

A Plea for Africa.

SERMON

DELIVERED AT BENNET STREET CHURCH,

IN BEHALF OF THE

AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY,

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A PLEA FOR AFRICA.

Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God. Ps. lxxviii. 31.

THE rise and fall of nations are sublime subjects for moral contemplation. The fabric of empire is composed of mind as well as matter; and when the revolutions of destiny are permitted by Providence to encroach on nations, and resolve them into their original elements, the component parts still inherit the principles of vitality. Like those blocks of living marble dug up from Grecian ruins, these scattered fragments may be collected in some future day to build a nobler temple of dominion.

History warns the powerful to tread lightly on the oppressed. Let armies as countless as the locusts which overspread Egypt in the day of God's anger, pass over any given territory, tracing their march with the wildest havoc, and sweeping the bare soil to its very dust with the desolating cannon,—still let not the oppressors triumph. In some secret cavern of the earth—in some untravelled glen—in some sunless gorge, a few miserable beings

may shelter themselves until the blast of war has overblown. These may be the fathers of a great people, whose first work, in the great drama of Providence, may be that of a bloody retribution.

“Let not the oppressor triumph”—says a great voice from heaven. God abhors the proud. The sighing of the prisoner comes up before him. The robe of sackcloth is as beautiful in his eyes as the gorgeous attire of palaces—and the human form, furrowed with the task-master’s whip, is as acceptable to its Maker, as the pampered and delicately beautiful countenance of him whom the winds of heaven have not been permitted to visit too roughly.

The analogies of all conquered nations warrant these introductory remarks. The conquered have in their turn become the conquerors—the slaves have become the masters—the harp hung on the drooping willows has lost its moaning sound, and in the renovated hand of its possessor has poured out the martial song of the triumphing trumpet. What sight more deeply affecting to the sympathies of humanity could have been witnessed than those spectacles of earth’s deepest sorrow so often seen in the luxuriant vales of Palestine. when God had given up his chosen people into the hands of their enemies? The sacked and smoking streets of the dear Jerusalem—oh, could they remain there! would afford the miserable some mementoes of former happiness. The eye red with weeping might rest on some of the mighty stones of the first temple, or on some lonely monument crowned with a name dear to Judah, strong and immortal in death. But no!—away over hill and valley, over brook and meadow—away over mountain and river these exiles, forlorn and weary and broken hearted, must go, while over them hangs the strong probability, if not certainty, that the beautiful places that had once known them should know them no more. Prophet and King, Prince and Counsellor, the care-worn man of war and the drooping virgin, chained together in

ranks, with feeble age and infancy along, darkened thy hills, Judea, more than once with their mournful procession, formed under the eye, and urged along by the spear of the Assyrian. No song is heard among these thousands; the inconceivable weight of national sorrow stifles and hushes the very groan—tears only, sad and hopeless ones, fall in silent showers on a soil soon destined to become sand under the blast of desert winds. Far north—to the cold waters of Babylon—go sit you down and mourn—yet not in quietness; the task-masters scourge shall resound in your ears; heavy burdens shall press you down; your delicately-formed young men shall stand as menials in the courts of strange monarchs—and they that carry you away captive shall require of you mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

This picture of deep and immense national sorrow is one of truth—a retrospective one, copied from the pages of God's word. Yet a land so swept by the tempest of war, and so emptied of its dwellers, has, after a lapse of years, a solitary succession of winter and spring and summer and autumn, voiceless, desolate and dreary, heard again a turtle-dove raise its sweetly melancholy voice—and next an old man, who could just remember the day of the spoiler when he was a little boy, with tottering step, after a captivity of seventy years, traces with his staff the outline of city, temple and tomb, and calls upon the Lord God of Israel until the old echoes awake again in the hoary mountains, and beat against the brazen heavens. Then comes a virgin along the valley, and as she lifts her song and takes her timbrel, the spring breathes over the land; the verdure breaks forth; the rose blushes beneath the rock; Kedron murmurs once more over its shining pebbles; the valley of Jehoshaphat is burdened with unwonted exuberance; Bethlehem seems to smile above the ramparts of white rocks, and Jerusalem gathers around her stately form the clouds of power, while the crown of dominion begins to settle on her brow.

