An

ADDRESS

to the

NEW YORK AFRICAN SOCIETY,

for

MUTUAL RELIEF,

delivered

In the Universalist Church,

January 2, 1809.

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By WILLIAM HAMILTON

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New York

Printed in the Year

1809
First.....The Society moved in procession from the African School Room to the Church.

Second.....The services of the house commenced with a Solemn Address to Almighty God, by Mr. James Varick, Chaplain.

Third.....An appropriate Hymn, sung under the direction of Mr. George Collins.

Fourth.....The Constitution read, by Mr. Adam Carman, Assistant Secretary.

Fifth.....The Address delivered by Mr. William Hamilton, President.

Sixth.....An appropriate Hymn.

Seventh.....A collection made to defray the expenses of the day.

Eighth.....A Hymn.

Ninth.....The services of the day concluded with a Solemn Prayer by the Chaplain.
To Mr. William Hamilton.

Sir,

The Address which was delivered by you, on the 2d inst. having afforded us the highest satisfaction, we feel it our duty to express to you the lively sense of gratitude which we feel on that account.

We beg that you will therefore accept of our most sincere thanks, and that you will honor us by suffering a publication of that valuable and useful work.

In behalf of the New-York African Society, for Mutual Relief,

PETER WILLIAMS, Jun. V.P.

New-York, Jan. 9, 1839.

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To the New-York African Society.

Gentlemen,

Your expressions of satisfaction in the Address delivered to you on the 2d inst. does much pleasure to my feelings, and your request for the publication of the address is a higher compliment paid me than I expected to receive; I shall, with the utmost cheerfulness, consent to the publication thereof, because I ever wish to act in conformity to the society's will.

I remain, Gentlemen, with much respect,

Yours &

WILLIAM HAMILTON.
The following Hymns were composed by Peter Williams, Jun. and Sung on the occasion.

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HYMN I

To the Eternal Lord,
By saints on earth ador'd
And saints above.
Let us glad honours rear,
In strains of praise and pray'r
His glorious name declare,
The God of Love.

When the oppressor's hands
Bound us in iron bands
Thou didst appear.
Thou saw our weeping eyes,
And list'ning to our cries,
In mercy didst arise,
Our hearts to cheer.

Thou didst the trade o'erthrow,
The source of boundless woe,
The world's disgrace,
Which ravag'd Afric's coast,
Enslaved its greatest boast,
A happy numerous host,
A harmless race.

In different parts of earth
Thou called the HullaME forth,
Our rights to plead,
Our griefs to mitigate,
And to improve our state,
An object truly great,
Noble indeed.

Thou didst their labours bless,
And gave them great success,
In Freedom's cause.
They prov'd to every sight
By truth's unerring light,
All men are free by right
Of Nature's laws.
They to insure our bliss,
Taught us that happiness
Is from above.
That it is only found
On this terrestrial ground,
Where virtuous acts abound
And Mutu'l Love.

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MAIN II

The Sov'reign ruler of the skies
To bless the human kind,
Implanted in the breast of man,
A sympathetic mind.
Hence we, participating woe
Each other's griefs alloy,
And by reciprocating bliss
We swell the tide of joy.

Instructed thus by Nature's God,
The good and great first cause;
We find that Fellowship and Love
Stand high in Nature's Laws.
As brethren are to brethren near,
So let us be combin'd:
Knit by the bonds of Mutu'l Love
In social compact joined.

With unremitting tender care,
Let us the sick attend;
Defend from want the fatherless,
And prove the Widow's friend.
So shall we cheer affliction's night,
And soothe the fiercest grief;
So shall we ease the aching heart,
By MUTUAL RELIEF.

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My Brethren and Fellow Members of the New-York African Society, for Mutual Relief, I congratulate you on this first anniversary of a day, which has produced an event, that for its importance to Africans and descendants, stands unrivaled; an event that long and arduous have been the exertions of many philanthropic characters to bring forth; an event that every benevolent mind rejoices to see. This day we are met with hearts big with gratitude, to celebrate an act of congress of the United States of America, which for its justice and humanity, outstrips any that have ever passed that honorable body; by an act bearing date March the second, eighteen hundred and seven, and which became an effectual law, January the first, eighteen hundred and eight, that species of commerce designated the slave trade was abolished.

This abominable traffic, the most execrable and inhuman that ever was practised, had been carried on for olympiads and centuries, and the tide of misery flowing through this channel, had arisen to an incalculable height. The wretched victims of the trade were not only deprived of life's first and most valuable jewel and best blessing, their liberty, not only were they torn from their native land, and all they held
delightful and dear; but they were likewise doomed to pass through a train of as severe inflicted miseries as could be devised, such as at the bare recital of, the heart of sensibility sickens.

