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The American Colonization Society.

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the cause of the society.

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1834.
REMARKS ON THE PRINCIPLES OF THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY,

By the Rev. R. R. Gurley, Secretary of the Society; most of which were delivered in the Middle Dutch Church, in the City of New York, on the evening of April 23, 1834.

The question which I propose to discuss, is one of the greatest which ever has been, or can be, submitted to the consideration of the American People.

Ever since the deluge, Slavery has existed in large portions of the world; and for more than three centuries, been encouraged in Africa by the slave trade, prosecuted until recently, with all circumstances of crime and cruelty, by nearly, if not all, the civilized powers of the world.

Of those who have been consigned by this traffic to inexorable bondage, (ten or twelve millions at least,) nearly one-half, have been doomed to their miseries for no alleged crime, and by no law or tribunal of their own country.

Long before the Revolution, slaves were introduced into this country by the commerce of England, and subsequently their numbers greatly increased by the inhuman enterprise of the American Colonies. But up to the time when slavery was forced extensively upon our shores, by the Mother Country, the people of America, foreseeing the sad consequences to posterity, sought protection therefrom, by petitions and appeals, both to the Parliament and the Throne.

But the evil came extensively upon us; it grew with our growth, and strengthened with our strength, and became inwrought in the interests, habits and frame of society. It pervaded the whole social and political organization and constitution in many of the Colonies, and affected all the relations and operations of men.

The Constitution of the United States, adopted as the common bond of a National Government, formed by the people of the several States, States independent to the moment of its adoption, leaves slavery where it found it, except that by the Union it creates, peculiar facilities are afforded for the diffusion of correct sentiments on the subject, and in the government established, powers vested, adequate (and at the request of those most interested, capable of being applied,) to remedy the evil.

Of the two millions of colored persons in the United States, the great
body are in slavery in the Southern and Southwestern States; the free people of colour amounting in all, to less than three hundred thousand.

The unfortunate condition of both classes, has long excited the benevolence of many minds, and what measures should be adopted to relieve their miseries and elevate their character, been a subject of deep reflection.—That they have been too generally and criminally neglected, is unquestionable. That the free enjoy few of the benefits of freedom,—that the slaves are uneducated, degraded, and suffer from laws rigorous and oppressive, is clear.

But Africa, with her uncounted, countless (I had almost said,) population, ignorant, debased, enslaved, opens before us her vast domain, where cunning has imposed on credulity, and flattery betrayed the innocent, avarice fettered the brave, and power crushed the weak; where all faith has been violated, all mercy forgotten; where Ruin walks abroad, amid the bounties of nature, and Despair hides in dim eclipse her glories. Africa then claims redress for her wrongs, and the sighs of her afflicted children come to us on every breeze. The whole African race, then, should be included within the circuit of our sympathies and charities.

The American Colonization Society had its origin in humane and benevolent sentiments towards the colored race. The characters of its founders, place their motives beyond suspicion, in the judgment of candid and liberal minds. Many of them, removed by death, have left enduring memorials of their love to God and man. I hope to show that their principles were as pure as their intentions.

The object of the Society is, to colonize, with their own consent, in Africa, or elsewhere, the free people of colour of the United States, and to act for this object in co-operation with the General Government, or such of the States as may adopt regulations on the subject. Will any one say, that because the Society will co-operate with the National Government, or the States, to effect its exclusive object, colonizing the free people of colour with their consent, it may co-operate for an object directly the reverse, colonizing them without their consent? Yet those who make it their chief concern to destroy the reputation of the Society, represent its scheme as one for coercing away,—for expatriating our whole colored population. This is as reasonable, as true, (and no more so,) as to represent that those who judge it best for the people of colour to remain here, deny them the liberty of removal. If the maintenance of the opinion, that the voluntary separation of the colored and white races be desirable, is to force the colored race away, the maintenance of the opinion, that their continuance with us is desirable, is to force them to remain. If the Colonization Society believes such separation will promote the interests of all parties concerned, the cause of human improvement and freedom and happiness, it may as rightfully exert a moral influence to effect this object, as those who think their continued residence with us is desirable, may exert such influence to effect their object. As to physical and legislative powers, they belong to no association of individuals disconnected from Government, and no such association can be held morally responsible for the opinions or acts of Government, any further than such opinions or acts can be shown to be the fruits of its moral influence. How can a Society, bound by its first principles to colonize persons only with their own consent, tend to expel them against their will from the country.

