsibility for misleading students of Virginia history.

[23]*Ibid.*, I, p. 118.

ing the struggle. It is in his chapters on military activity that Williams rises to his full powers; and they betray the inborn love for things military that lured him away from home when but a mere lad. His intimate knowledge of the details of battles and of military organization and administration makes this part of his history both valuable and readable. He demonstrates his uninhibited enthusiasm for military life and unconsciously projects himself into his writings when, in speaking of the War of 1812, he said,

> When the war-clouds gathered in 1812, there was no time wasted in discussing whether it would be prudent to arm the Negro, nor was there a doubt expressed as to his valor. His brilliant achievements in the war of the Revolution, his power of endurance, and martial enthusiasm, were the golden threads of glory that bound his memory to the victorious cause of the American Republic. A lack of troops and an imperiled cause led to the admission of Negroes into the American army during the war of the Revolution. But it was the Negro's eminent fitness for military service that made him a place under the United States flag during the war in Louisiana.[24]

His training in law and his experience as a legislator were used to good advantage in his historical researches and writings. For usable historical materials he was always winnowing through the maze of sources to get at the real evidence. It would not be saying too much to assert that he re-tried the case of the Negroes who were indicted for attempted insurrection in New York in 1741. He re-examined with great care the testimony of one Mary Burton, who is largely responsible for sending the Negroes to their death, and concluded that the "facts" which she presented were the result of her own imagination and her desire to secure the reward that had been offered. After devoting twenty pages to sifting the evidence presented in the trial against the New York Negroes, Williams said of the "plot,"

> It had its origin in a diseased public conscience, inflamed by religious bigotry, accelerated by hired liars, and consummated in the blind and bloody action of a court and jury who imagined

[24] *Ibid.*, II, p. 21.

themselves sitting over a powder-magazine. That a robbery took place, there was abundant evidence in the finding of some of the articles, and the admission of Hughson and others; but there was not a syllable of competent evidence to show that there was an organized plot. And the time came, after the city had gotten back to its accustomed quietness, that the most sincere believers in the "Negro plot" were converted to the opinion that the zeal of the magistrates had not been "according to knowledge." For they could not have failed to remember that the Negroes were considered heathen, and, therefore, not sworn by the court; that they were not allowed counsel; that the evidence was indirect, contradictory, and malicious, while the trials were hasty and unfair.[25]

As a student of the law, Williams was always concerned with legislative enactments and their enforcement and with the general legal status of the Negro at various periods in his history. The entire second part is concerned with laws regarding slavery in the colonies. In other places, he discusses the legal status of the Negro during the Revolution and in the nineteenth century. He also examined the "black laws" of the border states and Negro school laws from the beginning. The treatment of captured Negro soldiers alarmed Williams, and in no other part of his work does he manifest the passion with which he declared the illegality of the treatment of Negro soldiers at Fort Pillow during the Civil War. There was little of the dispassionate objectivity which, according to Williams, becomes an historian when, after a discussion of the incident, he concluded:

Gen. Forrest was a cold-blooded murderer; a fiend in human form. But as the grave has opened long since to receive him; and as the cause he represented has perished from the earth, it is enough to let the record stand without comment, and God grant without malice! It is the duty of history to record that there is to be found no apologist for cruelties that rebels inflicted upon brave but helpless Black soldiers during the war for the extirpation of slavery. The Confederate conduct at Pillow must remain a foul stain upon the name of the men who fought to perpetuate human slavery in North America, but failed.[26]

[25] *Ibid.*, I, pp. 169-170. In volume two, see also Williams' treatment of the capture and trial of Nat Turner, pp. 85-92 and of the trial of the *Amistad* captives, pp. 93-96.

[26] *Ibid.*, II, p. 376.

In discussing "The Unity of Mankind," the opening chapter of his first volume, Williams shows considerable familiarity with the Scriptures. He brought all his theological training to support him in his argument that the offspring of Canaan did not go into human bondage as was contended by the leaders of the pro-slavery argument, and that Noah's curse was not a divine prophecy. His discussion of the religions of Africa, while not exhaustive, is perhaps ample and obviously sympathetic. In one place, he said that the "false religions of Africa are but the lonely and feeble reaching out of the human soul after the true God." Williams' interest in the religious activities of his contemporary brethren becomes evident when one observes that he devotes more space and attention to them than he does to the period of the Reconstruction.[27] The African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Negro Baptists receive one chapter each.

