

95 38.8 3.8

SYMPATHY,

ITS FOUNDATION AND LEGITIMATE EXERCISE

CONSIDERED,

IN SPECIAL RELATION TO AFRICA:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY 1828,

IN THE

SIXTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

~~BY~~ BY JOHN H. KENNEDY.

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED BY W. F. GEDDES, NO. 59 LOCUST STREET.

1750

In conformity with the request of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, the collection in aid of the American Colonization Society, was taken on the Sabbath *preceding* the Fourth of July: that taken on the 4th was appropriated to Prince Abduhl Rahahman. The Reader is requested to get what good he can from the sermon, and is at liberty to ascribe its publication to such motives as charity dictates.

SYMPATHY.

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?—Lam. i. 12.”

21/6/11
The book of Lamentations was written during the Babylonish Captivity. The Holy City was at that time desolate, the land of Judea was a waste. In the text, Zion is personified: She speaks, she bewails, she appeals to the sympathy of the beholder. “Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by.”

This language is frequently put in the lips of the “man of sorrows.” The accommodation is a proper one; For never were claims ~~and~~ sympathy equally strong, and never were sufferings to be compared with those which He endured for our sake. But the feelings expressed are common to sufferers. The language is natural, “Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?” The words are to be understood not as an interrogation but as an affirmation, “You who behold them cannot certainly be indifferent to the sufferings I endure!” It is but the application to our own sorrows of the general principle, *There is an obligation on all persons to sympathise with those who suffer, and to give suitable expression to their sympathy.* This obligation results

1. From the principle of *Benevolence*. We ought to feel kindly and to act kindly towards others, to sympathise with the sufferer and to lighten if may be his burden; and we neither have nor need a better reason for it, than that it is *right*. To prove it we need not and cannot. It is an axiom in morals; a principle to be felt and acted on, not argued about. The obligation exists antecedently to and independently of any connexion or community of interest we may have with the sufferer.

2. This obligation results, From the community of interest subsisting between all the members of the human family. There is not only the material body of the Naturalist, and the Body Politic of the Statesman, but there is an ampler Body which includes every member of the human family. When a member of any body suffers the other members suffer with it. In some instances adjoining members are apparently gainers by the sufferings and contusions of other members: But the gain is only apparent, the member enlarged is only swollen, the loss is real, the strength is lessened. Between the members of the human family the connection is not so intimate as between those of the human body; still it is real. Every man is a loser in the losses of every other man. In this case, as in the other, there is not unfrequently an apparent gain. The man who enslaves another, who makes the sweat and blood of another minister to his personal aggrandisement, accounts himself a gainer. But the gain is apparent, the loss

is real. For if we admit, that he is a gainer in a pecuniary point of view (and even this is not true except in peculiarly favorable circumstances,) the loss sustained elsewhere may more than counterbalance his gain. Peace spreads her pinions for flight. No longer can he eat his bread in quietness. Idleness grows on him, and pride, ignorance, resentment, profligacy, and cruelty are in the train. It is difficult to say, whether the master or the slave be the greater loser by this unnatural state of things. If our ample survey extend to the illimitable future we will be constrained to exclaim with our gentle Poet—

“ Dear to me as Freedom is,
 And in my heart’s just estimation prized,
 Above all price, I’d rather be myself the slave
 And wear the chains, than fasten them on him.”

The general principle, That *all* are obligated to sympathise with those who suffer, admits this modification, *Special cases create special obligations*. They who are exempt from the ills deplored and whose location enables them to extend a helping hand without difficulty, are under stronger than ordinary obligations. The moral world like the natural will be most thoroughly cultivated, when the field under each one’s vision is the object of special though not exclusive attention. To this modification of the general principle there is evident allusion in the text. The sufferer addresses her plaint to those who “pass by” to those who are in the vicinity, the witnesses of her sufferings.

Let us now apply the general principle to a particular case, that of *The People of Colour*. Of this class of persons there are nearly three millions within the limits of these United States. About three hundred thousand of them have a partial and nominal Freedom: *Partial*, in as much as the most of them enjoy but a portion of the rights of Freemen; and *nominal*, because prejudices and circumstances present insuperable obstacles even where no legal disabilities exist. The remainder of this population exceeding two and a half millions in number is held in slavery more or less abject in proportion to their numbers within any given limits. Is the African in our land a *sufferer*? The fact is questioned. Our “Declaration of Independence” to the contrary notwithstanding, some aver, that slaves are more happy than Freemen! would that the consolations they so highly prize were allotted them! The implement suited to convince them is that which the wise man alludes Prov. 26, 3.