The country of our forefathers might truly be called paradise, or the seat of ease and pleasure, until the foul fiends entered - fiends did I say? yes, the name is too sacred an appellation for the base ravagers of the African coast: Until the man-stealing crew entered, peace may be said to be within her borders, and contentment in her dwelling, but the dealers in human flesh not contented with setting the nations on to fierce, bloody and incessant contests - not contented with making Africa groan from its sea line to its centre; but as if to be the more immediate instruments of cruelty, they obtain the captives taken in war, they kidnap thousands, they sever them from all their enjoyments! handcuff, brand, chain, clog, and scourge them, but why do we enumerate, who can recount half their sufferings, where is the artist that can delineate a full picture of their miseries - their wretched situation baffles description; let us then withdraw from, and at once acknowledge our inability to the task; but we stand confounded at the reflection, that there should be found any of the human family so lost to their nature and the fine feelings of man, as to commit, unprovokedly commit, such acts of cruelty on an unoffending part of the human family.
But my Brethren, however this may be, it is for us to rejoice that the cause or source from whence those miseries sprung are removing, it is for us to rejoice not only that the sources of slavery are drying away, but that our condition is fast ameliorating, it is for us to rejoice, that science has begun to bud with our race, and soon shall our tree of arts bear its full burthen of rich and nectarious fruit, soon shall that contumelious assertion of the proud, be proved false, to wit, that Africans do not possess minds as ingenuus as other men.

The proposition has been advanced by men who claim a pre-eminence in the learned world, that Africans are inferior to white men in the structure both of body and mind; the first member of this proposition is below our notice; the reasons assigned for the second are, that we have not produced any poets, mathematicians, or any to excel in any science whatever; our being oppressed and held in slavery forms no excuse, because, say they, among the Romans, their most excellent artists and greatest scientific characters were frequently their slaves, and that these on account of their ascendant abilities, arose to superior stations in the state; and they exultingly tell us that these slaves were white men.

My Brethren, it does not require a complete master to solve this problem, nor is it necessary, in order like good logicians to meet this argument, that we should know
which is the major and the minor proposition, and the middle and extreme terms of syllogism, he must be a wilful novice and blind intentionally, who cannot unfold this enigma.

Among the Romans it was only necessary for the slave to be manumitted, in order to be eligible to all the offices of state, together with the emoluments belonging thereto; no sooner was he free than there was open before him a wide field of employment for his ambition and learning and abilities with merit, were as sure to meet with their reward in him, as in any other citizen. But what station above the common employment of craftsmen and labourers would we fill, did we possess both learning and abilities; is there ought to enkindle in us one spark of emulation: must not he who makes any considerable advances under present circumstances be almost a prodigy: although it may be true we have not produced any to excel in arts and sciences, yet if our situation be properly considered, and the allowances made which ought to be, it will soon be perceived that we do not fall far behind those who boast of a superior judgment, we have produced some who have claimed attention, and whose works have been admired, yes in despight of all our embarrassments our genius does sometimes burst forth from its incumbrance. Although the productions of Philis Whately may not possess the requisitions necessary to stand the test of nice criticism, and she may be denied a stand in the rank of poets, yet does she possess
some original ideas that would not disgrace the pen of the best poets. -- Without naming others who have appeared in the interim of her and the present time, I hold in my hand a specimen of African genius; African I term it because in the position that the present argument is offered, it makes no kind of difference whether the man is born in Africa, Asia, Europe or America, so long as he is progenizied from African parents.

This book contains an introductory Address and an oration on the abolition of the slave trade, delivered in the African Church, the first of January eighteen hundred and eight, by two young men whom you are generally acquainted with: the address or frontispiece to the work is a flow of tasteful language, that would do credit to the best writers; the oration or primary work is not a run of excentric vaguries, not now a sudden gust of passionate exclamation, and then as sudden calm and an inerntness of expression, but a close adherence to the plane of the subject in hand, a warm and animating description of interesting scenes, together with an easy graceful style. If we continue to produce specimens like these, we shall soon put our enemies to the blush, abashed and confounded they shall quit the field, and no longer urge their superiority of souls.

You my Brethren have formed yourselves into an association for the purpose of protecting each other from
indigency, as far as in your power lies, conscious that deep poverty and distress is the bane of improvement, conscious too that our advancement in every point of view, depends much on our being united in social bodies.

Man in the abstract is subject to almost every inconvenience that can be named, his hand is feeble, his sight short, his movements slow; but united with his fellow man he is strong, he is vigorous, he turns the channel of mighty rivers, throws down huge mountains, removes thick forests, builds great cities, pushes on the great machine of trade, his arm is next omnipotent, not only so he is formed for social life, the gloomy hermit we pity, and the snarling cynic we despise, these are men who appear to be rubbed off the list of men, they appear to have lost the fine fibres of the mind, on which it depends for expansion and growth, they appear to be sunk into a state of insensibility, of the extreme happiness growing out of social life.