But it is asked, did not the Colonization Society, after the insurrection in Southampton, Va., receive and transport to Liberia at their own request, free persons of colour, compelled to seek some refuge from the indignation kindled by the outrages there perpetrated, of horror and blood? Certainly. But did the Society arouse the vindictive passions, urge on the perse-
cutions, excite the spirit of wrath and violence, before which these unfortunate men fled in dismay? The relentless foes of the Institution have not dared to allege or insinuate such a charge against it.

Suppose these unhappy men had fled to this city, and requested their Anti-Slavery friends to afford them an asylum, and the means of subsistence, and they had replied, we cannot receive you—the people of Virginia had no right to force you away; we will not in any way countenance their measures against you. Return and stand upon your natural and inalienable rights. Would not every unperverted mind have felt the inhumanity of such conduct? Yet the Colonization Society is guilty only of showing kindness to these people, at a time when they looked elsewhere for relief in vain.

My respected friend, Dr. Cox, (whose originality of genius, and nobleness of heart, no one more highly appreciates than myself,) has taken his position against the Society, in consequence of evidence first exhibited to him in England, which he has found ample reason since, to believe correct, "that the colored people of this country as a whole, and almost to a man, are utterly opposed to its system." This objection alone he regards as conclusive and invincible. Were the fact assumed, admitted, which it is not, the argument would be this only; a majority of the people of colour are opposed to colonization: therefore, such as approve it, should not be assisted to emigrate. I see not the force of the argument. Why should the liberty of the free colored man who chooses to settle in Africa, or my liberty to assist him, be abridged by the opinion of a majority, or of all his brethren? If the fact that some men of colour wish to remain in this country, be a reason why all should remain, is not the fact that some wish to emigrate a reason why all should emigrate? But I deny the fact assumed. More than three thousand colored persons have voluntarily emigrated to Liberia, and at nearly every period since the existence of the Society, have applicants for a passage been more than it has had funds to aid. — I know that in this city and the Northern States, the people of colour, generally, are hostile to the scheme. But the opinions of these, opinions mostly and mainly formed under the influence of those, who, to speak with the utmost charity, have mistakenly represented the Society as unfriendly to the best interests of their race, as the ally and defender of slavery, cannot be regarded as the unbiased judgment of our colored population, and if they were, those who think such judgment erroneous, have the same right with those who think otherwise, to express their views and exert their influence in the case.

But the opposition to the Society arises less from what it does, than from that which it does not. The establishment of Christian colonies of free colored men, disposed to emigrate, in Africa, might be forgiven, did the Society exert that influence, or rather did it not stand in the way of that influence which is deemed the appropriate and only remedy for slavery. It is said that the Society obstructs emancipation. A pamphlet has been published in England, entitled "The Extinction of the American Colonization Society, the first step towards the abolition of slavery." The question, then, of the moral influence of the Society on slavery is one most important, the discussion of which cannot, should not be avoided. True, the establishment of Christian States in Africa is an object of magnitude, and motive enough to animate all Christian hearts, yet if to effect it, be to prevent, or even greatly retard the voluntary and peaceful abolition of slavery, it may be secured at too great a price.

The Colonization Society exerts a powerful moral influence, favorable to the abolition of slavery, because it attempts to exert no other influence.— The people of the South recognize no right political or moral, in others
than themselves, to regulate, modify, or abolish slavery, and they justly deem any efforts to coerce them to abolish it, as a violation both of the spirit and letter of the Constitution. The Colonization Society by abstaining from all measures, which, in the judgment of the South, endanger the public safety, gains the confidence of the people, and secures from them a candid consideration of the truth, in regard to the interests and claims of our colored population.

We must respect the rights and judgment, even if erroneous, of those in power, would we plead successfully for those who suffer from it. "We must plead for the oppressed, not to them."

By uniting on a common ground, and for a common object of humanity to the people of colour, the wise and good of every State of the Union, the Society is producing that state of public sentiment, from which alone can result the peaceful abolition of slavery. It is by bringing the benevolent of the land to meet on some common principle, and for an unexceptionable purpose, relating to the people of colour, that a friendly interchange of thoughts and opinions is secured, that discussion, calm and dispassionate in regard to their interests and prospects is produced, and thus all elements set in motion for the formation of sober and correct opinions. To prevent men from forming wrong opinions is often important towards leading them to adopt right ones. Having taken sides on any question, they are seldom converted by controversy. We grant to our own reason what we will not yield to the dogmas of another. In the liberty of our will, only, do we obey the truth. Truth is best heard in the silence of the passions.