The language in an after part of our text seems peculiarly appropriate in the lips of the African; “Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.” It may be questioned, whether for an equal length of time any people have experienced as severe sufferings. The

crime however of introducing slavery lies elsewhere than at our door. Our Legislatures solemnly protested against it. The *British Lion* from whose paw God in mercy has rescued us, threw the helpless and mangled African on our shores; and we merit no further blame than as we may evince a desire to perpetuate the evil.

In regard to a *well regulated* system of slavery which some contend for, we are about as sanguine as in regard to a well regulated Theatre. It is a "rara avis," a brood extinct, rather that has never existed except in fancy—a thing that "might be," or that "ought to be!" The one to be popular must adapt itself to taste, in other words, must minister to vice; slavery to be lucrative must be "well regulated," i.e. for degrading its victims. The spark of intellect in the slave must be smothered, all sense of justice and of Personal rights extinguished; if he be a *man* he is not fit for a slave! But let "slavery disguise itself as it will," let there be every alleviation possible in the nature of the case; let his lot be cast with a master heedful of his temporal and spiritual welfare, still these are but alleviations. He is yet a *slave*, deprived of Heaven's noblest earthly blessing. Nor can there be any guarantee of the continuance of his present comforts. His "dawn" may be speedily "overcast;" his new master may "neither fear God nor regard man."

"Is it nothing to us" that more than two millions among us are in a state of slavery? Yes my Christian hearers, they have claims on us.

As men, They are members of the same family, sprung from the "one Blood." "It matters not what complexion an Indian or an African sun may have impressed upon them," they are men, rational and immortal beings, possessed of feelings and rights and hopes and souls. Shall we remain unmoved while they are reckoned up as the beasts of the field, and the principal solicitude in regard to them is, How they shall best minister to avarice or serve as a prop to idleness? Must we be unconcerned while they are consigned to a hopeless servitude, entailed on children's children, until the Trump of God shall utter its horrors? They are our Brethren who must "soon appear with us before the judgment seat of Christ," and if the evils they labor under admit of a remedy, we may no longer be unconcerned.

As Freemen we are bound to sympathise with them. We have waded through blood to establish the principle, That "all men are by nature free and equal." For fifty years we have been "sitting under our own vine and under our own fig-tree," and are not disposed to admit the principle, that slavery is preferable to liberty. If told to "mind our *own* business, our answer is, That to dislike and to oppose slavery is emphatically the business of Freemen.

As Americans we are specially interested in the circumstances and

sorrows of the slave. We are the persons in the present instance who "pass by," the witnesses, and who have it in our power to disburden ourselves while benefitting them. Our Country suffers, and as lovers of our country we cannot be indifferent to what affects her standing and interests. She suffers in point of *Character*. It is discreditable to us to perpetuate an evil which we were the first to denounce. Our country suffers in point of *strength*. A slave population is not merely a subtraction from our resources, but is inevitably hostile to our interests, and willing on any emergency to attach themselves to our enemies. Force and craft may succeed for a time in keeping the slave in subjection. He may be shorn of his locks and deprived of his eyes; He may be kept back from power, and kept away from instruction; But in time he will gather strength, and force will compensate for want of knowledge. Like Samson he will find, though it be even by feeling, the pillars of Despotism, and will pull down the Temple though himself should perish in its ruins. The increase of a slave population must greatly exceed that of the Free. In our Southern States the increase is at least as two to one. The principal reason of the difference is this—The respectability and wealth of the master depends in a great measure on the number of his slaves; consequently he has every reason to defer and the slave every inducement to hasten marriage. The consequence will be, that in process of time the slaves must gain the ascendancy. The scenes of St. Domingo will be acted over in our land; the entire Southern section of our country will be an Aceldama. Our country suffers in point of *morals*. Industry, economy, temperance, forbearance, in a word the entire elements of moral and republican being and of true national glory, never have flourished, nor can, to any great extent where slavery prevails. It is a worm at the root of our national Tree which must materially retard if not wholly destroy its vigor. "The whole commerce between the master and the slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other* * * * *. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to the worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated and daily exercised in tyranny cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the Statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part and the *amor patriæ* of the other. For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be

any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labor for another; in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavors to the evanishment of the human race, or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him." Jefferson's notes on Virginia, Query 18th. The chapter is brief and highly eloquent.