The appearance of *A History of the Negro Race in America* was an event of unusual significance in publishing and literary circles.[28] Never before had a Negro undertaken so ambitious and so serious a task. Because of the nature and scope of the work, the critics were compelled to consider it seriously; and if they did not always praise it, their unfavorable remarks with regard to it indicated that another milestone had been reached in the Negro's struggle for recognition by his fellows. The reaction from the press varied from warm and almost unqualified praise to criticism that approached excoriation. The *Kansas City Review of Science*

[27] Williams said that he did not present a thorough treatment of the Reconstruction because he was engaged in the writing of a two-volume work on the period and it was to follow his *History of the Negro Race*. See *Negro Race* II, p. 377n. Although the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (Vol. 10, p. 511) stated that such a work was published in 1889, the present writer has not been able to find any incontrovertible evidence that it actually was published. See also, *Encyclopedia Americana*, N. Y., 1940, Vol. 29, p. 340.

[28] The work, handsomely printed and bound, was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons of New York. There was a two-volume-in-one edition, as well as the regular two-volume edition.

for April and July, 1883, praised the ability and skill of Williams in handling his materials and concluded that he had "succeeded in producing a work which will be an authority on the subject treated until a better one is produced, which is likely to be a long time."[29] An English reviewer in the *Westminster Review* for July, 1883, hailed the work as one which contained "no needless or offensive vituperation. The style is clear and straightforward, with a few Americanisms here and there, some of which will be new to many of his readers on this side. . . ."[30] Another English reviewer put the point more bluntly when he said that the Williams volumes evinced "less judgment and critical experience than industry, and if the writer could make a stern resolve to be less declamatory and more grammatical, it would tell favourably on any future literary effort. The imperfections of the work, however, do not detract from the interest which it possesses in the eyes of the European reader as a history of the Negro race by one of themselves."[31]

The Magazine of American History regarded Williams' two volumes as "perhaps the most creditable performance that has yet come from the pen of any representative of the African race in America. It is the result of long and conscientious study by a vigorous and patient mind. It shows much labored research, and if there are those who could have performed the task better, few could have worked more enthusiastically or produced more acceptable general results." The reviewer described the work as one of "deep and absorbing interest," but observed that Williams' style was not sufficiently restrained and that he was perhaps a little too critical of other writers. In conclusion, the critic said,

> Yet the merits of the work are so great that we do not incline to find fault with details. The author has achieved a large degree of

[29] Quoted in Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 561.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 561.

[31] *The Academy* (London), vol. 24 (April 18, 1883), pp. 107-108. The review was written by E. J. Payne.

success and has endeavored to tell the story of the black man in an impartial spirit, which will secure the sympathy and respect of all intelligent readers. No one who fails to become acquainted with the contents of this book can claim to have a full understanding of American history, to what it forms a large and indispensable contribution. The author deserves the most substantial support upon the part of the reading public.[32]

The Literary World, published in Boston, considered the work of sufficient importance to merit a favored place among the major reviews on its second page. The reviewer pointed out that "measured by the literary line and not by the 'color line' " the work could hardly be a model. Williams, he asserted, reveled in adjectives, which, because of overuse, had become a weakness. "Nor is his temper the best, though much may be pardoned here. Yet the work shows research and mental calibre. Unequal in its parts, it is, upon the whole the most nearly satisfactory continuous account yet written of the African in America."[33]

A much longer and more unfavorable review appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly.* The reviewer said that no earlier effort to write a history of the Negro could compare with Williams' effort in extent of plan or general merit of execution. Taking the work seriously, the writer then said, "If we frankly point out its defects as well as its merits, it is because its author has honestly aimed to place it on that high plane where it can be judged by the standard of its absolute worth, without any sort of reference to 'race, color, or previous condition of servitude'. To criticise it thus impartially is a recognition of its values." The reviewer was of the opinion that the general plan and arrangement of the book were excellent and that its appearance was generally favorable. He then said that the favorable impression could not be sustained upon a careful reading of the work. He objected to Williams' statement that God gave all races civilization to start with, and de-

[32] *Magazine of American History,* vol. 9 (April, 1883), pp. 299-300.
[33] *Literary World,* vol. 14, pp. 72-73.