After these views, I introduce the doctrine of my text, which is:—*That while no nation can be reduced so low, without entire extermination as not to leave hope of a future renovation, every nation must infallibly rise in power and glory, to whom the mighty promise of God hath extended.*

It was the promise of Jehovah that brought his poor afflicted people from Egypt, where they had suffered the terrible evils of slavery. It was his promise that led the wanderers through a dry and thirsty land; and made their armies, when they at length invaded the land of Canaan, like the unbounded waves of the great sea, dreadful in their overflowing strength. A supernatural power walks abroad through that host where God's banner, all unseen to the faithless eye of the multitude, floats heavily and broadly before the undimmed eye of faith and heavenly confidence.—“*In this sign, I conquer,*” said Constantine, when a fiery cross was suspended in heaven—and thus, when the Christian finds the promise of God pledged to the fulfilment of any event he places all his confidence there and acts as though the event had passed and become one of the records of history, or was even then passing before his eyes in the full tide of its accomplishment. Faith has a power unknown to earth; it rends the heavens, and takes fast hold of uncreated strength; it uncovers the hiding place of futurity, and knows something of those great dispensations which are meted out in the strong promises and threatenings of the Holy One of Israel. When God has threatened, in years long gone by, to exterminate any nation and blot the last trace of their lineage from the face of the earth, the christian is not seen, like the incredulous *Séavant* of modern times, raking in the dust of Tyre and Sidon, sacking the hollow and tenantless tombs to find one descendant of perished empire, to mock the promise and impeach the threatening of “Him who cannot lie.” Where God

has spoken his sweeping judgements against a nation, none need expect to find a drop of patrial blood in the veins of any one on the bosom of the earth. The explorer of long perished empires, in his frail boat on those purple waters where Tyre once sat down the "Queen of Nations," may look into the deep and find its bottom paved with broken columns, the carved and lusted marble of her day of pride; but let him ask the wandering Arab, or the fierce Beduoin, or the solitary fisherman who dries his net upon the wave-worn rocks, if they can trace their descent to a city which centuries ago frowned above these tossing waves in the sublimity of power—they shall shake their heads in astonishment, and answer—no. For their descent they will point far eastward to the desert. They know not the name of those sea-washed ruins, and have no tradition of departed empire to chant in hollow cadence to the beating of wild billows.

The promise and the threatening of Heaven are alike certain in their fulfilment. Where now are the proud millions of Babylon? Where her Kings—her hundreds of provinces—her brazen gates—her lofty towers, and golden palaces? They are no where to be found. Wind and water, war and earthquake have raged against the very earth on which its corner-stone was planted, until darkness and doubt brood over the bleak and desolate site. Perhaps this wonder of the world stood here, where the reedy sinuous Tigris steals along through a plain of boundless prospect—or perhaps the spot is indicated yonder by mounds of enormous bricks—or still farther on, where shaggy furze and stunted shrubbery hide from human eye the den of the dragon, and the retreat of the desert serpent. There is no descendant of Babylonian Kings, of whom we may ask where the temple of Belus stood, or the awful city lifted up its battlements. Yet of a poor, peeled, despised nation, who once were slaves to Babylon the Great, hundreds of thousands now may be found scattered over the provinces of the earth. With them lives the

remembrance of ancient days, and the loved name of their own Jerusalem. Preserved by the promise, and obliterated by the threatening of Heaven's Majesty, I hold these two nations up before you, as spectacles of solemn import. The one indeed, is the shadowy, unsubstantial, ghostlike form of a deceased empire, slain by the curse of the Almighty;—the other, although scarred by the descending lightning, bleached by the bitter north winds, or scorched by the Siroc of the desert, is still a mighty form, through which a warm life-blood gushes, and to whom, eternal blessings that shall blend earth and heaven in a measureless flood of glory, are about to come through the fulfilling promises.

I have lingered enough in the ancient world to fix the great truth in the minds of this respected audience, of God's faithfulness in the fulfilment of his national promises and national threatenings. The day—the high occasion—the voice of liberty, echoing from the thousand hills of this favored land—and, alas! the groans of millions, heard low and smothered, like the first moanings of an earthquake, call me to the momentous considerations of our own times. I come weeping and deprecating the wrath of Him, who goeth forth, at times, through the earth, making inquest for blood, and terribly shaking the guilty nations. Spare, Lord, in thy hot displeasure. Let the dark wing of vengeance linger awhile in the already gathered cloud. Let the red sword rest longer still in its scabbard. Frown not upon this chosen people—for thy frown is death—extermination.—Thy loving kindness is better than life!

