

[Description: Typed letter from H. A. Tobey, Superintendent of the Toledo State Hospital, to Paul Laurence Dunbar, dated July 6, 1895, offering praise, encouragement, and a financial contribution to support Dunbar to continue writing his poetry. This is a full transcript of the two-page letter.]

[Letterhead:]

Toledo State Hospital, H. A. Tobey, M.D. Superintendent

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[Body of letter]

July 6, 1895.

Mr. Paul Dunbar, Dayton, Ohio.

Dear Sir:

Some five or six months ago an acquaintance of mine in Dayton sent me your little book of poems, which pleased me greatly. I am not a literary character, but believe I possess ordinary human instincts and emotions, and from my point of view I must compliment you enough to say that I believe you possess real poetical instinct. In these modern times, when it seems the chief aim and object of man is to obtain the "Almighty Dollar," poets and poetry are below par and by the common mass of mankind their real intrinsic value is not appreciated. This condition of society I very much deplore, as I look upon poetry as only a higher philosophy: so subtle, so ethereal, so diving, that our creator has endowed only a few of our kind with the sacred trust of translating to the masses a representation of the joys and sorrows that every heart has felt. When I first received your book I learned from the donor that, in a biblical sense, God Almighty has placed the stamp of Cain upon you, or, in other words, your skin is black. I knew nothing of your circumstances until some three months ago when I was in Dayton I learned from an acquaintance that your mother was a washerwoman and that even yet you are required to earn your living by menial labor. Since then I have read your poems again and again, and the more I read them the more I recognize the divinity that stirs within you. I do not belong to any church, and the little good I may be able to do is not done in the name of Christ, but only in the name of humanity; but by this statement I would not depreciate the beautiful character of our so-called "Savior." I have talked with a number of friends of mine and believe I am in position to give you financial aid if you desire to increase your education or to travel with a view of better qualifying yourself to pour out your poetical songs to the world. When I was in Dayton I learned that your ambition is to become a lawyer. The world is already too full of lawyers for its good, peace or welfare. What we need is more persons to interpret Nature and Nature's God. I believe you are specially endowed for this work, and therefore would admonish you to continue as you have

started, notwithstanding there in no popular clamor for, or perhaps much approval of what you have already done. I am so thoroughly Democratic in my sentiments that race or condition with me “cuts but little figure,” in my estimation of men. Therefore I am anxious to assist or help you in any way I can. Enclosed herewith I send you a check for Five Dollars, (\$5.00,) and would like to have you send me the number of volumes of your poems that this amount will buy.

[end of letter]