clared that Williams did not have sufficient training to undertake such difficult problems as "The Negro in the Light of Philology." He thought that the attention could have been more wisely devoted to the question of the extent of Mohammedanism in Africa. He admitted that the book grew better as one read further into it, and he praised the chapters on slavery in the colonies. The reviewer took exception to the manner in which Williams scoffed at earlier writers. He said that Williams criticised severely some writers who, in later editions of their works which Williams had evidently not seen, had revised their statements and points of view in the light of new materials. The reviewer said that he could not understand Williams' petty hostility to Massachusetts, which received much less favorable treatment than any other New England state. He concluded that despite the defects of omission and commission "the author has produced a work of great value; one that will be a treasury of facts for future students, and greatly facilitate their work, although it will inevitably be superseded in time by a history prepared with yet fuller research, more careful literary training, and a more judicial spirit."[34]

The reviewer in the *Nation* failed even to find as much merit in the book as did the critic who wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*. He began by saying that "To disparage the product of great literary industry is always repugnant to the fair-minded critic. . . . Nevertheless, the critic has a duty to perform, to the author, and to the public, and cannot avoid assigning this history a rank far below its pretensions." The critic insisted that he was reluctant to do this, because the author was a member of the race described in the book and because, at any rate, it was the most "ambitious and elaborate" work that had yet emanated from the pen of any Negro. Then, speaking for himself, the critic said,

[34] *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 51 (April, 1883), pp. 564-568.

He would be glad to say it was readable, but he has not found it so; or a valuable book of reference, but it is not that; or intellectually remarkable, but, by the only standard of comparison which Mr. Williams would exact, it must be judged the crude performance of a mind in no way exceptionally endowed. Its total effect is that of cramming without the power to digest or to arrange. Such a statement will surprise the author, as it probably will some of his reviewers, who have commended the orderliness of his narrative, whereas the fact is that his division and distribution of topics is unmethodical to the last degree. . . . The moment one goes below the chapter headings, the defects of time, perspective, and generalization become painfully manifest. . . . For example of classification run mad, the chapter in the second volume on "Antislavery Methods" may be consulted.

The reviewer severely censured Williams for his excoriation of Massachusetts for her slaveholding and for "heaping upon her epithets which no one of her sister colonies provokes." He said that Williams had been unduly influenced by Dr. J. H. Moore's *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* which he termed a "thinly veiled political pamphlet." He further declared that Williams had made a "perfect mess" of his treatment of the anti-slavery movement, and that while his chapters on the Negro in the Civil War were among his best, he considered the summary of the Reconstruction as "worthless, and is not excused by Mr. Williams' announcement that he is preparing a two-volume history of this dismal period".

To conclude, we cannot commend this work for originality, ability, or accuracy. As a book of reference, it will infallibly disappoint. After the parade of the number of books consulted in the preparation of it, the authorities cited are singularly few, and are indicated as a rule in the vaguest manner. A certain amount of historical, biographical, and statistical information is conveniently brought together, but it will have to be used with caution.[35]

The only agreement among the reviewers with regard to Williams' work was that the first part on "The Unity of Mankind" was unscientific, that certain important problems, like the slave trade, received little or no consideration, and that his criticisms of other authors were at times

[35] *The Nation*, vol. 36 (April 12, 1883), pp. 325-326.

intemperate. There can be no doubt that Williams consulted thousands of sources, and he anticipated the criticism that he was guilty of literary indigestion when he explained that he reprinted some documents in their entirety because of their great importance, and he feared he would be accused of not having consulted them. If he was guilty of immoderateness in his remarks concerning other authors, it can be said with some justification that some of his critics were guilty of the same thing. It seems that the significant thing about the reviews, aside from certain sound criticisms, is that they all looked upon this work as a serious undertaking and they handled it as such in their reviews.

The result of the publication of the *History of the Negro Race in America* was that it catapulted its author into national and international prominence. He was in great demand as a speaker. In April, 1884, he delivered an Emancipation Day oration at the Asbury Church in Washington, D. C., and took as his subject, "The Negro as a Political Problem." As usual, Williams approached his subject historically, and traced slavery in the District of Columbia from its beginnings and discussed the Negro during the Revolution and in the national period. In calling for a new Negro leadership, Williams said that the Negro needed "not the time-serving lickspittle, not the self-seeking parasite, not the obsequious cringing go-between, not swaggering insolence, nor any man ashamed of being . . . a Negro." The Negro needed, instead, "leaders with brains, character, courage, zeal, and tact" to help in the moral emancipation of their followers.[36] In the following month Williams was invited to deliver a Memorial Day address before the Charles Ward Post of the Grand Army of the Republic in Newton, Massachusetts.[37] His subject was "The Ethics of the War."