Over against the southern part of our continent, divided from Europe by the Mediterranean sea, another continent stretches along, holding us in equipoise, like a weight in the opposite scale of the balance. This should be called the *Monumental Continent*, as it is a land whose every promontory, and every speaking, murmuring river testify of wrong, of outraged hu-

manity, of nature bleeding in immense agony through millions of palpitating pores, and staining every land and discoloring every sea with gory blood. What hath Africa done, that her children should blacken beneath a heavier, more lasting curse, than ever rested on any other nation! What hath she done to thee, great America, that thou holdest her sons, her daughters, her feeble infants in bondage, and refusest to let them go? "*Carthage must be destroyed,*" was the Roman motto, when her Scipios drove the legions of Hannibal from the vine-covered hills of Italy, back again to Africa—but the motto of the Christian world against every son and daughter of Africa, has breathed a fiercer and less tender spirit. To erase from being, is to inflict but a momentary pang—while to enslave generation after generation, from the earliest dawn of life's clouded day, to its dark going down, is to entail torture in such a fearful shape, as to make it bear no imaginary similitude to everlasting wo! Oh could we this day assemble the enslaved sons of Africa! bring forward the millions free America holds in bondage, alike regardless of human or divine right—make the Indian islands give up their slaves, and Southern America yield her's—place them where the cool winds of heaven might fan their throbbing foreheads in the amphitheatre of your broadest valley; for their numbers would throng a wide extent of territory—and there speak peace to all their troubles! We would tenderly say—Bleeding Africans! Your God remembers you. He did not account of you as dust trodden down to be carried away by every passing wind. He did not leave you without a promise. The mighty pulsations of joy could not be full in the mind of uncreated benevolence until, in the deep communions of His spirit with man, He had revealed Africa stretching forth her hands—her *hands*—for alas! she hath worn manacles, and could not lift up her iron-eaten sinews to the avenger of na-

tions! Oh, Africa! this is the broad charter of thy coming freedom—the promise of the Everlasting God. When human charters, that have attracted the admiration of the nations, shall cease to convey freedom in their tenure, thy charter shall be found fresh and undisputed in that book, so magnificently described by Pollock in his “Course of Time” as being the

“Most wondrous book! bright candle of the Lord!
 Star of eternity! the only star
 By which the bark of man could navigate
 The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss
 Securely;—only star which rose on time,
 And, on its dark and troubled billows, still,
 As generation drifting swiftly by,
 Succeeded generation, threw a ray
 Of Heaven’s own light, and to the hills of God,
 The everlasting hills, pointed the sinner’s eye.”

The quenchless fire of the Ethiopian eye, the tireless vigor of the African frame, the ardent temperament of nature, the maturity of the affections in that fervid clime—all, all forbid, equally with the glorious promise of the Maker of all worlds, that Africa should be lost—should ring no pæan to the praise of Almighty goodness, when the harmony of the redeemed nations goes up from earth to heaven. Who will dare chain a noble, a King, to whom empires are hastening to do homage? Yet, O Africa, this nation of freemen have enslaved thy children and thy Kings!

The day is past, when any attempt may be expected to vindicate slavery on philosophical or religious principles. It is a horrible wrong, unjustifiable, impeached by every noble feeling that throbs the bosoms of the collective race of humanity. Is it possible that the constituted authorities of a nation so highly favored as this—so exalted to heaven in point of privilege—should feel a single doubt as to a proper and most imperious object for the appropriation of national revenue, when the overflowing treasury of the nation should demand a legislation for the appropriation of such super abundance! The war-ships of our heaven-delivered land—our eagle banner of victory—the one to convey to their native shores, and the other to wave over

and shelter the long exiled sons of Ethiopia, would present the noblest image of moral grandeur that ever reflected on the glassy bosom of the great deep. After the national debt shall have been discharged, it will not be beyond the resources of America to relieve and return one fourth of a million of slaves annually, with safety to themselves, and most especially glorious to the country that shall institute such operations, to repair the measureless extent of wrong that has been inflicted, for generations almost by the common consent of mankind, on an unoffending people.

I need not here repeat what has already been effected by the American Colonization Society. The transactions of this institution are known to all. They are so full of benevolence and the hallowed impulses of Heaven's own mercy, that one might, with the propriety of truth, compare its radiant influences to a rainbow, insufferably bright, spanning the sombre clouds of human wrong, that have accumulated on the horizon of our country's prosperity, and beating back, with calm and heavenly power, the blackening storm that always threatens, in growling thunders, a heavy retribution.