2. Having investigated to some extent the evil deplored, we now proceed to the *Remedy* to be applied. Whatever is attempted towards the removal of this evil must operate *gradually*. The Body Politic like the animal economy adapts itself to habits however ruinous in their ultimate tendency; and an entire *instantaneous* abandonment of such habits subjects it to serious inconvenience. Where moral principle is not sacrificed, the wiser course is progressive amelioration and prospective abandonment. Where the marsh has been of long standing, its contents must be drained not disgorged, and the soil must be cultivated as the waters recede; The evils of slavery as we have seen are great; But both the slave population and the Free have been too long accustomed to it, to profit by immediate universal emancipation.— What is attempted must also operate *harmoniously*. We must have the consent if possible, and must pay due regard to the interests of the master himself. The object to be aimed at, is not to establish the rights of the slave in the abstract, but to secure to him the exercise of those rights; and in our government this cannot be effected but with the consent and through the agency of the master. How little has been effected by the other modes hitherto attempted. We mean not intentionally to undervalue the services of the Abolition Society in the cause of emancipation. Their motives are pure and their efforts untiring; But we profess ourselves sceptical as to the benefits to emancipation resulting from their labours. One has perhaps been benefitted, but at the expence we fear of twenty. The mind of the master at the South has been embittered, the cords have been tightened, the chains riveted. We are not indeed to expect, that so great a work will be accomplished without difficulty and opposition: But the opposition in the South to the abolition scheme is nearly universal, and exists on the part of those who see and regret and desire to remedy the evils of slavery. Why have the Abolitionists been so unsuccessful? Experience is the best Teacher; and in order to make rapid improvement, we must permit her to comment freely though kindly on past mistakes. The Abolitionists, in our judgment, have not impartially surveyed the entire field to be operated on. Their operations have not been adapted to existing circumstances. We need wisdom as well as valor. Our arrows must not strike upon the thick plate of the harness, but between the joints. What we aim at, is to do execution, and not to spear our-

selves by rushing direct upon the set pikes of our opponents. To be plain, it is better surely to obtain the gradual emancipation of the slaves, than to have much wrath and no fruit. This is the principal assumed by "The American Society for colonizing the Free people of Color." This Society has always disavowed any design of intermeddling with slavery directly or of removing the slave without the consent of the master. Its direct object is "the removal of those who are already Free, or who may be hereafter emancipated." But its indirect, though certain and happy result will be the emancipation of the slave. This Society has been in existence about 12 years. It has auxiliaries in almost every State in the Union: and I now invite your attention to a summary of the benefits which may be expected to result from its operations.

1. A Christian Colony planted on its shores promises, by the blessing of Providence, to civilize and evangelize *Africa*. This Colony now in the 8th year of its history consists of about 1500 inhabitants. It has trebled the Colony of Virginia though fostered by Royal bounty, and has already effected more towards the overthrow of the Slave-trade than the combined Fleets of Great Britain and America. These can operate only at a distance and by force; it operates on the spot, and by moral suasion. The chiefs of the surrounding tribes send their sons to be educated in the Colony. One of them from an influential Tribe is now in this country under the care of the Colonist* who occupies the seat behind me. The Colony also operates by what may be called commercial suasion. It is a place of deposit for those articles of European produce needed in the interior of Africa, which are commonly bartered for slaves. These it furnishes for the products of Africa: consequently the motives the natives have for carrying on the Slave-Trade can no longer exist where the influence of the Colony is felt. Already this infant settlement shelters a sea-coast of 200 miles which was before a principal mart for slaves. Meanwhile its caravans will carry the yet richer blessings of salvation: many will run to and fro: knowledge will be increased; Africa will be civilized and gospelized: The Slave-Trade will be extinguished; God our Saviour will be glorified; and the human family benefitted.

2. It proposes to ameliorate the condition of the people of Color who are already Free. It may be alleged, that this class of persons have the entire privileges of citizens. In this Commonwealth the colored man is not only entitled to vote, but is eligible to the very highest post of honor and profit. In answer to this we ask in turn, was ever a colored man actually *elected* to any post of profit or honor! Or is such an event likely to occur even if thousands of them possessed

* Rev. John Lewis, now on a visit to this country.

