

Bearing of Black and Lee Forms a Study in Contrast

By Sidney Ormond.

Comparisons are odious, but to the close observer of events following the Mary Phagan murder and the trial now in progress one cannot help contrasting the impression made on the jury by Newt Lee, the negro night-watchman of the National Pencil factory, and the testimony of John Black, detective, who worked up a large part of the evidence being used against Leo M. Frank by the state.

It was only a short while ago that John Black, according to the statement of Lee, was "blun-blamming" at him night and day in an effort to get something new in regard to the death of Mary Phagan. Lee was not allowed to sleep, and you know what that means to a negro. No sooner would he curl up on his bunk to dream of yellow-legged chickens, watermelons and the fresh air of liberty, than along would come Black or Starnes or some other member of the detective force to harass him with questions. For months his life has been one volley of interrogations, fired at him coaxingly or menacingly. He told his story so often that doubtless if he were asked which he preferred, fried chicken or watermelon, he would say:

"I went down into the basement and—"

When Newt Lee went on the stand Luther Rosser, who is a bearcat when it comes to mixing a person up, had no terrors for him. The mere fact that Newt has no education stood him in good stead. His memory, or his "recollection," as he termed it, had been developed just in proportion as his education had been neglected.

Luther Rosser never budged him from his original story. He remembered the exact words he used before

the coroner's jury.

"So, Mr. Frank told you to go out and have some fun, did he?" Luther Rosser would ask.

"Naw, suh. He didnt say dat. He tole me to go out and have a good time," Newt would reply.

With John Black, the case was different, and the manner in which he became muddled up and confused under the crossfire of Mr. Rosser's questioning proves that the memory of the illiterate is often more reliable than the memory of a person of fairly good education. It proves another thing: Newt Lee is stolid. He has no nerves. Being questioned by Luther Rosser meant absolutely nothing to him. He didn't give a whoop whether it was Luther Rosser or John Black. Black is inclined to be nervous. He dreaded the ordeal through which he was to pass, and he looked forward to it with increasing fear as the days passed. Detective that he is, he knew Luther Rosser's tactics. He had been questioned by him before. He had felt the sting of Rosser's sarcasm; he had suffered from the vitriol which Rube Arnold occasionally pours into a wound inflicted by his colleague. He knew he was in for a hiding that great strips of skin were going to be taken off his person, and that, no matter what he said or how he said it, he was in for a merry, merry old time of it.

"I should worry," solloquized John Black. And worry he did.

No one questions that Black did his best. Jim Jeffries, also, did his best one fatal Fourth of July.

The testimony of Newt Lee and John Black forms a nice study in psychology. Lee would doubtless think you were cursing him if you used that word in his presence, and

But, really, that is all there is to it. One did and the other didn't.