“One of the earliest acts of the Society was to despatch a competent agent to Africa, to explore its coasts and the countries bordering upon them, and to select a suitable spot for the establishment of the contemplated colony. The Society was eminently fortunate in the choice of its agent, as it has been, generally, in those whom it subsequently engaged in its service. A selection was finally made of a proper district of country, a purchase was effected of it from the native authorities, to which additions have been made, as the growing wants of the colony, actual or anticipated, required. The country so acquired, embraces large tracts of fertile land, capable of yielding all the rich and varied products of the tropics, possesses great commercial advantages, with an extent of sea-coast from 150 to 200 miles, and enjoys a salubrious climate, well adapted to the Af-

rican constitution, and not so fatal to the whites, as many sickly parts of the United States.”

Within that district of country, the society founded its colony, under the denomination of Liberia, established towns, laid off plantations for the colonists, and erected military works for their defence. Annually, and as often as the pecuniary circumstances of the Society would admit, vessels from the ports of the United States have been sent to Liberia, laden with emigrants, and with utensils, provisions, and other objects, for their comfort. “No difficulty has been experienced in obtaining as many colonists as the means of the Society were competent to transport. They have been found, indeed, altogether inadequate to accommodate all who were willing and anxious to go.”

“The colony contains, at this time, about sixteen hundred inhabitants, emigrants from the United States; the colonists, became acclimated and healthy—have erected comfortable houses for themselves and families, and necessary public edifices, and are pursuing diligently and thriftily their private vocations, cultivating farms, following mechanical trades, or engaging in commerce with the natives of the interior and along the coast. As a community, it has acquired and maintains a character and influence with the tribes or nations around it; preserves order and quiet within; protects each in his rights of person and of property; has its courts, its militia, schools for the children of the colonists and of the natives, a printing-press, a newspaper, public library, churches, and frequent and periodical performances of divine service—in short, it presents, in a land of ignorance and depravity, of Paganism and Mahomedanism, the interesting and bright exhibition of an intelligent, moral and christian community.”

It must be seen in this review, hasty indeed and inadequate to the magnitude of the subject, that although wonders have been accomplished by the Society, its efforts notwithstanding are not sufficiently powerful to diminish the evil to any great ex-

tent. The Society is worthy of all praise, as it embodies nearly all the energetic feeling that exists in our nation on the subject of slavery. But the Herculean task is imposed on the wrong shoulders. Take it from those of spontaneous benevolence and philanthropy, and place it on those of power and national resources, and the feeble wrestlings of an infant with the monster slavery, would give place to the secure and effectual operations of full-grown manhood. It may be assumed as an undeniable position that the expenditures of ransoming and establishing the two millions of our slave population on their native continent would be less than the expenditures of a war that should have for its object the extermination of two millions of human beings. It costs less to save than to destroy.

CHRISTIAN AMERICA! I must reluctantly, close my plea in behalf of enslaved millions, by charging home upon the Capitol where the emblematic eagle spreads his broadest, boldest wing—upon every legislative hall in the slave-holding states—upon magistrate and people—upon army and navy—upon plain, mountain and river, the deep and as yet irreversible stain of slavery. The Genius of Columbia as she surveys from the loftiest peak of the Alleghanies, the azure field where the stars are sprinkled, has also in prospect the nebulous vapors that roll up heavily from the slave-cultured earth. The eye of HEAVEN is brighter than her's of the "stripes and stars"—and Heaven is all ear to record every extorted groan. The solemn demand in the high Chancery of Heaven against the beloved country of my adoption and tenderest love, will not be the price of what Africa now is—but of what she would have been, if her millions who have miserably perished in inhospitable climes like branches rent from the parent tree, had remained on the shores of her Gambia, her Niger, and had from the genial influences of peaceful commerce, and the renovations of civilization, surpassed the grandeur of her once renowned empires. It is the ghost of a mighty people that points the fleshless hand

towards America—then, solemnly raising it towards heaven, says—“*I will meet thee there*—not at Philippi, in night and battle agony, but at the bar of God, under the blaze of the judgment fires, just when the highest hills in heaven are reddening with the united flames of Africa and America. I will meet thee there, to ask for my kings and queens, my sons and daughters, my cities, my national renown—and for my eternal salvation !”

Slowly, like one stiffened in death, the accusing spectre has vanished. It is for us, my beloved countrymen,—it is for us to lay this terrible spirit forever, that he accuse us not at a moment when all that have breathed on earth—“the world’s gray fathers” and the latest born shall be witnesses of our disgrace—when the hollowness of our boast of freedom shall provoke “the jeers of the world.”