[36] George W. Williams, *1862—Emancipation Day—1884; The Negro as a Political Problem.* Boston, 1884, p. 7ff.

[37] As Judge-Advocate of the Grand Army of the Republic of Ohio, Williams had kept in close touch with the activities of the Union veterans of the Civil War.

He discussed the historical differences between the North and South from the Colonial period, and condemned the ministers of the South for not speaking out against slavery. He said that the South, "cursed wth moral blindness, had come to believe firmly in the righteousness of their rotten cause; and fought with a desperation worthy of a good cause. Historians and authors often make the mistake of apologizing for traitors by saying 'they were honest'. As well say the murder or thief is honest. The rebels attempted to take the life of the nation, and sought to steal the birthright of the Negro at the South. Treason is treason; loyalty is loyalty; and I speak these words with no bitterness in my heart. I simply seek to express the truth of history . . . ."[38]

A few weeks later Wiliams sailed for England to attend to business. One is inclined to believe that it was connected with his historical writings, but it is not clear from the letter which he wrote to his wife, the only source of information available on this phase of his life. He wrote,

I was called to London to sign a contract before the 16th inst, and was compelled to go on the first ship I could Secure passage. I was so busy that I could not find time to write, as I explained in my last letter. . . . I will be able to get through with my business early, and except my company desires me to go to Egypt, will return home in about three weeks.[39]

Apparently he went to Egypt, for in August he wrote his wife, from Heidelberg, Germany.

You see I am on my way back to England. I took a look about this city this evening, and visited the famous Castle built by Rudolph I in the XIII century. It is divided into six departments, and its walls are from 16 to 20 feet thick. It is curiously interesting. . . . As I write this there is an American Circus across the Street. It is quite novel to the Germans. It is evidently crowded. The people love pleasure here. I am living on mineral water and tea. I made

[38] George W. Williams, *Memorial Day; The Ethics of the War*. Newton, Massachusetts, 1884, p. 7ff.

[39] George W. Williams (aboard the *SS Egypt*) to Mrs. Sarah W. Williams, July 14, 1884. In the George W. Williams Papers.

up my mind not to touch beer, wine or any other liquor. . . . I was a guest of a veteran military club at Stuttgart the other night and it was curious to see me drinking five or six toasts with a soda water bottle before me! I dined with a Duke on Sunday, who is an officer in the army of the King of Wurttenberg. . . . I asked a Porter Sunday if there was a Baptist church in the city. He thought a while, rubbed his head, and then said he was sure there was no church of that nation in the city.[40]

In 1885 President Arthur appointed Williams Minister to Haiti. When President Cleveland came into office, Williams had not received his commission, and the former refused to issue it. He fought vigorously for his appointment. He wrote an open letter to the President, which appeared in the *New York Tribune,* in which he appealed to Cleveland for justice and fair play. Republican newspapers joined him in his fight, but the President was adamant, and Williams and his friends failed in his efforts to secure the appointment.[41]

Williams had intended, for some time, to write a history of the Negro's part in the Civil War, and during his leisure, he began to gather material for this volume even before his two volume work on the Negro race was published in 1883. As he traveled in America and in Europe, he kept this project before him. After his failure to secure the Haitian appointment, he had more time to put on his new historical work, and by 1886 he was engaged in the writing of his *History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865.* No one was more aware than Williams of the difficulties involved in writing of events so close at hand. He acknowledged this when he said that "in writing of events

[40] George W. Williams to Mrs. Sarah W. Williams, August 11, 1884. In the George W. Williams Papers.

