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AFRICAN COLONIZATION:

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY,
IN WASHINGTON, D. C.

JANUARY 19, 1875.

BY REV. JOHN ORCUTT, D. D.,
OF NEW YORK.

DEPARTMENT OF THE
UNITED STATES BUREAU OF EDUCATION

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A D D R E S S.

No person well-informed on the subject, will call in question either the motives or the good sense of the founders of the institution whose anniversary we celebrate to-night. The evidence is too clear to admit of a rational doubt that they acted under the impulse of a broad philanthropy and in the light of a sound philosophy, and also in accordance with a decree of Heaven.

The truth of this proposition I propose to illustrate and enforce.

And the first question demanding attention is, What were the views and aims of those honored men who founded this Society?

Those of Rev. Robert Finley of New Jersey, the leading spirit among them, are clearly stated in a letter addressed to his friend, John P. Mumford, Esq., of the city of New York, about two years before the Society was organized. He wrote thus :

“The longer I live to see the wretchedness of men, the more I admire the virtue of those who devise and with patience labor to execute plans for the relief of the wretched. On this subject the state of the free blacks

has very much occupied my mind. Their number increases greatly, and their wretchedness too, as appears to me. Everything connected with their condition, including their color, is against them; nor is there much prospect that their state can ever be greatly meliorated while they continue among us. Could not the rich and benevolent devise means to form a colony on some part of the coast of Africa, similar to the one at Sierra Leone, which might gradually induce many free blacks to go and settle—devising for them the means of getting there, and of protection and support till they were established?" And as one of the benefits of such a colony, he mentioned its civilizing and Christianizing influence upon Africa.

Early in December, 1816, Dr. Finley visited Washington for sympathy and support in his undertaking—hoping that it might be made an object of national concern. By some it was received with favor; by others it was ridiculed. But true to his convictions and firm in his purpose, he persevered in his efforts, meekly answering the skeptic with the remark, "I know this scheme is from God." And on the 21st of December of that year, fifty-eight years ago last month, a public meeting was held in this city to consider the matter, with Hon. Henry Clay in the chair, and other prominent men in attendance, such as Elias B. Caldwell, Dr. Finley's brother-in-law, John Randolph of Roanoke, and Robert Wright of Maryland.

Mr. Clay made the opening address, in which he heartily endorsed the plan of colonizing the free people

of color in Africa. Said he : " There is a peculiar, a moral fitness in restoring them to the land of their fathers. And if, instead of the evils and sufferings which we have been the innocent cause of inflicting upon the inhabitants of Africa, we can transmit to her the blessings of our arts, our civilization, and our religion, may we not hope that America will extinguish a great portion of that moral debt which she has contracted to that unfortunate continent ? "

Mr. Caldwell followed in the same line of remark. After giving other reasons in favor of the proposed colony, he continued : " But I have a greater and nobler object in view in desiring them to be placed in Africa. It is the belief that through them civilization and the Christian religion would thereby be introduced into that benighted quarter of the world. It is the hope of redeeming many millions of people from the lowest state of superstition and ignorance, and restoring them to the knowledge and worship of the true God. Great and powerful as are the other motives to this measure (and I acknowledge them to be of sufficient magnitude to attract the attention and to call forth the united efforts of this nation) in my opinion—and you will find it the opinion of a large class of the community—all other motives are small and trifling compared with the hope of spreading among them the knowledge of the Gospel. . . . Whatever may be the difference of opinion among the different denominations of Christians, I believe they will all be found to unite in the belief that the Scriptures

predict a time when the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall be spread over every part of the world, shall be acknowledged by every nation, and perhaps shall influence every heart." Other gentlemen present arose and endorsed the plan.

Such, then, were the views and aims of the immediate founders of this Society, as expressed just one week prior to the adoption of its Constitution, Dec. 28, 1816. On the following Wednesday, Jan. 1, 1817, it held its first meeting, and was fully organized by the election of officers, Hon. Bushrod Washington being made president, and Elias B. Caldwell, secretary. Enrolled among its vice-presidents we find the immortal name of Robert Finley of New Jersey, who lived to enjoy the gratifying success with which his efforts had been crowned only a few months, for his earthly labors were closed by death in October of the same year.

