

Letter pertaining to  
Colored National League

Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 1889

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CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

## THE TIME HAS COME

FOR THE RACE TO SHOW ITSELF  
WORTHY OF LIBERTY.

Mr. Tourgee On the League—The One  
Thing to Be Done—The "Colored  
Man" Must Take the Oar—For  
His Children He Must  
Act Now.

To the Editor of THE PLAINDALER.

Sir:—Your circular containing the letter of Mr. William E. Matthews and the reply of Mr. Jno. M. Langston is received with your request that I give my opinion in regard to the measure proposed.

It seems to me manifestly improper that I should give any opinion on such a subject. It is a question entirely for the consideration of colored men and which, I trust, they are capable of deciding wisely for themselves.

I have no hesitation in saying that if an equal number of native American citizens having white skins were distinguished against, as the colored people of the United States are, such an organization would have been effected in every nook and cranny of the country long ago.

Of course not all colored men any more than all white men can be expected to look at such a matter in the same light, and unless great wisdom is exercised in its organization and direction, it may be expected to result in failure. It is the first step the race has attempted of its own motion towards self-assertive freedom—the only freedom that can ever be relied on to give good results. And I for one shall welcome it with the highest gratification.

If Irishmen may organize to aid in improving the condition of Ireland or other nationalities among our citizenship to perpetuate the traditions of the land of their nativity, I cannot see why it is not merely the privilege, but the bounden duty, of the only class of our native citizens whom any one has ever proposed to deprive of the privileges so readily conferred upon the alien, to organize for consultation and harmony of action in the assertion and maintenance of their lawful rights, in a lawful manner.

My opinion for many years has been freely expressed that the chief error of the friends of the Negro in the United States

has been a desire to "steer" him in what they deem the right direction, rather than stimulate him to act for himself. I recognize the difficulties in the way of such an organization; and do not doubt that if it should be attempted to be organized in the South the category of martyrs would soon be a notable one; but there is no better use to be made of a man than to have him planted as the seed of a good cause, and it would seem to be about time that the colored race began a martyrology which shall contain the names of those suffering in the endeavor to achieve liberty, to counterbalance the rather over-crowded one which testifies to their long-suffering endurance of oppression.

There is no doubt in my mind that the colored man must take the laboring oar in the movement for his real enfranchisement. He can not, and ought not, to be the mere creature and servant of a party, unless that party is active and earnest in its efforts to secure for him the rights he is now denied to so great an extent, and which in the near future are likely to be still more openly curtailed.

Ten years ago I wrote in "A Fool's Errand," "A people can not be made free by proclamation or Constitutional Amendment!"

These measures only opened the door to the Negro to make *himself* free. What the race has suffered in those terrible years of transition has only been the prick of the spur that is pushing it forward to the assertion of its manhood and the full achievement of its rights. If it is worthy of equality of right and privilege, the time has come for it to dip its garments in the blood of the slain, and press forward to the attainment of that liberty which asserts its claim to justice rather than petitions always for mercy. If it is not worthy, it will simply slip in the blood of those who have perished for its disenthralment and slide back into deserved inferiority.

Earnest and united and intelligent action on the part of the colored men of the United States will do very much to cure the evils which now affect it, and relieve the country from the most fearful peril that has ever threatened its peace and civilization, while mere discordant "hollering" by men anxious not so much to *do* as to explain what might be done, will amount to very little. Very great difficulties stand in the way of an effective organization of this kind, and the chances are perhaps about even that no tangible good will result from it; but *any sort* of effort under present conditions is better than *no effort*.

The one thing that needs now to be done—more than all others—is to inform the intelligent thinking people of the North of actual Southern conditions. This the colored man must, in the main, do for himself and must devise ways and means ad-

apted to new conditions for doing it. The race will never have another Garrison or Phillips to fight its battles for it. With them has perished, too, the instrumentalities they used so effectually. New ones must be formed. What they will be, I cannot tell; but such an organization as that Mr. Matthews proposes, if effectually administered, ought within a year to accumulate a mass of facts which should challenge the attention of the Christian world, without submitting their informants to the peril of persecution therefore. Here will be found one of the chief difficulties, I opine, since the colored man of the North is too apt to forget that the colored man of the South can only tell what he knows when fully assured that he will never be known as having revealed it. It is a strange fact that the tongue or pen of his Northern kinsman, who has gotten farther away from his harsh condition, not unfrequently becomes a serious if not fatal enemy.

While, therefore I do not presume to counsel in regard to this matter, you will

permit me to say, that in my opinion, it is high time the Negro race in America did something—as a race—to proclaim their willingness and ability to maintain their right to exercise the privileges granted them and a determination to preserve for their children the liberties so many shed their blood to secure.

Hastily and sincerely yours,

ALBION W. TOURGEE.

Mayville, N. Y., Oct. 12, 1880.

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY

There is probably no more dangerous foe (though self-clothed with the cloak of friendship) to the negro race than A. W. Tourgee, not even excepting the editor of the Globe-Democrat and he of the Chicago Tribune. The colored people of the North are agitating a project to form a national league of negroes with the view of securing their rights. A number of articles from colored men favoring the measure have been published which are temperate enough in tone. Tourgee, on the other hand, contributes an article to their organ in which he warns them that if such an organization should be attempted in the South the category of martyrs would soon be a notable one, but suggests that there is no better use to be made of a man than to have him planted as the seed of a good cause. He goes on further to quote from "A Fool's Errand," a book he wrote ten years ago, as follows:

The time has come for the negro to dip his garments in the blood of the slain and press forward to the attainment of that liberty which asserts its claim to justice rather than petitions always for mercy. If it is not worthy, it will simply slip in the blood of those who have perished for its disenfranchisement and slide back into deserved inferiority.