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ON THE

Formation of Colored Regiments,

AND THE

DUTY OF THE COLORED PEOPLE

IN REGARD TO THE

GREAT SLAVEHOLDERS' REBELLION,

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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FORMATION OF COLORED REGIMENTS.

I.

From the Anglo-African, September 28, 1861.

MR. EDITOR:

The duty of the black man at this critical epoch is a question of much importance, deeply interesting the friends of liberty, both white and black. The most imposing feature of this duty, I am told, is in relation to military organizations. This question, I am told, is forced upon us by our eminent, educated, far-sighted leaders, who, anxious for our elevation and zealous for our reputation, in connection with our white brothers would have us write our names side by side with them upon the immortal book of fame, won by well-contested and desperate encounters upon the battle-field. Claiming that any omission on our part to exhibit that patriotism so noticeable in the whites, will, when history shall record the doings of this memorable country, leave our names without one deed of patriotism or expressed desire for the success of the cause of liberty; not one laurel to entwine the brows of those whose valor like blazing stars upon the battle-field would, no doubt, have eclipsed those whom we now are satisfied to acknowledge as superiors and protectors. Is this all wisdom, this mode of reasoning; or is it a mistaken idea, called into existence by a desire for fame? Is it a demanding necessity that the world will decide belongs to us to meet, thus to prove our manhood and love of liberty? Have not two centuries of cruel and unrequited servitude in this country, alone entitled the children of this generation to the rights of men and citizens? Have we not done our share towards creating a national existence for those who now enjoy it to our degradation, ever devising evil for our suffering, heart-crushed race?

Who that will carefully note the many historical reminiscences, made mention of by those who are ready to do justice to us, can doubt our bravery? Who that has heard of the many privations,

hair-breadth escapes, and the unflinching determination of our enslaved brethren seeking the free shores of Canada, can doubt our love of liberty? True patriotism does not consist in words alone, neither do patriotic demonstrations always contribute to the end alone, independent of material aid. I do not suppose any people have been taxed heavier or more than the poor colored people for the cause of liberty, with such small results to themselves. Now, if we have contributed our share to support and establish a government, that we are not entitled to a share in the benefits thereof, what becomes our duty when that government is menaced by those they have cherished at the expense of our blood, toil and degradation?

Let your own heart answer this question, and no regiments of black troops will leave their bodies to rot upon the battle-field beneath a Southern sun—to conquer a peace based upon the perpetuity of human bondage—stimulating and encouraging the inveterate prejudice that now bars our progress in the scale of elevation and education.

I claim that the raising of black regiments for the war would be highly impolitic and uncalled for under the present state of affairs, knowing, as we do, the policy of the Government in relation to colored men. It would show our incompetency to comprehend the nature of the differences existing between the two sections now at variance, by lending our aid to either party. By taking such measures we invite injustice at the hands of those we prefer to serve; we would contribute to the African colonization scheme, projected a half century ago, by ridding the country of that element so dangerous to the charming institution of negro slavery.

Entertaining the sentiment and determination that they do, would it not be unjust in them to accept our service? Would we still invite them to cap the climax by forcing us to the cannon's mouth to save the destruction of those whose whole existence should be merged in with their country's weal and woe? That death should be the readiest sacrifice patriotic citizens could offer to uphold the people's hope, the people's palladium, no one should deny. But what do we enjoy, that should inspire us with those feelings towards a government that would sooner consign five millions of human beings to never-ending slavery than wrong one slave master of

his human property? Does not the contemplation of so flagrant a wrong cause your blood to boil with Christian indignation, or bring tears to the eyes of your broken-hearted old men, whose heads, now silvered by time or bleached by sorrow, can no longer shoulder the weightier responsibilities of a young man's calling?

Not only that. Any public demonstration (for this could not well be done in a corner) would only embarrass the present administration, by stirring up old party prejudices which would cause the loss of both sympathy and treasure, which the government cannot well afford to lose at present. By weakening the arm of the government, we strengthen that of the slave power, who would soon march through these States without fear of forcible resistance.