[41] Simmons, *Men of Mark,* pp. 562-563; see, also, the *New York Tribune* for April 20, 1885. In a letter to his wife, March 23, 1885, when he was in Washington awaiting the outcome of the Haitian appointment, Williams said, "You know that I have the nerve to meet my enemies; and I feel that if God is for me those opposed can do but little. I am calmly awaiting the decision. I trust in God only. . . . Whatever is right will triumph." George W. Williams Papers.

within living memory it requires both fortitude and skill to resist the insidious influence of interested friends and actors, to separate error from truth with an even and steady hand, to master the sources of historical information—to know where the material is, to collect and classify it . . . and to avoid partisan feeling and maintain a spirit of judicial candor."[42]

Although Williams was a soldier in the volunteer and regular army of the United States and participated in many of the battles he described, he insisted that he "relied very little on personal knowledge, preferring always to follow the official record." He had been an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic for many years and at the meetings he had heard many stories of the deeds of the Negro soldier, but he informed his readers that he did not let his enthusiasm lead him away from the record. As in his earlier historical works, he was anxious to write an accurate account as objectively as humanly possible. Concerning his approach to the problem before him, he said,

> I have found it necessary, in the sake of history and science, to prick some bubbles of alleged history, and to correct the record. Negro soldiers were not in the battle of Red Bank, as many school histories declare; nor were the free Negroes of the colonies enrolled as a part of the established militia. . . . On the other hand, justice, in many instances, has been denied the Negro soldier in the war of the Revolution, as in the case of the Rhode Island regiment. I have nevertheless kept to the record, hewing to the line, regardless of the direction the flying chips take.
>
> I have spoken plainly . . . but I have not extenuated nor set down aught in malice. My language is not plainer than the truth, my philippic is not more cruel than the crimes exposed, my rhetoric is not more fiery than the trials through which these black troops passed, nor my conclusions without warrant of truth or justification of evidence.[43]

In preparing his history of the Negro troops, Williams

[42] George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865.* New York, 1888, p. ix, hereinafter referred to as *Negro Troops.*

[43] *Negro Troops,* pp. xiii-xiv.

said that he used all the available official and unofficial sources. The *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion,* edited by Lt. Col. Robert N. Scott, had recently been released, and it is believed that Williams was one of the first to use these important sources. Materials unavailable to him when he was working on the *History of the Negro Race,* such as the records in the office of the adjutant-general, were placed at his disposal. He used official and semi-official army and navy gazettes, manuscripts from various departments of the federal government, publications of historical societies, newspapers, books, and pamphlets. He also was able to secure the personal testimony of a number of generals, six of whom he knew personally. In his travels both in America and in Europe, he gathered materials bearing on the history of the Negro soldier in ancient and modern times.

The new volume, which appeared in 1888, was divided into sixteen chapters. The introductory chapter dealt with Negro soldiers in ancient times, principally in Egypt. Then follows a survey of the activities of Negro soldiers in modern times, including the American Revolution, in the armies of France, England, Haiti, and Mexico. Williams next discusses the background of the Civil War and the growing antagonism between the North and South. The first two years of the war were years in which the status of the Negro was discussed by Union officials and the question as to whether to use him as a soldier was debated. Williams devotes considerable attention to these matters, and then enters into a discussion of the Negro troops in battle, to which six chapters are devoted in a geographical treatment of the subject. The two concluding chapters deal with the Negro soldier as prisoner of war and with the testimony of officers and civilian leaders who have spoken on the performance of the Negro soldier.

It was a more confident and a somewhat more sober Williams who wrote the history of the Negro troops. Because

of the difficulty of writing with so little perspective, of which he was aware, he manifested considerable caution in the conclusions which he reached lest he be accused of yielding to the temptation of being biased. He wrote with more confidence, too, because he had the feeling that his word was as good as that of anyone, since in the 1880's few serious historians had undertaken to write about the Civil War. The absence of serious writings on the Civil War period deprived him of the opportunity to engage in the disputations that tended to mar his earlier work. Although Williams discussed in some detail, in his preface, the exhaustive research that had gone into the writing of the work on the Negro troops, the finished work contains few citations of authorities or sources. Here and there, a footnote refers to the *Official Records of the Rebellion;* and there are also explanatory footnotes which are signed by the initials of the author, "G. W. W." Many documents presumably from the *Official Records,* are quoted or are given in their entirety, but the author does not make it clear where they are located. In some instances Williams included the bibliographical information in the text, making footnotes unnecessary.

The volume sparkles with brilliant descriptions of battles, and once more one gets the impression that because of his tremendous personal interest in military affairs, Williams' greatest talents lie in the field of military history. The descriptions are too lengthy to include in a study of this nature, and quotations would not do justice to them. It can be said, however, that they display a very intimate acquaintance with military organization and strategy, and they are so graphic as to leave to the reader little necessity of imagination in order to understand them.