the requisite qualifications! Can they attain even to mediocrity of respectability and influence! We tarry not to ascertain why this distinction exists, or how far these feelings are consistent with moral and christian principle: we merely advert to the fact. Where any class of society find themselves excluded from an equality of intercourse and from participating in the honors and emoluments of society, their ruin is almost inevitable. Their strongest earthly stays to industry and uprightness of demeanour are removed. Our Sabbath Schools and infant schools and churches may do much to rescue thousands; But the mass will become idle and vicious in despite of every effort. The colored man is as susceptible of improvement as the white if he be placed under equally favorable influences. The remedy is, that he be removed from those moral disabilities he is now subject to. The Colonization Society, has provided an asylum on the North-western coast of Africa where he may enjoy every advantage. The territory is ample and may be enlarged to almost any extent. The climate is perfectly congenial with the African constitution, and the soil in the highest degree fertile. The results surpass the expectations of the most sanguine. A City (Monrovia, so called in honor of the Ex-president) is laid out, and lots in eligible situations are already valued at \$500. Two churches are erected, public buildings of various sorts: The children of the Colony are all day-scholars and most of them Sunday-scholars: Labor is high, commerce thrives at an almost unexampled rate. Many of the colonists are already wealthy, i. e. possessed of from \$5000 to \$10,000 each. The individual now present from the Colony assures me, that a more contented and happy community is not to be found. The benefit which would result to us, by the removal from these unfavorable influences, of those who now immensely augment our pauper and criminal list, is a consideration of no little importance; But I omit it for the present as too selfish in its aspects to be ranged under the Head of Sympathy. The Society has provided the asylum and affords to emigrants every facility for reaching it; and had it no other claims to patronage, this we deem of no little importance.

Finally. The Society will promote emancipation, and will effect as we believe finally, the extinction of Domestic Slavery. It will contract at first the edges and lighten the hue, and will wipe off at last the very vestiges of that broad black spot which yet defiles our national eschutcheon. Two obstacles to emancipation at present exist. The one is in the mind of the master, a conviction that his slave when emancipated in this country is not a gainer. The other obstacle is of a legal sort. The laws do not permit emancipation unless the person emancipated be removed. If the person liberated be removed to Africa

and placed in circumstances the most favorable to his happiness, both the moral impediment and the legal are removed: The mound is removed and the drain commences. Of those already sent to Africa at least one half were emancipated gratuitously for that purpose, who but for this opening would have yet been in a state of slavery. We hesitate not to say that hundreds of masters are waiting to liberate their slaves so soon as the Society has it in its power to transport them. A gentleman whose name is well known to the public refused \$50,000 for his slaves and is now training them for Liberia. In whatever light therefore we contemplate this Society either in relation to Africa, to the People of color already Free, or in relation to Domestic slavery, it merits our prayers and our patronage.

No doubt I trust now remains as to the claims on our sympathy, of suffering humanity in the general, or of bleeding Africa in particular. Let our contributions in some measure correspond, with the recollections of the anniversary we celebrate, with the number and magnitude of our personal and national privileges, and with the importance of the object claiming our patronage.

This is the anniversary of American Independence—the day on which was planted the Tree of Freedom under whose grateful shade we recline, whose abundant and wholesome fruit we share—a day in a word which will be held in joyful and thankful remembrance so long as Freemen breathe.

As to mercies; There is no people so highly favored as we, and there never has been. Babylon it is true had mightier bulwarks, Egypt a more fertile soil; Greece had more refinement, Rome had more power, Great Britain has more commerce: But the *aggregate* of blessing, religious, political, physical, has never been equalled. The same is true of this City. Tasting then as we do the enriching bounties of Heaven, and commemorating our Liberty as the most fertile channel of blessing, how inevitably must we sympathise with those who “with their eyes only see” but “come not nigh” to these mercies.

A parting word on the importance of the Institution claiming our patronage. It is difficult to conceive of stronger claims or of claims more diversified in their Character. As a *missionary* enterprise it has claims to patronage. The Colony at Liberia on the western coast of Africa is the most promising missionary station in the world. It affords full access in every direction to a continent of one Hundred and Fifty millions of souls who before the planting of this Colony seemed hopelessly debarred from christian approach. On the friend of science this Society has claims. The influence of the Colony will soon be felt over all western Africa. The votary of science may travel leisurely under its safeguard; the blanks in our present map of Africa

may soon be variegated with rivers and inland seas and Cities. To the friend of *Freedom*, a word. If this Colony be properly supported, the Slave-Trade will soon be known only as one of the abominations of other times, and the masters in our own land will say to their captives "go forth." *Lover of our country!* slavery if not remedied will prove our ruin. Already a line broad and deep divides between the slave States and the Free. Animosities exist in almost every form; and widely separated as these sections of our country are in habits and interests we can hope for nothing better, until a righteous Providence for our crime of withholding from others what he has freely bestowed on us, shall sweep this promising empire with the besom of destruction.

My hearers! I do not address those whose sympathies are absorbed on objects of ideal distress, on tragic exhibitions: But I address persons who weep with those who *really weep*; and who by abstaining from the dissipations of the day have it in their power to aid the wretched,