It would be contrary to Christian humanity to permit so flagrant an outrage in silence to be perpetrated upon any people, especially a class who have known naught else but wrong at their hands, whom they would so gloriously serve in time of danger to their own liberties and sacred rights, preferring now their services to uphold a Government leagued with perdition, upon which the doom of death is written, unless they repent, in letters so plain that he who runs may read. Let us weigh well this thing before taking steps which will not only prove disastrous to the cause we would help, but bring suffering and sorrows upon those left to mourn unavailingly our loss.

I maintain that the principle of neutrality is the only safe one to govern us at this time. When men's lives are in their hands, and so little inducement as there is for us to cast ourselves into the breach, our work for the present lies in quite a different channel from assuming war responsibilities uninvited, with no promised future in store for us—a dilemma inviting enmity and destruction to the few, both North and South, among our people, enjoying partial freedom.

The slave's only hope—his only help—is his suffering brother at the North. When we are removed, the beacon light which directs and assists the panting fugitive is darkened and obscured—his once bright hope, that gave comfort to him as he pressed on to liberty's goal, is shadowed o'er forever. Our own precipitous, unwise zeal must never be the cause to stay the car of freedom, but ever let it roll onward and upward until earth and heaven united shall become one garden of paradisaal freedom, knowing no color,

no clime, but all one people, one language, one Father, Almighty God.

Once under army discipline, subject to the control of government officers or military leaders, could we dictate when and where the blow should be struck? Could we enter upon Quixotic crusades of our own projecting, independent of the constituted authorities, or these military chiefs? Will the satisfaction of again hearing a casual mention of our heroic deeds upon the field of battle, by our own children, doomed for all that we know to the same inveterate, heart-crushing prejudice that we have come up under, and die leaving as a legacy unto our issue—all from those for whom you would so unwittingly face the cannon's mouth to secure to them a heritage denied you and yours?

Is this country ready and anxious to initiate a new era for down-trodden humanity, that you now so eagerly propose to make the sacrifice of thousands of our ablest men to encourage and facilitate the great work of regeneration? No! no!! Your answer must be: No!!! No black regiments, unless by circumstances over which we have no option, no control; no initiatory war measures, to be adopted or encouraged by us. Our policy must be neutral, ever praying for the success of that party determined to initiate first the policy of justice and equal rights.

Who can say that in another twelve months' time the policy of the South will not change in our favor, if the assistance of England or France will by it be gained, rather than submit to northern dictation or subjugation? Did that idea ever suggest itself to your mind? Strange things happen all the while. Look back for the last twenty-four months, and ask yourself if you could have fore-told what to-day you are so well informed has actually transpired when coming events cast their shadows before?

In these days, principle is supplanted by policy, and interest shapes policy, I find by daily observation, both in high and low places. Although to many the above idea may seem idle and delusory, inconsistent with the present spirit and suicidal policy of the South, yet I for one would feel justified in entertaining it equally with the idea that the North would proclaim a general emancipation so long as she supposed it a possibility to reclaim the disaffected States of the Southern Confederacy.

And, if an impossibility, what would all proclamations to that effect avail?

I believe with the act of emancipation adopted and proclaimed by the South, both England and France, (and in fact I might safely say all Europe,) would not only recognize their independence, but would render them indirectly material aid and sympathy.

To get the start of the northern slave-worshippers, as they are sometimes termed, who can say that, as a last resort, these rebel leaders have not had that long in contemplation, knowing that should they succumb to this government through force of circumstances, or the uncertain chances of war, their lives would be valueless only as a warning to future generations.

Then, why may we not hope that such is their ultimatum in case of a series of defeats—the liberation of four millions of our poor, heart-crushed, enslaved race. One or two large battles will decide the future policy of both the contending parties—the sooner it comes the sooner we will know our fate. It is in that scale it hangs.

Then let us do our duty to each other—use care in all our public measures—be not too precipitous, but in prayer wait and watch the salvation of God.

R. H. V.

II.

REPLY.

From the *Anglo-African*, October 19, 1861.

MR. EDITOR:

In your issue of September 28th, appears an able and elaborate article on the "Formation of Colored Regiments." I have no desire for contention at a time like this with those who differ honorably from me in opinion; but I think it just, once in a while, to speak out and let the world know where we stand on the great issues of the day, for it is only by this means that we can succeed in arousing our people from a mistaken policy of inactivity,

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