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# The National Association of Colored Women

By Mrs. Josephine Silone-Yates

"We have but faith; we cannot know,  
For knowledge is of things we see;  
And yet we trust it comes from thee,  
A beam in darkness; let it grow."

The history of this organization, the National Association of Colored Women, and of its formation, is somewhat unique, and has for its members, possibly, also for the sociologist, and the casual observer, a special interest, because of the manner of this formation; the causes surrounding, or leading, to the same; and the additional fact, that, outside of secret orders this organization represents the largest, possibly the only national, non-sectarian body of educated Negro women organized for the definite and avowed purpose of "race elevation."

It is not the purpose of this article to go into the details of the causes or chain of events that led to its formation, but rather to tell of the work it is accomplishing; however, as a bit of history, it is interesting to note that it literally was a child born of "prayers and tears," and was organized in the City of Washington in 1896, by the consolidation of two National bodies of Negro women, known, the one, as the "National League" and the other as the "National Federation." The name of the new organization thus formed was, out of deference to the parent bodies, a compromise, in which the word "Association" was substituted for the words "League" or "Federation."

The prime object of the organization, as stated in article II. of its constitution is, "To secure harmony of action and co-operation among all women in raising to the highest plane, home, moral, and civil life," and under the very beautiful motto, soon adopted by its leaders, "Lifting as we climb," in many ways highly suggestive of its aims. Many things have been accom-

plished during the seven years of its existence.

The first convention of the National Association was held in the city of Nashville in 1897; the second in Chicago in 1899; the third in Buffalo in 1901; the fourth will be held in the city of St. Louis, July 11-16, 1904.

Each convention thus far held has been an inspiration to those attending and a wonderful revelation to the interested onlooker as to the work and development of Afro-American women; not only with reference to papers read and discussions of the same, but also because of more tangible proofs through exhibits of painting, of literature, of music, and of other forms of art that prove the growth and development of a race in its efforts to struggle upward "through all the spires of form."

From its initial period, all clubs of women that have some well defined aim for the elevation of the race have been eligible to membership; and while much stress is placed upon the Mother's Club, the establishment of kindergartens and day nurseries, for the reason that these organizations strike, as it were, at the root of the whole matter, at the same time the Association urges the formation of musical clubs, for the study of high class music, believing that music in the Negro is a heaven-born gift that should be cultivated to its highest extent, and that should never be allowed to degenerate into a low and unseemly amusement, calculated to degrade rather than to elevate the race.

It urges the formation of temperance clubs, knowing that intemperance is one of the greatest foes to the progress and development of the Negro as well as to other races.

It urges the formation of domestic science

clubs, cooking classes, and similar forms, because unsanitary methods of living, of cooking, etc., prevent the masses of our people from doing their best work from economic and from other standpoints.

It urges the formation of benevolent and charitable institutions, since, above all else, the race as a unit should be taught to be self-sustaining, independent, self-reliant; should learn to think logically, and act accordingly.

It encourages the formation of Women's Exchanges and other varieties of business clubs, or organizations, in order that our women and girls may learn the value of a "penny," how to make and how to invest a dollar, as well as how to spend one; for, Mrs. Thompson, and others to the contrary, with reference to woman as an "industrial failure," the Negro woman has been, and for some time must continue to be, at least "an assistant" bread-winner if the finances of the race are to be improved; and fortunately for her, she has, generally speaking, managed in such manner that few of the conditions mentioned in Mrs. Thompson's article in a recent number of the *North American Review*, have attained with our women, possibly because, with but comparatively few exceptions, the Negro woman instinctively knows the art of "managing;" but this is another story, and returning to the original discussion, it may be added that the National Association of Colored Women encourages the formation of all forms of clubs that have as an object the general improvement of society.

It now represents a membership of at least fifteen thousand educated, cultured, refined Negro women, with the local branches that compose it, scattered abroad in twenty-six States, Indian and Oklahoma Territories. In more than half of these States, as in Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, New York, Rhode Island, Louisiana, West Vir-

ginia, Kansas, etc., a flourishing federation exists, and in several of the larger cities, as in St. Louis, Cleveland, and elsewhere, a city federation.

Each of these States holds annually a highly successful State meeting, in which a line of work for the year is mapped out, officers elected, and papers on questions of the day are read, discussed, and the usual business of a State Federation carefully conducted.

The value of such training to our women along the line of parliamentary and of business organizations, the inspiration they receive from contact, the unity they acquire, which is so much to be desired, so necessary in race development, and that can only come from thus working together for a common cause, are all points that cannot be overestimated from a sociological point of view.