Two weeks after the formation of the Society, its President and Board of Managers presented a memorial to Congress containing these words: "If the experiment, in its more remote consequences, should ultimately tend to the diffusion of similar blessings through those vast and unnumbered tribes yet obscured in primeval darkness, reclaim the rude wanderer from a life of wretchedness to civilization and humanity, and convert the blind idolator from gross and abject superstitions to the holy charities, the sublime morality and humanizing discipline of the Gospel, the nation or the individual that shall have taken the most conspicuous lead in achieving the

benevolent enterprise, will have raised a monument of that true and imperishable glory founded in the moral approbation and gratitude of the human race, unapproachable to all but the elected instruments of divine beneficence."

This memorial in the House of Representatives was referred to an able committee, from whose report we quote as follows: "It seems manifest that these people cannot be colonized within the limits of the United States. If they were not far distant, the rapidly-extending settlements of our white population would soon reach them, and the evil now felt would be renewed, probably with aggravated mischief. Were the colony to be remote, it must be planted on lands now occupied by the native tribes of the country; and could a territory be purchased, the transportation of the colonists thither would be vastly expensive, their subsistence for a time difficult, and a body of troops would be required for their protection. And after all, should these difficulties be overcome, the original evil would at length recur by the extension of our white population. . . . Turning our eyes from our own country, no other adapted to the colony in contemplation presented itself to our view nearer than Africa, the native land of negroes; and probably that is the only country on the globe to which it would be practicable to transfer our free people of color with safety and advantage to themselves and the civilized world. It is the country which, in the order of Providence, seems to have been appropriated to that distinct

family of mankind. And while it presents the fittest asylum for the free people of color, it opens a wide field for their improvement in civilization, morals, and religion, which the humane and enlightened memorialists have conceived it possible in process of time to spread on that great continent."

It would be easy and very pleasant to recite here a long list of distinguished names of the early endorsers of the plan : but suffice it to say, among them we find the names of *Chief-Justice Marshall*, *General Lafayette*, *Bishop Meade*, and *Dr. Archibald Alexander*. The latter of these, in his introduction to his history of African colonization, said: "As for himself, the writer is as fully persuaded that the plan of colonizing the free people of color in Africa is wise and benevolent, as he ever was of the wisdom and benevolence of any human enterprise." We are here on this occasion to adopt and defend this sentiment.

We belong to that Christian brotherhood referred to by Elias B. Caldwell, who believe in the final triumph of Christian civilization in every land and in every clime. We accept this as a truth revealed in the Scriptures.

But there is another volume given us for our instruction on the subject. A thoughtful Christian scholar once made this remark: "God is a preacher; the principles of his moral government are his text, the Bible his sermon, and Providence the application."

Now light, greatly needed in this matter, is not to be found in the sermon as stated, but in the application; not

in the Bible, but in the book of Providence. Let us then study and profit by the lessons thus set before us.

It is a historic fact, which no one is disposed to deny, that Christian civilization began its march in Asia: and after permeating the most of that continent with its recuperative influences, passed into Europe with similar results; thence across the Atlantic, and westward still, till it has, in our day, reached the Pacific ocean, keeping itself within the limits of that belt of the earth called the Northern Temperate Zone.

It is true that the northern part of Africa was illuminated by the burning altar of Christianity for three hundred years: that Egypt and Carthage were once highly civilized; but it has been well said, as Egypt derived its ideas from Asiatic sources, its place in history is Asiatic, rather than African; and Carthage being Phœnician, when those two cities were absorbed into Rome, North Africa belonged much more to the European than to the properly African quarter of the globe. And it is worthy of note, that the portion of Africa thus enlightened for three centuries, lies north of the tropic of Cancer, i. e., in the one single zone upon which the star of empire, in its westward course, shed its light.

And who were the actors employed in planting, extending, and sustaining civil and Christian institutions in Asia, Europe, and North America? They were the Egyptian, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, the Macedonian, the Roman, the Goth, the Frank, the Englishman, and the Anglo-American—races

constitutionally fitted for the work assigned them by the very circumstances of their birth and growth. They were raised in the higher latitudes, which made their tissues compact, tough, and fibrous, which gave them vigor and the power of endurance. With these and other requisite endowments, they went forth in the successful prosecution of their high mission ; and because our lines are fallen unto us in this particular latitude, we have been large partakers of its benefits.

But there is one continent still buried in the midnight darkness of heathenism. It lies down in the inter-tropical regions alone, and yet within the reach of the covenant-promise which the Father made to the Son : " Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." " Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."

Who then shall be the bearers of the promised blessing to the teeming millions on the benighted continent of Africa? The importance of this question will be seen and felt by every Christian mind just in proportion as that mind is informed in regard to mission work in Africa, a detailed account of which would be instructive, but the merest summary must suffice.

