

THE DUTY OF STRENGTHENING LIBERIA.

AN ADDRESS

BY

HON. G. WASHINGTON WARREN,

Delivered in Washington, D. C.,

AT THE

Sixty-Third Annual Meeting of

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY,

JANUARY 20, 1880.

Published by Request of the Society.

WASHINGTON CITY :

COLONIZATION BUILDING, 450 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE.

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ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT:

The American Colonization Society is distinguished from all other charitable and benevolent institutions in this, that it is organized, and holds its place of business in the National Capital. New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston and other large cities have organized Societies which from those centres extend their operations throughout the country; and they have State Societies auxiliary to the American Colonization Society. But it is a significant fact, and indicative of the National and supreme importance of our Society, that it was founded here in Washington, that here it has held its Annual Meetings for nearly two-thirds of a century, and has during all this period, had its executive committee composed of eminent and patriotic men holding frequent sessions here, and diligently endeavoring to promote its philanthropic objects.

Again, this Society, more than any other in our country, has heretofore held intimate relations with our National Government, and has been its selected agent in carrying out its most delicate and humane mission. After Liberia had been established on the western coast of Africa, by the far-seeing wisdom of the founders of the American Colonization Society, whenever, during that darkest period of the slave trade, our ships of war seized a slave-ship, and brought her into an American port, the Government contracted with it to transport to and colonize the re-captured Africans in that home of the free. In the course of time, Liberia which had become the home of so many who had been snatched or redeemed from slavery, was an efficient and zealous instrument in the cause of humanity, in breaking up that most detestable traffic.

Every great nation has had its colonies. History is full of the settlements of new countries by peoples banished or voluntarily emigrating from their homes, and of the exactions made upon them as they grew up and flourished, but were still kept in subjection as tributaries to the mother country. Liberia is the only instance in history of a free and independent nation colonized by another country—not indeed by the Government, but by its incorporated Society, which thus has become the founder of a distant State, destined to have a leading influence in the Christianization of a Continent. It will be the province of History at some future period, to draw a parallel between the policy and aims, and their comparative results, of the East India Company and those of the American Colonization Society: the one founded upon the lust of personal gain and plunder, and for the extension of National dominion, the other solely in the interest of humanity and for the amelioration of a down-trodden race.

If the United States has greatly developed her material resources by the enforced employment of the slave labor of those of African descent in the cultivation of what was once her chief staple, she not only has expiated the National sin by the sacrifice of blood and treasure in the late war, resulting in emancipation, but she, as it were, made an atonement in advance by presenting to Africa the form and example of a free republic in Liberia.

President Anthony W. Gardner, in his message addressed to the first session of the 17th Legislature of Liberia on the 10th of last month, depicts in glowing terms the auspicious omens of their National prosperity and their means of advancing the permanent interests of the neighboring peoples. He recommends the passage by the Legislature of a resolution of thanks to the Government of the United States for sending the U. S. ship *Ticonderoga* at a critical juncture, and for the friendly services rendered by her Commander, Commodore Shufeldt. He recommends liberal appropriations for the support of the schools and the college, and favors the encouragement of internal improvements. Let me quote a few eloquent passages on the Mission of Liberia.

“Permit me to remark to you, gentlemen constituting this honorable body, our duty to our Brethren of the Interior is providentially plain before us. Let us heed the Macedonian call now, lest we have cause,

when too late, to regret it. God in His overruling providence has inclined and predisposed the hearts of our Aboriginal brethren toward us for good. Let me urge upon you the importance of heeding the divine monition, and of engaging in the work of enlarging our borders, and making strong our bands, by uniting with this intelligent people who like ourselves can read and write (though in a different language) and who occupy no mean rank in mathematical and classical literature. A people who for many generations have been free from the destructive effects of intoxicating drinks, and are therefore in the happy enjoyment of an unimpaired body and mind, an undwarfed manhood, and a soul that delights in the free worship and adoration of the Great God, the merciful and the compassionate. * * * *

“The aboriginal tribes also in and about Cape Palmas with the exception of the Bereby section, present a most encouraging and gratifying aspect. * * * *

“From these references, gentlemen, your honorable body will be able to form some idea of the vast and favorable opportunities presented to Government for uniting our brethren of the tribes around and beyond with ourselves, and thus laying the foundation of a powerful future State. * * * *

“I am willing, gentlemen, and I believe you are, to follow the indications of the Great Arbiter of all events in the work of civilizing and evangelizing Africa. Who can divine the motive that induced the Mohammedan King, Ibrahima Sissi, to seek the co-operation of the Liberian Government? Who can foresee the sublime results that may hang upon the appeals echoing from the Barline, Mar, Soreka, and Grebo tribes, for a more intimate connection with Liberia in all her interests? Admit that their motives are wholly selfish and mercenary. Admit that their object is only for gain; even in that case they will compare favorably with other nations and peoples on the globe who make a much louder boast of having higher aims in view than the mammon of this world. But can you positively assert that there may not be a background of the most thrilling events, pregnant with the highest interests of African elevation and redemption behind the scenes? You cannot; you dare not.

