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PATRIOTISM, PHILANTHROPY, AND RELIGION.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

American Colonization Society

JANUARY 16, 1877,

BY

ALEXANDER T. MCGILL, D.D. LL.D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

WASHINGTON CITY:
COLONIZATION BUILDING, 450 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE.
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ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT: Truthfulness must be considered the only rock on which any moral reform or social combination will ever abide. After long observation I affirm that the American Colonization Society is the most truthful institution of uninspired wisdom I have known to be set up amid the passions of men and changes of time. No rock in ocean ever stood the conflict of surges at the base and tumult of storms at the summit with more simple and unchanging aspect of stability and usefulness. Truth is not simple as error is. She disdains the poverty of one idea, prefers to be complex, proceeds with a balance, and reposes with confidence only when she is many-sided in her completeness. The wreath which was laid on the cradle of this organization—*patriotism, philanthropy, and religion*—is the same as it was threescore years ago, without the fading of one leaf or flower, whilst every other society with but one of these objects in its aim has withered away. Truth is also positive in her moderation. Error is negative, and therefore easier as well as simpler, coinciding with the passions of men, and achieving success with a quicker speed than is possible for the solid and temperate and well-poised movement of the true.

Societies younger than ours, with the one idea of abolishing slavery at any cost and without delay, have triumphed already and disappeared, because their work is done. But ours may now be seen coming slowly up, with scant resources, to a ravaged field and forlorn occupation, and yet the best opportunity that ever dawned on her benevolence. No changes have changed her in the least. Slavery predominant and slavery destroyed are just the same thing to her interference—the problem of the black man remaining unsolved to her eye. We have always proposed to work with him as a freeman, and therefore gladly accept his emancipation everywhere. But what is freedom to him in the social degradation which yet remains? What is liberty worth when his own is used by others more than by himself, and that to make him a slave to his own passions? What is the bill of rights in his hand when it is reddened in a war of races or trampled with con-

tempt, which no constitutional amendment can amend in the constitution of our nature? What is religion itself to him, the freedom with which the Son makes free, when its altars are abandoned for the polls, and its pulpits forsaken by the best culture it has, for the stump, the tribunal, and the brawl of pot-house politicians?

It must be confessed that complicated misery and fearful danger attend the glory of his manumission still, and it calls for more than one idea to heal the complication. No remedy here can advance him another step; no mechanism of party can put on him the true habiliment of manhood. We must send him home, when he is willing to go, and see that his home is attractive and safe, as it was not when he was torn from it and sold from bondage to bondage. We must consign him as a citizen from one Republic to another, with gain to him in the transfer of true instead of nominal "liberty, equality, and fraternity." We must do by him for his home what the navies of christendom could not do for the coast of Africa—stop the traffic in human flesh; and we must do by him what all the missionaries of christendom besides could not do for a quarter of the globe—span it with an equatorial church, redeem it from the curse of Ham, and overspread the mysteries of darkness and death on its bosom with the mysteries of "a kingdom which cannot be moved."

Such is the composite object we offered sixty years ago as a true catholicon for the African race. And who can doubt it now, or allege that it was faulty or mistaken in any one of its ingredients? We seem to be hindered at present from gathering certificates on every hand. Party faction, more than sectional faction ever did, prevents us from asking Congress, and State after State, and church after church to witness the excellence of our object and the wisdom of our way. But it is enough to recall the memorials of attestation, which all men must honor, as a verdict on the past and a trust for the future. It would be well to begin another decade with a roll-call of the original officers and members, and ask what one of those illustrious men would now, if he were living, and led by the logic of events which have intervened, regret the institution, as too slow and cumbrous and neutral, or in any one particular as not suited and true to the situation? Would Bushrod Washington, or Henry Clay, or Daniel Webster, or John Randolph, or William Thornton, or Francis S. Key, or John Mason, or Charles Marsh; would Robert Finley, or Samuel J. Mills, or William Meade; would any one of the fifty original members who sat as peers in the first council of colonization, and represented there

the patriarchal wisdom of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Marshall, say that the amazing overturn which we have witnessed in this generation has altered one syllable of the original platform on which our object was placed?

1st. "To rescue the free colored people of the United States from their political and social disadvantages.

2d. "To place them in a country where they may enjoy the benefits of free government, with all the blessings which it brings in its train.

3d. "To spread civilization, sound morals, and true religion throughout the continent of Africa.

4th. "To arrest and destroy the slave trade.

5th. "To afford slave owners who wish or are willing to liberate their slaves an asylum for their reception."

Only the last plank of this original has been loosened in the least by the great convulsion through which we have passed. Slave owners no longer exist among us with wishes or willingness to be consulted and regarded. But surely the nation itself, whose fiat has broken every yoke and made the slaves its own constituency, should be willing to liberate them from every ban that is left, from the very name of "freedman," and help them to an asylum which is absolutely safe, and more and more complete in all its appointments and attractions. What means "intimidation" in the charges and counter-charges of this convulsive present? No such word has ever yet been heard at the polls of Liberia. No military muster is made, or needed, or called for there to guard the franchise of a colored citizen. There, indeed, he is his own master, free to canvass, free to change, free to vote, without one claim of antecedents on the one hand, or fear of guns upon the other. Is it not now as much as ever, and more than ever, "an asylum" for the black man?