Passing over a period of some two hundred and fifty years prior to 1730, during which the Romanists of different nations and orders labored in vain to plant missions on its west coast, the first Protestant missionary attempts were made by the Moravians in 1736, and were

continued thirty-four years at the expense of numerous lives, and little or no good accomplished. The English followed, and with similar results. Three stations planted by the London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow Societies in 1797, were extinct in three years, and five out of six missionaries dead. The Church Missionary Society, subsequent to 1808, established at different points and attempted to maintain ten stations, but soon failed in every instance.

To say nothing then of the attempts and failures of Roman-catholics to get a foothold there for centuries, we have more than a hundred years of Protestant missionary experiments with like ill success. And why did they all fail? Why succeed in Asia, Europe, and North America, and fail in Africa? Because of the unhealthiness of the climate to white men, and the hostility of the natives generated by the slavetraders. The question returns, How shall it be done? Who are the workmen appointed to give Christian civilization to Africa?

If we can find any of her own children who have been brought into contact with Christian institutions, and thereby have been elevated to a level on which they are at all prepared for such a mission, we might suppose that God would send them. In the light of *reason* we might think so; for the African has a tropical nature, a sensuous organization that is suited to the African climate, a constitution comparatively unaffected by miasmatic influences, before which white men fall like grass before the

mower's scythe. Besides, there is a manifest fitness and propriety, as Mr. Clay said, in sending the colored man, if prepared for it, to enlighten his pagan brethren in the fatherland.

Well, it is apparent that we have some of the race in the United States : and we cannot doubt they are here by an overruling Providence as really as Joseph was made to sojourn in Egypt by an overruling Providence, God meaning it for good, though Joseph's brethren, in their action in the case, had evil in their hearts. Nor are they here heathen bondmen as they were when brought here, but Christian freemen, half a million of them communicants in the church of God.

Now the question arises, Are these the appointed workmen to go forth and plant and sustain Christian institutions in that pagan land?

It may be said—some intelligent persons do say and honestly believe—that the African is incapable of doing such a work. Others equally intelligent and sincere think differently. And what saith reason? President Humphrey of Amherst College, one of the wisest men that ever lived, once said, "Every creature of God is capable of all the civilization it needs." Let us apply this saying to the insect world.

The bee makes a beautiful house. Is it not entirely sufficient for all the uses for which it was constructed? So in the animal world : the beaver builds her house as if by human reason. Does she need a better house? The application of the remark might be extended to all

the lower orders of creation for like illustrations of its truthfulness.

Now, will any intelligent person venture to assert that the negro does not need Christian civilization—that it would not improve the race in Africa? If not, how can he doubt their ability to sustain it? Whether they will ever come up to the level of the Anglo-Saxons does not concern us; that is a question for the future to decide. But are they capable of self-government upon any plane of national responsibility? To this question reason, we think, gives an affirmative answer. Nor are we shut up to the mere light of reason in the matter. We have the concurrent testimony of facts. The experiment has been successfully tried for nearly a third of a century. The Republic of Liberia is a standing monument of their capability to govern themselves. Besides, all the great powers of the world have acknowledged the fact by formal recognition and international correspondence. And no less a diplomatist than Lord Palmerston was pleased to characterize the State Papers of President Roberts as comparing favorably with those he received from other countries. In a word, that the government of Liberia has been administered with a good degree of wisdom and discretion is the combined testimony of the civilized world.

We hesitate not to say, therefore, that the difficult problem is solved; that a portion of the appointed workmen for Africa's redemption, qualified and made ready in this land, have gone forth to the field of their opera-

tions, and that, all things considered, they have thus far done their work well.

And how did they get over there? Their destined field of labor was on the other side of the Atlantic, and to reach it by a sailing-vessel required a voyage of five thousand miles: and how could they in their condition of poverty and dependence meet the expense of it? God provided for that. There is no link wanting in the chain of his providence: and one link in that chain touching the evangelization of Africa evidently is the American Colonization Society: for it is the free bridge over which the prepared workmen could go, and have gone.

We have hurriedly followed the course of the star of empire from Phœnicia to Greece, from Greece to Rome, from Rome to Britain, from Britain to the United States, and from the United States, after many generations of delay, to Africa, thus reaching the last great continent to be possessed and completing the circle. Does not the history of these events, as presented to us in the book of Providence, suggest a reason why Africa should be the last? Was it not because the workman, according to the divine arrangement, would not be sooner prepared to enter upon their mission?