In contrast to his earlier work, Williams' *History of the Negro Troops* undertook to prove a very definite thesis, namely, that Negro soldiers were among the nation's most gallant heroes and that they had made significant contributions to the preservation of the country. More than once,

after discussing the performance of duty during war, Williams made assertions like the following:

> Every duty was discharged joyfully, every privation and pain endured heroically, and but one thought animated them from first to last, the preservation of the national life with the death of slavery. To compass this end there were no trials too severe, no duties too arduous, no death too bitter. In all the engagements in which they participated, as far as it was possible, their officers sought for them the posts of danger and honor. Danger never awed them and honor never spoiled them. They were equal to every military contingency, and neither General Hunter nor the Government ever had occasion to regret the military employment of Negroes in the Department of the South.[44]

It was in support of this thesis that Williams included the chapter entitled, "The Cloud of Witnesses" in which he quoted words of praise of Negro troops by such leaders as Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, Adjutant-General Lorenzo Thomas, Major-Generals James G. Blunt, S. A. Hurlbut, Alfred H. Terry, and W. F. Smith, and Brevet-Major General Thomas J. Morgan. Williams concluded the discussion by saying:

> The masses of Negroes in the United States are ignorant but from their loins will spring only a race of patriots so long as a monument records the magnificent military achievements of the Negro soldier. Under such an object lesson, held by the sacred spell, touched by such an immutable influence, centuries might pass, treasures corrode, cities disappear, tribes perish, and even empires whose boast was their duration might crumble, but a republic that remembers to defend its defenders in tracing their noble conduct in monumental marble and brass can never decay. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word endures forever. Truth only is immortal.[45]

When this volume appeared, it did not enjoy the exclusive attention which Williams' earlier work received, for reaching the public about the same time was Joseph T. Wilson's *Black Phalanx,* a history of the Negro during the War for Independence, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Like Williams, Wilson had been a soldier in the late war and

[44] *Negro Troops,* p. 213.
[45] *Ibid.,* p. 332.

had written for publication before.[46] Although the Wilson volume was an extensive treatment of the subject, it lacked the integration and organization that characterized the Williams volume. Even the highly critical reviewer of both volumes in the *Nation* admitted that Williams' volume was better arranged, though he hastened to add "although it leaves in this respect much to be desired." He continued,

> Both of these books show honest intentions and a certain amount of praiseworthy diligence . . . but both show a want of method and an inability to command their own materials, so that they leave the reader with a renewed interest in the subject, but with a very imperfect sense of clear comprehension. Each gives some facts and documents which the other omits. Of the two Mr. Williams' book is the more grandiloquent, while Mr. Wilson is grandiloquent once for all by yielding to the whim of calling the troops a "phalanx."[47]

A History of Negro Troops was more favorably received in the literary world than Williams' earlier volumes. In the *New Englander,* Joseph E. Roy asserted that Williams had told the story of the Negro soldier "with wondrous effect."[48] Though not reviewed, it was listed in several important European journals, including the *English Historical Review* and *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique.* The reviewer in the *Literary World* described the book as possessing "peculiar interest from the humanitarian standpoint as well as the literary, in being the production of a young army officer of African blood." He said that Williams deserved "congratulation for the intelligence, discretion, and excellent workmanship with which he has prepared the book. . . . Considering our common impressions of the racial source of it, it is remarkably well written. The tendency to 'fine writing' which might have been expected is slight, scarcely

[46] Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx; A History of the Negro Soldiers of the United States in the Wars of 1775-1812, 1861-65.* Hartford, 1888. Wilson was also the author of *Emancipation, Voice of a New Race,* and *Twenty-two Years of Freedom.*

[47] *The Nation,* vol. 46 (March 1, 1888), p. 180.

[48] Joseph E. Roy, "Our Indebtedness to the Negroes," *New Englander and Yale Review,* vol. 41, p. 362.

noticeable in fact; the style is manly, modest, strong; the book presents the facts, and presents them in an orderly, dignified, and impressive form.''[49]

Many contemporary critics remarked on Williams' style, most of them were critical of it. Williams seemed to revel in what were, doubtless, to him beautiful figures of speech. The following is typical:

> History records, and the record will remain as long as the English language endures, that at Fort Pillow General Forrest and General Chalmers violated the honor of a flag of truce, the laws of civilized warfare—outraged every sentiment of humanity, and dishonored the uniform of Lee and Jackson, the Christian soldiers of the Confederacy. As long as brave deeds blaze in the firmament of national glory, as long as patriotism is revered and valor honored, so long will the gallant defence of Fort Pillow by the Negro Spartans be held in sacred remembrance by the loyal friends of a ransomed and reunited nation.[50]

If this be considered florid, it can be said that it is no more so than the writings of other contemporary historians like George Bancroft and John Fiske. In another place Williams says,

> As the shadows gathered about the expiring days of the eighteenth century, it was clear to be seen that slavery, as an institution, had rooted itself into the political and legal life of the American Republic. An estate prolific of evil, fraught with danger to the new government, abhorred and rejected at first, was at length adopted with great political sagacity and deliberateness, and then guarded by the solemn forms of constitutional law and legislative enactments.[51]

Perhaps in this and in other passages Williams is inclined toward bumptiousness, but it would seem that he felt compelled to write in this fashion in order to paint in bold relief the pictures of the tragic events about which he wrote. For the most part, Williams wrote with deliberate restraint, employing satire, subtlety, and elaborate description where

[49] *Literary World,* vol. 19 (February 18, 1888), p. 55.

[50] *Negro Troops,* p. 272.

[51] *Negro Race,* I, p. 441.

necessary to give that glow to his work which had the effect of making it vivid.

Two points of view, seemingly contradictory, run through the writings of Williams which may be said to be his philosophy or philosophies of history. One is his strong feeling that God rules the affairs of men. Doubtless, his training in theology and his experience as a religious leader are responsible for this point of view. It pervades his writings, and can be said to be the dominant philosophy. In one place, he made the extravagant statement that "It is fair to presume that God gave all the races of mankind civilization to start with".[52] His idea of progress was based on the view that God wills that man shall continuously improve his lot. In viewing the future of Africa, he said,

> Tribes will be converted to Christianity; cities will rise, states will be founded; geography and science will enrich and enlarge their discoveries; and a telegraph cable binding the heart of Africa to the ear of the civilized world, every throb of joy or sorrow will pulsate again in millions of souls. In the interpretation of *History* the plans of God must be discerned, *"For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night."*[53]

The other point of view was that the economic factor, the greed for money, has been an important force in the history of the Negro, the dominant theme of which has been exploitation by the white man. He saw in slavery, which he considered as primarily an economic institution—and an evil one at that—and Christianity a continuous struggle for supremacy. That slavery was finally abolished was viewed by Williams as a victory of God over the devil and as another evidence of God in the affairs of men.

When Williams addressed the World Federation of Missions in London, in 1888, it was as a distinguished man of letters and a mature student of American and African affairs that he spoke on the subject, "The Drink Traffic in the

[52] *Negro Race,* I, p. 22.
[53] *Ibid.,* II, p. 552.

Congo." So interested did he become in the problems of the Congo that Belgium sent him there to study conditions, and in 1890 he made his report.[54] S. S. McClure, representing the Associated Literary Press of New York City, secured the services of Williams, in 1889, to write a series of letters from Europe and the valley of the Congo. It is interesting to observe that his letter of introduction described him as a "gentleman of learning and an author of several historical works of acknowledged merit."[55] It was upon his return from the Congo that he became stricken in England and died at Blackpool, August 4, 1891.

Judged by the standards of historical scholarship of his own day, it can be said that Williams was as ardent a devotee to the cause of truth as any of his contemporaries. Having received no technical training in historical criticism, he, like many of his fellow sufferers, wrought well and contributed much to the growing literature of American history that was to make possible the high standards of scholarship of a later generation. Judged by the standards of historical scholarship of today, it can be safely said that Williams' works, though failing to measure up in the areas of criticism and interpretation, are substantial and reliable sources of information and bear up surprisingly well under careful scrutiny. Perhaps the *History of the Negro Race* will, as predicted by the reviewer in the *Atlantic Monthly,* "inevitably be superseded in time by a history prepared with yet fuller research, more literary training, and a more judicial spirit"; but after more than sixty years, during which time American historical scholarship has made its greatest strides, it is interesting to observe that the prediction has not yet come true.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN
North Carolina College for Negroes

[54] Smith, "George W. Williams," *Dictionary of American Biography,* vol. 20, p. 264.

[55] A letter, "To Whom these presents come," written by S. S. McClure, September 26, 1889, in the George W. Williams Papers.