If he prefers, after all, to make this country his home, with a view to advance the improvement of his lot and elevate his race, we are not done with him in the true objects of our colonization. We shall stand at his side to help him and rejoice. For his advancement anywhere is not only a chief aim of the Society, but a great auxiliary, both at home and abroad. The more elevated he becomes here the more fitted he is for Africa—to go himself or send others. We have never failed to choose the best for this emigration. If he be not cultured enough to know how to work, and how to vote, and how to bear office, how to teach and how to christianize in teaching, we do not

elect him for the citizenship of Liberia. We would rather detain him, with all the damage his unfitness may do to ourselves, than send him over to be a burden or a pest in that community which we seek to model for the redemption of a continent. We do not forget the war of anti-slavery upon us on account of this kind of selection, and its vehement demand that colonization should wait for the best, until these could be used at home, in the work of immediate and universal abolition. And now we look to the magnanimity of the triumphant to spare the intelligence, and industry, and virtue, of which they have made so much, in order to propagate for us and Africa this glory of the race.

Twenty-six years ago, Mr. President, at the great anniversary over which Henry Clay presided, I believe, for the last time, having the President of the United States on his right, and a vast audience, composed largely of statesmen, ambassadors, and philanthropists of the highest rank before him; after almost every phase of the subject had been swept by his magnificent eloquence at the opening, and after the Rev. Dr. Fuller, then of Baltimore, had followed him with ingenious prophecy and tender pathos which continued that brilliant assembly in a trance, you were felicitous enough, under all the disadvantage of being third orator in such a succession, to hold the unflagging interest of that house with the great thought that the work of the Society is more at present with Africa than with America; to make the Colony attractive and draw to itself, without the persuasion of agencies here, the crowd that must be always eager to make their own condition better. That thought is my gateway to another line of truth, the truth of facts, as well as principles, in your beneficent and steady working to this hour.

You began with a careful and costly experiment on the Coast to find the most healthy location for your Colony. The life of Mills himself was paid in that experiment. But you succeeded. Even Plymouth and Jamestown, for health to the Englishman, were not to be compared with Monrovia for health to the American negro. You began with a tutelage to govern the colonist, because the power of self-government in him had not then been developed or tried; and he became at once heroic in the hands of your Agency; refused to follow disheartened "tutors and governors" back to America; took the guardianship of himself into his own hands; declined the offer of British marines to protect him at the price of only a few feet to be ceded for their flagstaff, and with a band of but thirty-five fighting men repulsed

the natives, led by their kings, with eight hundred in one battle, and double this number in another. Such heroes were Lott Cary and Elijah Johnson. They would buy territory for themselves and make their own Trustees of the chivalric Stockton and Ayres, who purchased Cape Mesurado for such colonists at the hazard of their own lives. We do not wonder that Ashmun and Gurley hastened in their wisdom to divide with such colonists the government of their own Commonwealth, and that the Society itself hastened to fulfil its promise from the first, to resign its own authority as soon as the freedman could stand for himself.

Nations are slow of growth, especially in the cradle of their youth. A centenary is the familiar unit with which we measure the growth of our own in its boast of unparalleled progress. But one quarter of a century—scarcely more than enough of years to bring the infancy of an individual man to the majority of manhood—was enough to bring your first handful of emigrants, who landed as guests merely at Sierra Leone and Campelar, without a foot of territory or shore to be called their own, to the dignity and independence of a Republic complete in every department of a nation's power, and acknowledged by the greatest nations of the world. And what if the subsequent advance in material greatness may not correspond with such a beginning, and the reproach of disappointed hope may have come to hinder the expansion of colonization zeal among ourselves? Does not life in all its analogies demand a quiet solidification to succeed a rapid growth? It would be impossible for a narrow Coast of six hundred miles by fifty, with a vast interior of teeming and savage people pressing on its civilization with a proportion of twenty-five to one, at the process of assimilation, to go fast without being overwhelmed. It is the slowness of safety; it is the compactness of unity; it is the balancing of maturity; in all respects the opposite of failure and decline, which must explain the present appearance of results in Liberia. Your thought is right and true, and your promise fulfilled, that Africa is overtaking America in the power of attracting immigration. Its agriculture is improving, its commerce increasing; its education already commands the respect of Universities in Europe, and its documents of State have become the admiration of Governments over the civilized world. The romance of travel is all gathered now to the old continent which it fringes and guards and aims to redeem. The engineer is at the heels of the adventurer in this age, and he is always followed soon by trains of immigration.