But it is said, Liberia is a failure. We hesitate not to say that the judgment of persons who thus speak of our colonization work in Africa is greatly at fault and of little value. Because Liberia does not present to their vision everything desirable, they seem to view it as con-

taining little or nothing valuable. With about as much reason might they regard the sun in the heavens a failure because its rays are sometimes intercepted by clouds, or because it does not always shine with the same brilliancy and beauty, or in accordance with their wishes or notions.

While we would not claim for Liberia American sunlight, we think an obscured sun better than no sun, and half or quarter of a moon better than no moon, and even starlight preferable to no light. And we think that candor demands of every intelligent person such examination of the subject as is necessary to create the conviction that Liberia may justly be characterized as a bright star in the firmament, if nothing more.

Reflect, it is only some sixty years since that whole region was darkened by heathenism in its worst forms. Now a civilized people is there ; the English language is there : the mechanic arts are there : a growing commerce is there : a government with a written constitution is there ; churches and Sunday-schools are there : other schools and a college are there : asylums and hospitals for the sick and needy are there : five Missionary Boards in this country have missions there ; connected with those missions as clergymen and Christian workers, over one hundred and thirty of the emigrants sent by this Society or their children, are there : all the means and appliances necessary to the growth and permanency of a powerful nation are there : and yet Liberia is pronounced a failure !

Such was not the judgment of the *Westminster Review* even in the earlier and darker days of the colony. It said :

“The Americans are successfully planting free negroes on the coast of Africa, a greater event probably in its consequences than any that has occurred since Columbus set sail for the New World.” Nor was such the opinion of Theodore Frelinghuysen when, addressing the annual meeting of this Society in the hall of the House of Representatives forty-one years ago, he spoke of Liberia in this language : “Like the Star in the East, which announced the Saviour to the astonished magi, it points to the advent of the same Redeemer, coming in the power of his Spirit to roll away the darkness of a thousand generations. Yes, sir, there is hope for Africa. God, I believe, is preparing his way before him. The harvest begins to ripen, and the slumber of ages will soon be broken : and those beams of light that now refresh our hopes, will expand and spread through the heavens, until they shall be lost in the splendors of an eternal day.”

African colonization a mistake and a failure? No, no; the voice of history cries in trumpet-tones, No! On the contrary, as the late lamented Joseph Tracy has clearly shown, the attempts of Romanists and Protestants, for a period of nearly four centuries, to sustain missions there *without colonies*, were signal failures, while every attempt to introduce Christianity and civilization by colonizing Africa with people of African descent has

been, in a greater or less degree, successful. Every such colony planted still subsists ; and wherever its jurisdiction extends has banished piracy and the slave-trade ; extinguished domestic slavery ; put an end to human sacrifices and cannibalism ; established a constitutional civil government, trial by jury, and the reign of law ; introduced the arts, usages, and comforts of civilized life, and imparted them to more or less of the natives ; established schools, built houses of worship, gathered churches, sustained the preaching of the gospel, protected missionaries, and seen native converts received to Christian communion. *Not a colony has been attempted without leading to all these results.* Yes, we can point to Liberia as a tree planted by this Society whose roots and trunk and branches are in their nature colonization, but by a divine grafting has yielded much missionary fruit.

In the great current of events, of how little importance are the mistaken opinions, the blind assertions, and the opposing influences of a few or many individuals! Like eddies in a mighty river, they only make a little disturbance within the small circles of their influence, while the stream steadily and majestically rolls on as if they did not exist.

One point more : There is a prevailing impression that in the changed state of things since the war the work of this Society is no longer needed, or at most is valuable simply and purely as a missionary association. If it were so, we might well consider the question of closing up the concern.

There is a principle involved in the institution, distinctly recognized by its founders, that should not be overlooked or forgotten. We refer to that affinity of race, implanted in the human mind, which makes it impracticable for the white race and the black race in this country ever to dwell together upon terms of full social equality. If this element of power in the institution gave it importance half a century ago, why does it not now? Is it not as true now as then that because of such a law the highest destiny of the negro can never be realized under the shadow of the Anglo-Saxons? You may call it fastidiousness, foolishness, wickedness; good sense, bad sense, or nonsense, or anything you please; it is something which cannot be extinguished, and which legislation cannot control.

Possibly some one present may be thinking of that passage of Scripture so often quoted, "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth;" but why stop at a comma? why not quote the remainder of the verse? "and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."