The operations of the Society are awakening in the Southern mind sympathies, associations, trains of thought, which are the germs of great and noble actions. They appeal eloquently to all the generosity, to all the justice of our nature. Every notice of Liberia, every ship that sails thither, every slave manumitted to go there, pleads the cause of human freedom. Examples of emancipation, have an effect more powerful, than all the culminating denunciations of the wrathful; and like example, the influence of the Society takes effect, because it leaves no apology for resistance in the conscience or judgment of its enemies. In warring with it, they must war against themselves.

The measures of the Society tend to elevate most surely and rapidly a community of men of colour, who may exhibit to the whole world the capabilities of the colored race for high moral and social improvement, and for self-government.

No reflecting man, I think, can believe, that in these respects, as a community, they will surely and rapidly rise here. I say nothing of the causes which prevent it. In every way would I gladly aid their improvement. But I must give up my reason, to expect, that to any considerable extent, they will be rapidly improved. Almost every thing is against them. But in Liberia, every thing is adapted to unfetter their minds, to awaken their enterprise, kindle their hopes, stimulate industry, rouse them to action.—As a people they need to be thrown, chiefly, upon their own resources; they want motives for intellectual energy, and noble conduct. What circumstances can do for human character, we read in the history of our country. What they had done, Mr. Burke saw and admired before our Revolution, when in allusion to the commercial enterprise of the New England colonies he exclaimed, "What in the world is equal to it? While you are looking for these hardy adventurers in the arctic circle and among the tumbling mountains of ice, they are at the antipodes, and engaged under the frozen serpent of the South. While some draw the line and strike the harpoon on the coast of Africa, others are pursuing their gigantic game along the coast of Brazil. No sea but what is vexed with their fisheries, no cli-
mate which is not witness to their toils. Falkland Island, that seemed too remote an object for the grasp of national ambition, is but a stage and a resting-place in the progress of their victorious industry." Human nature is of all countries and ages, and what has elevated it here may ennable it in Africa. If in vanishing opposition, in surmounting obstacles, in subduing the hardness and taming the wildness of unintelligent nature, making her to pay tribute to civilization, and her wilderness to become fruitful fields, our minds have gained power, will the people of colour gain nothing from a like discipline. It is yet to be seen whether their experience will prove an anomaly in the history of men. And to elevate the man of colour in one part of the world is to do a general benefit to his race.

That the Colonization Society exerts a powerful moral influence, favorable to emancipation, is, as far as I know, the unanimous opinion of the friends of the colored people at the South. Their opinion is, also, that the present Anti-Slavery measures at the North retard emancipation. Is no value to be attached to their judgment in the case?

The friends and foes of the Society profess equally to adopt, as their rule of conduct, the precepts of Christ. In regard to Slavery, as in regard to all other great moral and political evils, I agree generally with Dr. Cox, that the remedy is the "genuine influence of the Gospel of Christ." But I deny that this can prove instantly, and wholly effectual. For some of the physical evils of the world, even such as have originated in moral causes, there is no immediate remedy. It is remarked by Coleridge, that "an evil which has come on gradually, and in the growth of which, all men have, more or less, conspired, cannot be removed otherwise than gradually, and by the joint efforts of all." It is impossible, instantly, to render the ignorant enlightened, the poor independent, and the long degraded and oppressed qualified for all the immunities and privileges of self-government. The general prevalence of Christianity would not render this possible. But experience forbids the hope, that Christianity will at once pervade all hearts, and genuine Christians often find their duties more or less modified by the circumstances of the society in which they are placed, by the characters and actions of those who constitute that society.

The perfect law of liberty, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is designed to be the law of order in the world, comprehending, regulating, controlling all the duties of man to man. It refers each individual to his own bosom, for a standard by which he may judge of his neighbour's claims on him; his own self-regard is to be the measure of his charity. Rightly interpreted, this law makes it no duty for a man, to treat all other men alike, to treat them as they may desire to be treated, or to deem one man's interest as valuable as that of many. He is bound to treat every other man as his conscience decides, he might reasonably expect that other to treat him, in an exchange of circumstances. He must estimate other men's interests in society, as he would reasonably expect his own to be estimated, were he in their condition. Governments are ordained of God for the good of men. But those who administer them, must regard the general good as paramount to that of individuals. If, as is remarked by South, "in the government of the visible world, the Supreme Wisdom itself, submits to be the author of the better; not of the best, but of the best possible, in the existing relations; much more must all human legislators give way to many evils, rather than encourage the discontent that would lead to worse remedies." "Salus populi suprema lex," is founded in the law of nature, and of Christ. The governing MIND, in the body politic, is morally bound to take care for the safety and life of the body. If evils exist, if the system be diseased, this mind must judge of the particular remedies, the time and mode of their application, and that the general body
be not endangered by the suddenness or violence of their action. When men are born into a state of society, unnaturally constituted, they must take things as they are, and endeavour to make them as they should be, without needless delay, and by all practicable means. Those who have the power, must exercise it benevolently, as in the sight of God, and responsible to Him. Whatever there may be in the Slavery of the South, that violates the law of Christian love, and I believe there is much, is to be unhesitatingly condemned. Of the system, I cannot better express my own views than in the words of the illustrious Robert Hall:

"Slavery, considered as a perpetual state, is as incapable of vindication as the trade in slaves; they are integral parts of the same system, and in point of moral estimate, must stand or fall together."

"But here we are most anxious to guard against the misrepresentation of our sentiments. Convinced, as we are, that negro slavery is most iniquitous in its origin, most mischievous in its effects, and diametrically opposite to the genius of the British Constitution, we are yet far from proposing a sudden revolution. Universal experience shows, that in the body politic, no less than in the natural, inveterate diseases admit only of a slow and gradual cure; and we should deprecate an immediate emancipation, almost as much as the planters themselves, from a full conviction that the debasing operation of slavery, long continued, disqualifies its subjects for performing the functions and enjoying the immunities of a free citizen."

While the Christian religion lends no sanction to the system, it lends none to measures tending to its sudden and violent overthrow. It develops principles, and inculcates precepts, which will certainly remedy it, when their influence becomes general in any community, and it is the glory of our religion, that the whole process of its operations is beneficial, as well as the end, towards which the whole process tends. It prompts "every man to measure his efforts by his power, and his sphere of action, and do all he can do," for mankind; and society to do the same. Its great and benevolent revolutions are begun in the individual soul. It enlightens the conscience, sways the will, and softens the heart. Its meek disciple is commanded to withdraw from "the strifes of words, the railings, the evil surmisings, the perverse disputings of men," who aggravate the sorrows of the suffering, increase the selfishness of the selfish, and pour oil upon the fires of revenge.

To a kind, fair and candid discussion of the slavery question, there can be no reasonable objection. It has been well said, "that half truths are the most dangerous of all errors;" and these must be "removed by the whole truth." The influence of the whole truth can never be injurious where the minds of men are capable of comprehending it.

That in the principles of the Anti-Slavery Societies of the North, is much error mixed with some truth; that the language and measures adopted to illustrate and defend them, are incapable of justification and tending to produce most fearful results, is among my clearest convictions. I deplore them as hostile to the union of the States, to the best interests of the colored population, and as putting in jeopardy the peace and safety of whole communities at the South. I do not presume to question the motives of the members of these Societies; but I should be deaf to the voice of History, I should be blind to all the lights of human experience, I should forget the nature of man, could I believe their efforts were not adapted to stir the deepest and most terrible elements of society—elements which once wrought into fury, will shake the land, if not cover it with blood.—Reason is powerless in the hurricane of the passions.*

* The compound poisons used not unfrequently to excite discontent among the lower orders, who may suffer from the errors or the unequal operations of governments, are thes
"I have met," says Coleridge, "with men, who at the commencement of the revolution, were travelling on foot through the French provinces, and they bear witness that in the remotest villages, every tongue was employed in echoing and enforcing the doctrines of the Parisian journalists; that the public highways were crowded with enthusiasts, some shouting the watchword of the revolution; others disputing on the most abstract principles of the universal constitution, which they fully believed all the nations of the earth were shortly to adopt; the most ignorant among them confident of his fitness for the highest duties of a legislator; and all prepared to shed their blood in the defence of the inalienable rights of a self-governed people. The more abstract the notions were, with the closer affinity did they combine with the most fervent feelings and all the immediate impulses to action." God preserve us from the horrors of that day, when confidence between men shall no longer exist, and all sympathies and motives be absorbed in the instinct of self-preservation. Upon the question, whether the principles of the Colonization Society, or those of its opposers, shall prevail, may depend, I humbly conceive, the peace and happiness of the country.

