

[P.L. Dunbar to H.A. Tobey, July 13, 1895:]

MY DEAR DR. TOBEY:

If it is a rule that tardiness in the acknowledgment of favors argues lack of appreciation of them, you may set it down that the rule has gone wrong in this case. Your letter and its enclosure was a sunburst out of a very dark and unpromising cloud. Let me tell you the circumstances and see if you do not think that you came to me somewhat in the role of a "special providence."

The time for the meeting of the Western Association of Writers was at hand. I am a member and thought that certain advantages might come to me by attending. All day Saturday and all day Sunday I tried every means to secure funds to go. I tried every known place, and at last gave up and went to bed Sunday night in despair. But strangely I could not sleep, so about half-past eleven I arose and between then and 2 A.M., wrote the paper which I was booked to read at the Association. Then, still with no suggestion of any possibility of attending the meeting, I returned to bed and went to sleep about four o'clock. Three hours later came your letter with the check that took me to the desired place. I do not think that I spent the money unwisely, for besides the pleasure of intercourse with kindred spirits which should have been sufficient motive, I believe that there were several practical advantages which I derived from the trip, whence I have just returned.

I wish I could thank you for the kindness that prompted your action; I care not in whose name it was done, whether in Christ's, Mahomet's or Buddha's. The thing that concerned me, the fact that madce the acta good and noble one was that it *was* done.

Yes, I am tied down and have been by menial labor, and any escape from it so far has only been a brief respite that made a return to the drudgery doubly hard. But I am glad to say that for the past two or three years I have been able to keep my mother from the hard toil by which she raised and educated me. But it has been and is a struggle.

Your informant was mistaken as to my aspirations. I did once want to be a lawyer, but that ambition has long since died out before the all-absorbing desire to be a wor4thy singer of the songs of God and nature. To be able to interpret my own people through song and story, and to prove to the many that after all we are more human than African. And to this end I have hoped year after year to be able to go to Washington, New York, Boston and Philadelphia where I might see our northern negro at his best, before seeing his brother in the South: but it has been denied to me.

I hope, if possible, to spend the coming year in college, chiefly to learn how and what to study in order to cultivate my vein. But I have my home responsibilities and unless I am able to make sufficient to meet them I shall be unable to accomplish my purpose. To do this I have for some time been giving readings from my verses to audiences mostly of my own people. But as my work has been confined to the smaller towns generally the result has not been satisfactory.

Perhaps I have laid my case too plainly and openly before you, but you seem to display a disposition to aid me, and I am so grateful that I cannot but be confidential. Then beside, a physician does not want to take a case when there is a reticence in regard to the real phases of it. And so I have been plain.

Sincerely,

Paul L. Dunbar

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