Feby 1 – 1890 –

Mayville.

My dear daughter:

Your sweet letter was received. Do not be troubled. You know your papa loves you and means only love for you. I do not believe you wish to spite him or do anything very desperate because you think him too exacting. It is not necessary and won't pay.

I shall quite give up your attempting to illustrate the poem, so there is no need to worry about that. Besides the poem is lost – and there is no need to think of it again. It is neither to be illustrated nor published at all. I surely did not write you to scold or find fault. You know that: I only did not want you to sport. Sporting is bad form and bad policy in horse men or even a girl. If it is necessary to your happiness, however, why sport to your heart's content.

Don't get worried, if I did advise you to begin to do. I think that is the only way one does. If I had not overcome my apprehension that I was not ready to do or been compelled to do, I would never have done. I have trembled with dread at every step in my life. I was afraid of my classmates in College — half jealous of them. I have lived — to find out when it was too late to be of value — that only one of them was anything like my intellectual peer. I could not do what they did. It does not seem to have been necessary that I should. If I had thought myself fit to command a company at the outset, I should have been a Maj. General before the war closed. I did not; so I served under men who were my inferiors every way except that they believed in themselves. The fear of starvation and shame led me to fight for a place as a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1867. I found myself the strongest man in it. I suffered almost mortal agony over the task of undertaking the duties of the Judge=

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2010

ship in 1868. It was easy to me and I was known in it. I should be ashamed to confess what induced me to publish Timothy which was the basis of my literary success.

I am not blaming you; but if you learn nothing from my failures I might almost as well not have lived. I do not suppose any one who knew me — any one of my instructors, for instance, would have advised me to attempt to get an election to the Convention — to accept the Judgeship or to write "Timothy". Tick they are the three things on which my successes are all based.

No one is a safe adviser of what a worker should undertake. An unusual question one may take advice. But no one can measure another's capacity. A teacher may criticise method and may criticise results but must of necessity be the worst sort of judge of what a worker may undertake. That each one must

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

decide for himself on wait as I did for fate to decide it for him.

This is all I have ever said to you. I did not care a fig about your illustrating the poem. I was very anxious you should be willing to undertake it — to do it, in fact — without asking any body's advice as to whether you had better do it or not. I did not care about its being accepted and probably would have preferred that it should not be accepted. I only wanted you to decide to do and do, without waiting to take another's judgment on its advisability of it, being fully convinced that no man or woman either, ever did a great thing on a wise one, who asked another's advice as to whether he ought to risk the undertaking. Others may advise as to method or criticise ~~and~~ results, but

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2016

no great work in art or literature, in war or statesmanship, or any other ~~x~~ noble pursuit, that was ~~done or~~ undertaken on another's advice.

This was the lesson I tried to instil — to cultivate not an inclination to wordo in a mad desire to accomplish certain needed or what others deemed necessary preparation, but a willingness to undertake what others deem impossibilities for you.

I did not ask you to do more than you were doing but to undertake something without asking others if they thought you could do it or being overpowered by your own sense of unpreparedness. Never mind it, now. You will learn some time, that the artist grows only by attempting the impossible and that the teacher is the worst possible advicer of what should be undertaken. It may not come to you until you are forty as it did to your father: it may not come to you until you are sixty

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

I did not ~~xxx~~ mean to restrain you against your will but only act as a rudder or steering gear in making the journey of life smoother and pleasanter for you. If you do not wish me to do so, I will not. If you prefer the risk of an impossible task and the chances of weathering a headland covered with wrecks, to making a safe passage in a sheltered bay, why of course you must take it.

I have never intended to urge you to impossible or exhausting endeavor. My only caution has been against the idea that you must exhaust all schools and forms of art before attempting to do anything. I have thought that you are like myself too much inclined to consume exhaustiveness of preparation. I think if I had a lot of pins to pick up I would invent a machine to do it very neatly. Your Mamma would pick up the pins probably, while I was making the ma-

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2011

as it has not to many who might have achieved success if they had learned it sooner.

I will not trouble you with it again. But do not think I am dissatisfied or in any manner inclined to find fault. You are doing well: developing splendidly with all the odds of a glorious success in your favor. I only wanted to put on the brakes so that you need not weaken your nervous energy by ceaseless dragging.

Tell your Aunties I am glad she has the rheumatism — or rather has not the Grippe. The former is bad enough we were greatly alarmed about her. She must not start home until she is well able to do so. I didn't think I could write so much and now am as full of pains as [illegible] is of holes to pay for it. God bless you, Darling. Love to Aunties,

Yours

A. W. Tourgee

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013