Who will not rejoice to see rising on the shores of Africa a Christian State? A few small spots of light relieve the darkness of this vast continent, in which from sixty to one hundred millions, Pagans, Mahomedans and slaves, remain unvisited and unblest by the friends of man. If even the citizens of a heathen Empire could not be insensible to the moral beauty of the sentiment expressed in the words "Homo sum, et humani nihil, a me alienum puto," if knowledge, civilization, Christianity, be of any use, surely an enlightened and religious people, will not want motives for building up in Africa a social fabric, representative of the good to be realized from piety and liberty and law. They will believe that from this fabric the light and voice of wisdom will go forth to guide the steps, reform the manners, cheer the hearts, revive the hopes and save the souls of millions. With all its difficulties, misfortunes, Liberia prospers beyond any thing in the history of colonization. Evils, abuses may exist there, but they can and will be remedied. The materials which constitute it may be rude and unformed, but they will be wrought into order and beauty and strength. It has ever been the purpose of the friends of this colony, that Christian education should keep pace with its growth.—And their confidence is, that established on right principles, and possessing a Christian character, it will regenerate the intellectual and moral state of the people of Africa.

They rejoice that the benevolent, and particularly that the ladies, in our large cities, have resolved to prepare teachers for Africa, and to sustain

described by a foreign writer who has looked deeply into the springs of human action:—

1st. "Bold, warm, and earnest assertions, it matters not whether supported by facts or no; nay, though they should involve absurdities and demonstrable impossibilities."

2nd. "Startling particular facts, which, disassociated from their context, enable a man to convey falsehood while he says truth."

3rd. "Arguments built on passing events, and deriving an undue importance from the feelings of the moment."

4th. "The display of the defects without the accompanying advantages, or vice versa."

5th. "Concealment of the general ultimate result behind the scenery of local and particular consequences."

6th. "Statement of positions that are true under particular conditions, to men whose ignorance or fury make them forget that these conditions are not present, or lead them to take for granted that they are."

7th. "Chains of questions, especially such questions as the persons best authorized to propose are ever the slowest in proposing; and objections intelligible of themselves, the answers to which require the comprehension of a system."

8th. "Vague and commonplace satire, stale as the wine in which flies were drowned last summer," &c. &c.
an adequate number of schools in Liberia and among the neighbouring tribes.

Those who feel bound to extinguish the light which holy and self-sacrificing men have suffered and died to kindle on the African coast, represent the evils in the colony and the present debt of the Society, as proofs of the futility of the scheme and ominous of its total ruin. As conclusively might they show, that, the misfortunes, attending in their early stages, the American colonies, ought to have led to their abandonment, that eternal night should have covered their glorious promise. The embarrassments of the Society have been produced, mainly, by causes incidental to the nature of the enterprise, not to have been foreseen nor prevented.—Yet the experience of these causes, may teach lessons how to provide against their recurrence, and to gain more for the future, than has been lost by the past.

Whether the greater portion of our colored population will ever find a home in Africa, is a question alike impossible and unimportant to answer. That all the tendencies of the Society are good for the whole colored race, that it interferes with or obstructs no other wise and judicious measures for their benefit, but approves of them, is enough, without defining the extent of its ultimate and final effects. The almost miraculous consequences of colonization on our own shores, may enable us to augur something of the greatness and grandeur of these effects. It will be for after ages to witness them. The mariner, who two centuries hence, shall guide his ship from the pillars of Hercules to the Cape of Good Hope, may see his nightly way illumined by the lights of a hundred cities, a constellation fair as Orion or the beaming Cross, signal placed in heaven by God’s own hand, to rebuke the undevout, and to call to worship the ransomed disciple.

Though I have all faith, though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and my body to be burned, said Paul, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. He may well consider, that he has rendered his country and mankind, some service, who at times, when men’s spirits are troubled, and their passions mutiny, can speak a word to calm that ocean whose first dark heavings should not be disregarded. The public mind of a nation is a deep and mighty element, capable of being so moved as to defy control and lose every attribute of humanity but its malignant power. To the shadow of an abstract right, France, with the watchword of Freedom on her lips, erected an altar to Liberty on the bones of citizens murdered by herself, and drenched it in human blood. Let the North and the South become arrayed against each other on the subject of our colored population, and we may indeed tremble for our country. And never, while I live, will I cease to urge every friend of the colored race, every friend of freedom and the Union, to cultivate peace, brotherly kindness, and charity, the threefold bond of our strength, and usefulness and glory.

From the Christian Mirror, May 8.

The African Repository for April, is the most important number of that work, which has come into our hands this long time. Among the excellent variety which occupies its pages, is a letter from Gerrit Smith, Esq., full of piety, philanthropy and faith. He seems more encouraged than ever at the prospects of the Colonization Society; and we cannot but hope, that his expectations will be realized. We regret that we have not room for so lovely an exhibition of the Christian spirit, as this letter furnishes us.