“It seems to me that I can see in the call of the Mohammedan chief the fall, or the bowing of the crescent before the cross, at least, in Af-

rica. And who can tell the part that Christian Liberia is to play in this great drama? Gentlemen, allow me to repeat, we have a great work before us, and it is our duty as a Christian Government to go forward, and do all we can in our day and generation, to bring about the grand result, not only for the unification, but the civilization and Christianization of the thousands of heathen now sitting in darkness and in the region and shadow of death." * * * *

In concluding this topic, he announces the Liberian policy to be, "Interior development; and the incorporation of the native tribes into the Liberian Body Politic."

Mr. President, it would seem from reading these words, warm from the pen of the President of Liberia, and in the presence here of those who have grown gray in this cause, that our Society might hope for the speedy realization of the desire of its founders, and say with Simeon, of old, "Our eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all the people."

Now is the glorious opportunity of this Society. What is wanted is, that through its officers and agents, at public meetings and through the press, it should make an appeal in earnest to the whole country.

The apathy which has lately fallen upon our people with regard to helping on the African colonization cause is owing to a strange misapprehension of our duty. We often hear it said, Your Colonization Society did much good in the time of slavery in the South, but, since the day of emancipation, its mission is ended. The colored people have a right to stay here, and their labor is wanted here. If any wish to go to Liberia, let them obtain the means themselves. At any rate, it is no affair of ours; we are not responsible for their present condition. Now this position is untenable; we are all wrong. The fact is, the whole country, and every State, as part of the Union, is morally responsible for the former existence of African slavery in the South, and the consequent present condition of the freedmen. All the old States agreed to the continuance of the slave trade for twenty years after the formation of the Constitution of the United States. Subsequently, the whole country became responsible for the enforcement of the law for the rendition of fugitive slaves from within its borders; and for those Northern statesmen educated in the North, who afterwards settled in Southern States, became Governors, or Senators and Representatives in

Congress, and were most pronounced in their pro-slavery opinions and influence. We have only to remember that the late civil war was for the defense of the National integrity. Southern States claimed the right to secede. The North and West declared secession impossible—that our country was indivisible. By the grand result, we are all members of one body politic. If, therefore, one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it. If there is local disorder in one part, the other parts are affected. If the cholera or yellow fever decimates the population in one State, the other States send relief. If the Indian is wronged, the whole country moves for him. And so, the problem of the proper care of the freedmen is a problem for the whole Nation to solve. What the Government cannot or will not do, the people should be asked to supply.

Now thousands upon thousands of the freedmen yearn to go to their fatherland. If we throw obstacles in their way, if we refuse to aid them, because they are wanted to till the soil and raise the profitable crops of this country, we are just so much partakers in the guilt of our ancestors who favored the bringing of the ancestors of the freedmen from Africa here, and placing them in bondage for their labor.

The American Colonization Society has now a broader field than ever before, and it deserves a place among the missionary efforts and benevolent objects of the Christian community. By a zealous prosecution of its missionary work, not only will Africa be brought more and more under the benign influence of Christianity, but the condition of the freedmen remaining at the South will be vastly improved, when it shall be known, that if they cannot fully enjoy the equal rights of citizenship, they may readily obtain the means of going to what they would deem a better country, where they could work out their own destiny as a distinct race, and could accomplish the greatest results under the most favorable conditions. We ask, therefore, for the sympathy, the moral support, and the generous aid of the whole country.

And one word more ought to be said at this sixty-third Anniversary Meeting in the National Capital. Two things can the National Government, in the proper exercise of its constitutional functions, do for the cause of our Society. Congress can respond favorably to the able memorial presented at its last session for an appropriation for explorations and surveys of the western coast of Africa, and from Liberia into Cen-

tral Africa, in the interest of commerce and civilization. And the Executive might be authorized to employ some of the U. S. Steamships in carrying bi-monthly mails from one or more ports of the United States, so that, no longer we shall be dependent upon British steamers, via Liverpool, as a means of communication with the Republic we founded; and that no longer we shall be in danger of losing our well-earned prestige on the African coast, by the superior enterprise and foresight of the British Government; but shall henceforth show ourselves able and willing to cherish and secure the commercial advantages which we were the first to develop. And shall not the plea of humanity be made and answered? The United States, in her early history, lifted up her voice for the freedom of Modern Greece; she has repeatedly exerted her National power to rescue a naturalized citizen from the custody of his native country which claimed him as her subject. And will she not now grant this boon to those deserving freedmen who long for their fatherland, and to Liberia which has sprung from her very loins, and which promises to be a remedial power for the healing of the African Nations?