The attraction to Africa of her own children will be a stream which is not to be reversed. Our great asylum in this land for all nations already suffers some reversal. The skill of industries, and even the toil of common labor, have almost crowded the voyage back to the old world of late, because of the redundancy and the mixture of races to be met in our workshops and fields. The discouragement of capital is much; oppressive legislation is more; but most of all is the jostle of nationalities—Caucasian, Ethiopian, and Mongolian—in their free fight for employment and a living, the cause of this backward turning from America. But Africa forbids by her climate all competition with her sons. There may be on the heights of her grand interior safe retreats from the fever of her Coast to attract in coming time enough of other kindreds to stimulate the development of her own myriads and make a civilization equal to the best; but the din of busy occupation, the hum of toiling millions, the rewards of tillage on her exuberant soil must be chiefly, by God's own appointment, Ethiopian.

His blessing has attended thus far the work of your hands. This might indeed be counted on, when we know it is right and true by its principles and aims; and if our depression had been a thousand times deeper than it ever was, the integrity of motive and operation would have assured us that God is with us. But see the signals of His presence and direction from the beginning. It was no sudden or accidental thought of Dr. Finley or any other agent in the first convocation. It was older than the Revolution of American Colonies in its meditation and projection, and when the time had come "all things worked together for good." Patriotism in the legislative councils of Virginia; piety in the conference of clergymen at Princeton, N. J., and missionary ardor among the students of theology at Andover, flowed together simultaneously to begin this organization. God has ennobled it in the succession of its Presidents. Washington, Carroll, Madison, and Clay have been the line of your predecessors. He has guided the selection of agents and officers of every kind without one mistake in the appointments of human wisdom. He has prospered the voyage at all times, without one shipwreck with loss of life in sixty years. Truly we may thank Him and take courage. "What hath God wrought?" We may well rely on His abiding benediction when we feel sure that His own ark is in it, as it was in the House of Obed-edom.

The white man sent with the gospel to Africa perishes quickly and

constantly, as if it were the "breach upon Uzzah" for him to attempt any more the devout but deadly adventure. And yet the living minister must go there with the great commission upon him. It is the Divine appointment. Bibles and tracts and schools are treasures of unspeakable value; but we must keep them "in earthen vessels"—men of like passions with others. "The foolishness of preaching," more than eloquence of any other sort, must be made to save men by means of sympathy between man and man. It is the colored preacher that must go, and go as a colonist, identified with the emigrating band in seeking a home, or brought up in the colony itself and educated there.

Half way back in the lapse of your anniversary time, and more than half way back to the first planting of the colony, Mr. Clay said from that chair, "What Christian is there who does not feel a deep interest in sending forth missionaries to convert the dark heathen and bring them within the pale of Christianity? But what missionaries can be so potent as those it is our purpose to transport to the shores of Africa? Africans themselves by birth, or sharing at least African blood, will not all their feelings, all their best affections induce them to seek the good of their countrymen? At this moment there are between four and five thousand colonists who have been sent to Africa under the care of this Society; there are now twenty-five places of public worship dedicated to the service of Almighty God and to the glory of the the Saviour of men; and I will venture to say that they will accomplish as missionaries of the Christian religion more to disseminate its blessings than all the rest of the missionaries throughout the globe."

About the time our great patriotic statesman was talking thus, like an eloquent evangelist, Lieutenant Forbes, of the British Navy, was publishing his book on Dahomey, in which it was virtually declared that Liberia was a cheat, and that our Society was engaged in transferring to the shores of Africa American slavery under another name. The prompt denial of this, and triumphant appeal to the Constitution of the Society and the facts of history, could not hinder the American Anti-Slavery Society from siding with Forbes and maligning Clay, and insisting that our officers had evaded the issue in their emphatic refutation. Where, now, is the truth, after all that obloquy, and the victories of our assailants, and the overthrow of slavery, and the advent of freedmen to search for themselves the records of Congress, and twelve States at least, and ecclesiastical assemblies innumerable, attesting the singleness of aim with which the Society has always sought to secure the liberty and culture and salvation of the negro? Our

existence itself at the Sixtieth Anniversary may answer. Persistency is triumph wherever truth is marshaled. The pointing of your finger is equal to the marching of a host, when all things are ready. Vindicated, established, and successful, beyond all precedent, among the voluntary societies of the world, I would say to you "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." But you have already listened to these words long enough, with the raging of a red sea before you, and the pillar of the cloud behind you. Your great opportunity, God's own opportunity for movement, has come, and louder than a thousand billows the voice of His Prophet is heard, saying, "go forward." What if the patriotism and the philanthropy both should yet be challenged and impugned whilst the public mind is bewildered with the problem of freedmen at our doors by the million? Those objects were feet in your progress. Take now the wings which have infolded them all along, and spread these to heaven henceforth, and let all men see the ultimate and main identity of your mission: "Another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

Surely nothing is lost to humanity or patriotism or any other object of your manifold original by soaring in this way. It is infinitely better to be narrowed upwards than downwards, to have the expanse of a firmament that touches everything with light and life to be your margin than the vale of cold and dark infidelity, where so many other societies have descended to die. Let it be seen that the best economy of Christian Missions attaches itself to the work of Colonization, as Hopkins, and Stiles, and Mills, and Burgess, and Ashmun, and Alexander have taught us to believe, and America and Africa both are yours, and both shall pass away from the orbit of earth before the crown of your immortality shall fade.





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