THE

WORKS

OF

SAMUEL HOPKINS, D. D.,

FIRST PASTOR OF

THE CHURCH IN GREAT BARRINGTON, MASS.,

AFTERWARDS PASTOR OF

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN NEWPORT, R. I.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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DOCTRINAL TRACT AND BOOK SOCIETY.
1852.
"April 29, 1784. There has been a proposal on foot some time, that a number of blacks should return to Africa, and settle there, that a number, who have been under the most serious impressions of religion, should lead the way, and when they are fixed there, should improve all opportunities to teach the Africans the doctrines and duties of Christianity, both by precept and example. In order to this, a number who shall be thought best qualified for this business, must first be sent to Africa, to treat with some of the nations there, and request of them lands, proper and sufficient for them and as many as shall go with them to settle upon. It is presumed land would be freely given. And it is thought, that such a settlement would not only be for the benefit of those who shall return to their native country, but it would be the most likely and powerful means of putting a stop to the slave trade, as well as of increasing Christian knowledge among those heathens. In order to this, there must be some expense. A vessel must be obtained, and a cargo procured of such things as will sell there, (all spirits excepted.*) A captain must be found, who can be relied upon, and paid. This supposes a sufficient number of blacks may be found for sailors, who are used to the sea, and that the advantage of the trade will repay most of the expense. I communicate these hints of a plan to you, that I may know how far you approve of it, and whether you think it practicable. And if you do, whether you, in conjunction with some of your able friends, would advance any thing considerable to promote such a design. It has been said by some, and doubtless by many, 'There are a number of men who have large estates, much of which they have gotten by the slave trade, who now profess to be convinced they have done wrong in having any hand in that trade, and manifest great zeal against it, and are great enemies of slavery. Let them show their repentance by their works; by giving up a considerable part of their estates to liberate the Africans and promote their good. Let them do this, and we will believe them sincere and honest men, but not before, &c.'"

The following important letter to Mr. Brown was written just one month and one day before the first colony of blacks set sail from England for Sierra Leone:

"March 7, 1787. Dear Sir: This will be handed to you by Dr. Thornton, a gentleman from the West Indies, who has been in this city† some weeks. He brings no recommendation, but appears to me to be an honest man, though too flighty and unstable, perhaps, to be at the head of an affair in which he is very zealous: a settlement of the American blacks in some part of Africa. Should he have opportunity to converse with you, which I wish, and [which] will be agreeable to him, he will communicate to you his plan, &c.§ I have, as you know, sir, been for years desirous of an attempt to make such a settlement, and am glad to hear that Friends in Britain, and other dissenters, have joined to carry this into execution, I suppose upon the late Dr. Fothergill's plan. I wish some gentlemen, who are able, would send a vessel to Africa,

* As far as we can judge from the journal and letters of Hopkins, he was disposed to insert a temperance clause in all his important negotiations which would admit it.

† This closing appeal is another illustration of the unbounding faithfulness which characterized its author. He knew that the charge of inconsistency had been brought against the estimable man whom he was addressing, (see p. 123, above,) and he meant to use this fact as a motive for a more generous contribution to the new enterprise.

‡ In 1794, Newport was incorporated a city, but returned to its old town government in 1787, a few days after the date of this letter.

§ It is important here to notice that Mr. Hopkins does not allude to Dr. Thornton's plan, as in any degree novel. His fears relate merely to the prudence of Dr. Thornton in executing it. Dr. Alexander says that Dr. Thornton "is still remembered as a man of many eccentricities, arising from a vivid genius, and a real philanthropist." See History of African Colonization, p. 61.
MEMOIR.

perhaps to the Ivory Coast, with a proper cargo to trade there for ivory, &c.; and that some proper persons might go and treat with the princes or nations there for land, on which those who are disposed to return might settle. I think there would be a prospect of their gaining, rather than their losing money by such an undertaking, beside their promoting such a good design. I thank you for your letter of January, 1786, and the pamphlets enclosed with it. I have dispersed most of them, where I thought they might be of the most service. I have seen the piece, upon the slave trade, which obtained the highest prize in the University of Cambridge, in the year 1785, which you mentioned, and hope it will do much good. I conclude you have seen it. I have not been able to effect the design toward which you generously offered to give twenty dollars,* as I have been much confined at home the year past. You have doubtless been informed that a gold medal was offered by the Society in New York for Liberating the Africans, for the best piece against the slave trade, to be produced at the last commencement in the college there. I have not heard anything further of it.—Any further intelligence from Britain, or any other quarter, which you shall be able to communicate, respecting the slave trade, and the resettlement of blacks in Africa, will be thankfully received by your respectful friend,

S. Hopkins.”

Nearly two years after the preceding epistle, we find its resolute author addressing Granville Sharp, the eminent colonizationist of Great Britain. The letter is inserted, with some abridgment, in Prince Hoare’s Memoir of Mr. Sharp, pp. 340–342; but the whole of it is now published for the first time.

“Newport, January 15, 1789. Sir: As I am an utter stranger to you, I presume to introduce myself by the following narrative: I am the pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport, on Rhode Island. I spent the former part of my life a hundred and fifty miles from this place; have lived here near twenty years. When I removed to this town, my attention was soon turned to the slave trade, which had been long carried on here, and was still continued. It appeared to me wholly unjustifiable and exceeding inhuman and cruel; and I thought I was obliged, in duty, to condemn it in public and preach against it. I had better success than I expected, and most of my hearers were convinced that it was a very wrong and wicked practice. But this procured to me many enemies in the town, which were increased and more irritated when I proceeded, as I soon did, to condemn the holding these Africans in perpetual slavery, who were brought here by the iniquitous slave trade. I was, so far as I then knew, almost alone in my opposition to the slave trade and the slavery of the Africans; but since, [I] have read, with great satisfaction, your writings on that subject, some of which, I believe, were published before the time above mentioned, and the writings of others. And I have had the pleasure of finding a conviction of the evil of this practice to spread and prevail in America. And two respectable and numerous societies are formed, one in New York and the other in Philadelphia, with a view to promote the abolition of the slavery of the Africans, and protect and assist those who have obtained their freedom; of which you have doubtless been fully informed; of both which societies I have the honor to be a corresponding member.

“In Massachusetts, all the Africans are made free by their Constitution, and many have obtained their freedom in this State. But their circumstances are, in many respects, unhappy, while they live here among the whites; the latter looking down upon them, and being disposed to treat them as under-

* An allusion to the Prize Essay which was mentioned in the letter of February 10, 1786, to Dr. Hart, and which was suggested to Mr. Brown by the Prize Essay of Clarkson, noticed by Hopkins a few lines above.