

CHAPTER XV

The Light Grows Brighter



At this period (1800-50) the Negroes were beginning to better understand the benefits of united action, and their white friends gave them all possible support and encouragement. A number of Philadelphia Negroes presented, in 1800, through Mr. Waln, the delegate, a petition to Congress calling attention to the unlawful dealing in slaves which was going on between several American ports and Guinea, and stating that a number of freedmen had been kidnapped and sold into slavery. The southern delegates were very indignant that such a petition should have been presented. However, the petition was finally referred to a committee which brought in a bill forbidding American vessels to carry slaves from this country to foreign markets.

The Negroes of Philadelphia were thoughtful and progressive and in 1817, they held a local convention to protest against the plans of the American Colonization Society. In 1830 Rev. Richard Allen, Junius C. Morel, James C. Cornish, Cyrus Black, and Benjamin Pascal requested the free people in the several states to send delegates to a meeting called for September 20, 1830. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways and means for the

establishment of a colony in upper Canada. The delegates met and recommended that a parent society be formed with branches in different towns and money be raised to buy a tract of land for the proposed colony. Agents were sent to Canada to see if the plan would be advisable. Some of the States had already passed laws forcing the free Negroes to leave and many of these exiles had made their home in Canada.

Consequently what was called the "First Annual Convention of the People of Color" met in Philadelphia, June 6-11, 1831, in the Wesleyan Church on Lombard street. The delegates were as follows:

- Philadelphia, John Bowers, Dr. Belfast Burton, James Cornish, Junius C. Morel, William Whipper.
- New York, Rev. William Miller, Henry Sipkins, Thomas L. Jennings, William Hamilton, James Pennington;
- Maryland, Rev. Abner Coker, Robert Cowley;
- Delaware, Abraham D. Shad, Robert Cowley;
- Virginia, William Duncan.

The officers chosen were:

- President, John Bowers;
- vice presidents, Abraham D. Shad, William Duncan;
- secretary, William Whipper;
- assistant secretary, Thomas L. Jennings.

The stated purpose of the meeting was to discuss the general condition of free Negroes.

A committee made a report in which those who were engaged in the Canadian settlement were praised and urged to continue the work; and among other things, the virtues of education,

temperance and economy were recommended to the race. "The convention attracted public attention on account of the intelligence, order and excellent judgment which prevailed. It deeply touched the young white men who had, but a few months previous, enlisted under the broad banner William Lloyd Garrison had given to the breeze."

"The Rev. S. S. Jocelyn, of New Haven, Conn.; Arthur Tappan, of New York; Benjamin Lundy, of Washington, D.C.; William Lloyd Garrison, of Boston, Mass.; Thomas Shipley and Charles Pierce, of Philadelphia, visited the convention, and were cordially received." Messrs. Jocelyn, Tappan and Garrison made stirring addresses and especially urged the establishment of a college for the education of colored youth. A committee appointed to consider the matter reported as follows: "The plan proposed is that a college be established at New Haven, Conn., as soon as \$20,000 are obtained, and to be on the manual labor system, by which, in connection with a scientific education, they may also obtain a useful mechanical or agricultural profession; and (they further report having received information) that a benevolent individual has offered to subscribe one thousand dollars toward this object, provided that a farther sum of nineteen thousand dollars can be obtained in one year."

The report of the committee was received and adopted, a soliciting agent and a treasurer appointed and committees appointed in several cities. You can see that for a long time the subject of manual training has engaged the attention of thoughtful people. But the people of Connecticut showed themselves very unfriendly to Negro schools as we shall presently see, and the idea of the college in that State was given up. Nearly every year during this period, conventions of colored men were held and the delegates represented the intelligence, the culture and the learning of the race in the United States.

In the town of Canterbury, Conn., a select school for young ladies was established in the summer of 1832 by Miss Prudence Crandall, a Quaker lady. It was intended to give instruction in the higher branches of learning. Not long after the school opened, Sarah Harris, a colored girl seventeen years old, whose father was a well-to-do farmer applied for admission to the school. She stated that she had finished the highest grade in the village schools and wanted to increase her knowledge so as to teach among her own people.

Miss Crandall admitted Sarah and for a few days all went well, for many of the other girls had known Sarah in the village school and liked her. But after a time some of the parents called on Miss Crandall and objected to a Negro girl attending a private school with their children, no matter how good she was nor high and unselfish her aim. But Miss Crandall was firm and when the white parents withdrew their children she advertised to teach colored girls.

The angry parents called a town meeting to discuss the matter and a set of resolutions were drawn up protesting against the founding of a colored school in their neighborhood. Nevertheless Miss Crandall received into her school in April, 1833, about twenty young colored girls from Boston, Providence, New York, Philadelphia; but the storekeepers refused to serve Miss Crandall and her pupils; the latter met with insult, contempt and abuse in the streets, the well and the doorsteps of the house were filled with refuse and a number of other petty meannesses were practiced, but Miss Crandall and the girls remained firm.

The right-thinking people of the neighborhood came to Miss Crandall's support, among them being the Rev. Samuel May, Mr. Arnold Buffom, Mr. George Benson and others. But a man named Judson, a citizen of Canterbury, and a leading politician