Among Afro-American people the church is the leading organization; and the endorsement of the church affords a highway to the hearts of the people.

The church, irrespective of creed or denomination, has endorsed the work of the National Association of Colored Women, and looking upon it as one of its strongest allies, has pledged and given it hearty support in innumerable ways.

The teaching fraternity, next to the church, perhaps, sways the multitude, and in every section of this broad land teachers have enlisted to carry forward the good work.

The Department of Professional Women's Clubs, which consists very largely of teachers, united with other professional women, promises to become one of the most valuable departments in the organization, and from it great things are expected.

The Association supports a national organ, known as "Notes," edited by Mrs. Margaret Washington, and an able corps of associates. Ten numbers per year are furnished for the small annual subscription

price of twenty-five cents. It is thus within reach of every one; keeps members in touch, furnishes helpful suggestions, and is a general means of communication.

Undoubtedly the conservative tone adopted by this paper, and the determination of the National Organization from its incipency, diligently "to saw wood," and thus find no time for controversy, has had much to do in dignifying its aims and in increasing its scope and influence.

In addition to "Notes," several State papers are published at the expense of respective States, as "Queen's Gardens," of Ohio, Mrs. Carrie Clifford, editor; "The Outlook," of Missouri, Miss Victoria Wallace, editor.

The press of the country at large has been very kind to the National Association of Colored Women, freely placing the columns at the disposal of the organization, and for some time a "Woman's World Department" was conducted in the "Colored American," thus giving in addition to "Notes," a general survey of the work for the outer reading public; while special articles, as called for relative to the work of the organization, have from time to time appeared in such leading papers as the Boston "Transcript," Boston "Herald," Los Angeles "Herald," "The Evangelist," "The Voice of Missions," "Church Reviews," etc.

The National Council of Women, an organization founded in 1888, composed of twenty large national bodies, and as many local councils, and itself one of the affiliated branches of the International Council of Women, recently in quinquennial session in Berlin, deserves the hearty and sincere gratitude of a race for the breadth of thought evidenced and the advanced ground taken by its leaders in inviting to membership in its organization the National Association of Colored Women; and its act of affiliating this organization with the Council, as it did in the year 1900, was such a

gracious recognition of the worth and merit of Negro womanhood that it goes far toward the mitigation of the contumely that is from time to time and from various sources, unjustly heaped upon it.

The leaders of the Council have at all times remained firm and steadfast to their self-imposed obligations, and this at a sacrifice best known only within the organization.

Similarly, the National Association has had membership and representation in the "National Congress of Mothers," which embodies another great altruistic movement of the age; and as an affiliated member of the National Council has membership and representation in the International Council, composed of national organization from eighteen civilized countries, working in unison under the motto, "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you;" with the motto of the Council, "Lead Kindly Light," and that of the National Association, "Lifting as we climb," it is readily seen that we have a chain of beautiful sentiments, which if exemplified in the acts of members, show this club movement among women to be one of the world's great unifying forces, destined to establish beyond disputation, "The brotherhood of man, the Fatherhood of God."

With reference to work accomplished by the national body it may be stated that while not in any sense condoning crime, not in any sense unduly sympathizing with the criminal, at each convention strong resolutions have been passed denouncing lynching as a barbarous mode of punishment, and condemning the convict lease system. Three notable addresses upon this latter subject have been read before the convention. The first, prepared by Mrs. Butler of Atlanta, Ga., and read at the Nashville meeting, was published in 1897, at the expense of the National Organization, and placed on sale in order that the ideas contained therein might reach the



public eye, and, if possible, effect some change in the system.

The second, equally good, the product of one of our brainiest young women, Miss Josephine Holmes, also of Atlanta, was read at the Chicago meeting, 1899.

The third was the famous lecture on this subject, "The Convict Lease System," prepared by Mrs. Frederic Douglass, since deceased, widow of our deceased race leader, and was given before the Buffalo convention, 1901.

Said the Buffalo "Express," in referring to this address: "M.s. Douglass' statement threw new light on the origin as well as the working of a system by which some of the States have re-established slavery under the guise of penal law."

At the Chicago meeting in 1899, and again in Buffalo in 1901, the Association assumed the cost of publishing pamphlets written by Mrs. M. C. Terrell, then president of the organization; the proceeds of the sales of these publications Mrs. Terrell very generously contributed to the National Ways and Means Committee as a gift to start a fund to be used in establishing kindergartens and day nurseries. Various additions have been made to this fund and from it money has been sent as ordered to assist the Maggie Murray Kindergarten of Atlanta, Ga., the Alice D. Karey Kindergarten of Charleston, S. C., and the Butler Mission Kindergarten of Chicago.