Consider, because a man is a man, it does not follow that all men are white men, or black men, or red men. A bird is a bird, but every bird is not a blackbird, or a bluebird, or a yellowbird; and it would be worse than folly to try to make it so. Nor have all birds the same instincts and habits. One species builds its nest upon the sand; another in a chimney; another on a tree; another in

the clefts of the mountains, and so on; just where "Mother Cary's chickens" in mid-ocean make their nest, we don't feel called upon to decide. It is sufficient that they know where, and how, and when to do it. And some birds are migratory in their habits, following the sun after a mild temperature; while others seem to have a fondness for colder regions, and to enjoy even a snow-storm. Now this diversity in preference and habit among the fowls of the air, is but a manifestation of the instinctive laws of their being. So is it with other orders of God's creatures; nor is man an exception. The great Father of us all did not make a mistake in giving Africa to the black man, and the black man to Africa. It was doubtless for the highest good of all concerned.

But, says one, "Are you going to drive the negro out of the country?" No; we don't propose either to drive him away or compel him to stay. It is a matter submitted to his own free will. The language of our constitution is, "with their own consent." They have three rights in the case: a right to go, and a right not to go, and a right to choose between the two. But when they have deliberately made up their minds to go, it becomes a serious and important question, whether a moral responsibility does not rest upon the individual and upon the *NATION* to furnish the requisite means.

As to promoting emigration by coercion, we would say further, there is a kind of force which is manifestly justifiable and even commendable. Take an illustration

of it. An intelligent colored man in a northern city, recently remarked to a friend of mine residing there, "I want to leave the city and the country." "Why," said the white man, "don't the people here use you well?" "Oh, yes," said he: "but the effort they make to use me well, makes me feel that I am a negro." Many a black man, no doubt, has felt the force of that remark as no white man can feel it.

President Roberts, who emigrated to Liberia more than forty years ago, remarked in a public discourse on his last visit to this country, "I have no disposition to urge my colored brethren to leave the country, but as for me, I could not live in the United States." Professor Freeman, of Liberia College, when on a visit a few years ago to Pittsburgh, Penn., where he had formerly spent twelve years as a teacher in a college for the education of colored people, was offered strong inducements to remain there and resume his former position in that institution, which he declined; and the Trustees put this question to him, "What will you stay for, Freeman?" His answer was in substance as follows: "I will stay, gentlemen, for what either of you white men would consent to become a negro for, and live in Pennsylvania, and transmit his social status to your children."

Such cases show us how God *uses* the incompatibility between the two races for the accomplishment of his benevolent purposes towards Africa. The Rev. Dr. Van Rensselaer, in a dedicatory discourse which he delivered some twenty years ago, at the opening of the Ashmun

Institute for the benefit of colored people, near Oxford, Pennsylvania, spoke thus: "There is a natural congeniality between the blacks as blacks, and between the whites as whites—a congeniality that will assert its claims in the time of God's demand, and operate to produce sympathy of feeling and of action between the African population in America and in Africa." We have seen something of the fulfilment of that prediction already, and we believe that some power will continue to work, and become more and more potent in proportion as our colored people become elevated and enlightened. If you want to keep them here, keep them in ignorance, and you will be more likely to succeed. If you would have them, under God, fulfil the high mission of redeeming a continent from the thralldom of sin and death, prepare them for it, and aid them in it.

No more fitting words could be used, we think, in closing, than are contained in an oration delivered before a literary society in Union College, about ten years ago, by the late Rev. Dr. Robert J. Breckenridge of Kentucky.

"I cannot tell but that it may be the will of God, seeing he has used first the Asiatic dark races, and then the European white races, as repositories of his infinite gifts and mercies to mankind, to use, finally, the African black races in a similar glorious way. But to suppose, that in doing this, he will make the black race and the white race essentially one, or essentially alike, or will strip either of them of its essential peculiarities, which are the

very basis of its destiny, high or low, is to reverse, absolutely, every lesson we can draw from all that he has hitherto said and done.

“The American colonies of free blacks on the west coast of Africa deserve to be ranked among the highest enterprises of modern times. And I may be allowed, on this occasion, to reiterate what I have taught so long, that a powerful and civilized state within the tropics has been the one crying necessity of the human race from the dawn of history; and that for us, and for the black race, the creation of such a state from the American descendants of that race, is the highest form in which that great necessity can be supplied.”

NOTE.—The planting of Liberia by this Society, is the cheapest colonization work in human history. The entire cost does not much exceed \$2,500,000, while the British government expended upon Sierra Leone, during the first half century of its existence, more than \$30,000,000.



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