

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON · *Autobiographical Writings*

never lost his personal friendship for Washington, thought it would “lead people to think that you and I would talk the thing out in private and if you did not agree with me I then pounded you in the Evening Post. That, of course, I have never done. . . .” At Villard’s suggestion the sentence was changed to read: “Sometimes he has criticized me publicly in his newspaper and privately in his conversation.”⁸²

Despite their many variations, Washington’s autobiographical writings are consistent in their picture of the man and his times. They reveal the moral values Washington had inherited from his mid-nineteenth-century experiences and teachers. The plucky hero might have stepped from a book by Horatio Alger or G. A. Henty. Washington’s personal philosophy also linked him with the Emersonian popular philosophy more than with the twentieth century. Washington particularly revealed his Victorianism in his handling of family and personal relationships. He hid them forever behind a veil of conventions. His mother might be any mother, his wives were all described without individuality as good housekeepers and devoted workers for the school and the cause. Washington was clearly the hero of his own life, and it was a life that seemed to promise that black men as well as white men could carry “the message to Garcia” and find acres of diamonds in their own back yards, if they had any. For very different reasons, white and black Americans welcomed Washington’s faith that through upward striving, white benevolence, and a benign Providence, his race could overcome, as he had overcome, the obstacles of the color line.

⁸² BTW to Villard, Apr. 6, 1911, Villard to BTW, Apr. 11, 1911, Oswald Garrison Villard Papers, MH.