Every effective organized body has had its period of development and growth, as well as of actual accomplishment.

The National Association of Colored Women, so dear to the hearts of its earnest workers, long since passed the experimental stage, and entered upon an aggressive campaign of growth, with "push organization" as its battle cry, meanwhile accomplishing as much in the line of work as reasonably can be expected, when one reflects that few Negro women are women of leisure, or, of large means; and that the time and money

they give to public work is usually at a sacrifice practically unknown to the women of other races engaged in similar work.

It should also be considered that it has been for various reasons a difficult task to enlist in this movement more than a comparatively small number of colored women well adapted by means and influence to carry forward this work; but this condition is gradually changing, and the recognition that the National Association of Colored Women has received at the hands of the National Council of America, the International Congress, and from the Commissioners of the World's Fair in St. Louis, in which instance this body of women was the first Negro organization outside of Fisk University (and this is hardly a parallel case), to receive a World's Fair Day, will tend greatly to increase the respect in which the organization will be held on all sides.

As to the national work, in this its period of organization, when most of its force must be spent upon organizing individual clubs, State Federations, Department work, and in the thorough systematization of this work, it cannot with truth be said that it has at any time remained at a standstill, or that it has swerved from its original purpose of "Raising to a higher plane, home, moral and civil life," as set forth in its Constitution.

It has at all times hewn directly to the line in carrying forward this purpose, and, leaving each State and each community free to take up the line of work most needed therein, according to the best judgment of the leading minds of the State or community, has favored as national work the kindergarten and day nursery idea, as before stated, mainly as a method of getting at the root of the problem of race elevation—"the children."

In this idea it has not wavered, as may be seen from the fact that aid has been extended to several kindergartens from money

donated to the Ways and Means Committee from the sale of pamphlets published at the cost of the national body; and from the additional fact that the resolution introduced by the present president of the Association at the last Triennial Council of Women of the United States, and unanimously passed by that august body, pledged the members of that organization to assist the National Association of Colored Women in every possible way in their very laudable

efforts to establish kindergartens and day nurseries.

The National has been urged at each biennial meeting to set aside a fund, however small, for this same purpose, and with the act of incorporation, will be in a position to receive bequests, legacies and endowments, to carry forward this and many other forms of national work that will help to make the National Association of Colored Women one of the great forces of the century in the solution of the race problem, a problem that can be solved only by race elevation.

### Beyond Price

Has you got a prattlin' baby,  
You kin bounce upon yo' knee—  
One dat's alluz jes' a-smilin'  
An' ez happy ez kin be?

One uv dese hyar chubby fellers  
Dat jes' steals up in yo' lap  
W'en de voice uv slumber calls him  
Fur to take a little nap?

W'en he wakes up, looks at daddy,—  
Plants a kiss upon yo' cheek,  
An' den axes you to jine him  
In a game uv "Hide an' Seek?"

Ef you come home blue an' fretted  
Wid de troubles uv de day,  
Don't his cheffle looks an' lafter  
Drive yo' sorrers all away?

Oh, den, bless Gawd, my ol' comrid,  
Ef you've got a babe like dis;  
Fur to tell you lands an' dollers  
Couldn't furnish no sich bliss!

S. F. X.

### WHERE DO THE GOOD FOLKS GO

By S. Fuller Collins

Tell me, mother, I'm in earnest,  
Where do the good folks go?  
When they leave this world of sorrow,  
Do they become like snow?

Went to heaven in my slumbers,  
Oe'r the dreamland way,  
Failed to see good old Aunt Dinah,  
And quick did the keeper say:

"She's not hear my dearest maiden,  
Tho we are not to blame,  
For on earth, the land of mortals,  
All have a chance the same."

Where is she? Pray tell me mother!  
Where can the good soul be?  
Near the throne I saw Joe Tompkins,  
And I thought she was good as he.

For three years I've done my duty  
In the church of God,  
Tho if Aunt Dinah missed the city,  
Why should I longer trod?

Tho it may be in her journey,  
She stopped on the "half-way ground,"  
Where they wait for the final judgment,  
As explained by Parson Round.

All the world appears a mystery,  
Since I went o'er the dreamland way  
And saw bad (?) Joe Tompkins in heaven  
And Aunt Dinah "not there," they say.

Perhaps they exchanged places,  
Or my vision was faulty that night,  
As the scenes of dreamland are shifting,  
And not a reliable sight.

Anyway mother the way is not clear  
As we go through the world to and fro,  
And ghost-like the question keeps haunting  
"Where Do the Good Folks Go?"