But my Brethren, mere socialities is not the object of our formation, but to improve the mind, soften the couch of the sick, to administer an elixir to the afflicted, to befriend the widow, and become the orphan's guardian, and is this not a noble employment, can there be found a better, you ought to be proud to be engaged in such an exercise, it is employment of this kind, that raises the man up to the emperium, or highest heaven. -- But in order that an association of this kind may appear to better
advantage, let us take a view of the situation of man, precarious indeed, subject to continual vicissitudes—
This day strong and active, to-morrow feeble and deciipped, to-day healthful and vigourous, to-morrow lifeless and entra-omboed. See the rich and lordly owner of a manor, now rolling in his guilded chariot, or now sitting beneath his stately dome, surrounded by his wife and children, his hall crowded with a retinue of servants, his fine wrought board covered with costly viands and full flowing bowls of delicious cordials, his walls revivating with the loud cheer of convivial friends, his sun of bliss shines clear, not a cloud to intercept its rays, but suddenly storms and tempest arise, and thick clouds overspread his horizon, he is driven as by a torrent of misfortune, and as by a whirlwind his riches all flee away, and with them, as is common, flee his friends; he is turned from his stately dwelling to give room to some hard hearted creditor, and from a reverse of fortune, now takes up his abode in some low hovel; But does the scene of distress close here, he must not only suffer the mortification of his loss of property, friends, and pleasures, but he must likewise be subject to affliction and death, pale sickness astrides him, he is rid until his enfeebled body can sustain the pressure no longer, then death, but oh! with what horror, what ghastly horror does he attack the man, Oh! Death thou cruel monster, thou dost not appear half so dreadful when in the field of battle, where blood and carnage spread the
ground, and where from the mouth of ordinance as from a
vulcano fierce flaming fire issues forth, spreading
destruction in every direction, or where the battle
pushed on by furious leaders to the foul entrance of a
fortress kept by tube behind tube, and thou Oh! Death,
standing in dread array forvarming the presumptuous in-
vader of his fate; or when the furious tempest howls,
and the angry ocean convulsed to its low foundation,
swells and lifts its head as to make war with heaven,
and the fierce lightnings vivid flashes, darting from the
clouds, accompanied with the loud roar of thunder, the
affrighted mariner in his crazy bark, dashed about from
wave to wave, expecting momentarily the sea to be his tomb. --
No thou fell monster, thou dost not appear half so terri-
ble in scenes like these, as to the man about to be torn
from his wife and children by thy cruel fangs; at thy
approach his eyes start inward, his blood retreats back
to its reservoir, an icy coldness takes possession of the
vacuated parts of his body, he heaves a languishing look
at his family, and with his cold quivering lips, feebly
exclaims, oh! my family, most merciful God, what shall be
the fate of my family, gracious heaven protect my wife —
my children!

But my Brethren are scenes of distress confined to
the rich made indigent by misfortune, are they the only
depressed by affliction; happy indeed were this the case,
would it be for the human family, but the wretched of
this class stand as a mere cypher compared with the poor
of mankind, the labouring part of the community, who de-
pend on their daily earnings for their subsistence, each
winter brings to these its anxieties, but let affliction
attack them when it may, it is sure to bring with it
additional sorrows; here then arises the necessity of
societies, to lessen the miseries of mankind, to partici-
pate in their sorrows and to reciprocate joy and happiness
as extensively as their MUTUAL endeavours at RELIEF will
admit.

Happy for these United States that the spirit of
Liberty, improvement, and philanthropy, pervades the people;
societies for the purpose of spreading useful knowledge,
diffusing virtuous principles, or for ameliorating the
condition of man, are amply encouraged; this state, and
particularly this city, has produced its full proportion
of useful institutions; without naming a long list of ex-
cellent associations, I shall take the liberty to mention
one to which we are extremely indebted, as Africana, and their
descendants, I here mean the Kanu-Mission Society: this
institution was established in or about the year one
thousand seven hundred and eighty-four, by a number of
gentlemen of the first respectability, who were strongly
attached to the principles of Liberty and the Rights of Man;
they, possessing the true spirit of patriotism, felt for
the honor of their country, they saw that while the syren song of liberty and equality was sung through the land, that the groans of the oppressed made the music very discordant, and that America's fame was very much tarnished thereby; they were not contented with barely planning the means of the emancipation of large numbers of the enslaved but they likewise established a seminary of learning, and so spirited were they in our cause, that in the year one thousand eight hundred, when, from the inadequacy of their funds to the accumulated expenses of the society, they had incurred a debt of twelve hundred dollars and upwards, the trustees of their school pledged themselves to each other to raise the just mentioned debt, by subscription, or defray the same from their own private funds. — Thou source of Benevolence, and first and main spring of all good actions, be not jealous of us, but next to thee, we owe to these men our highest tribute of gratitude, but to them as to thee, we can render nought but unprofitable thanks.

My Brethren, many and repeated attempts have been made in this city, to establish societies of various kinds among the people of colour, but whether from the impolicy of the plans, or our unripeness for those institutions, we will not say, but they have always soon perished or dwindled away to a number so small as scarcely to deserve the name of society; whether this will be the case with this institution or not, remains for futurity to say, but if we may
judge from appearances, we shall predict that its standing shall be long, and that the rays of its beneficence shall make the hearts of thousands of yet unborn members dilate by its cheering effulgence and effusions of benefits in seasons of sickness and distress.

This society has not been formed three quarters of a year, and the number of its members exceed by three times the number of any civil institution yet attempted among us.

The principles on which this institution is founded are congenial not only with the wish, but likewise with the interest of its members; its principles forbid the idea of its members becoming beggars to the society for relief in time of sickness, but it is the pledge, the agreement, and the duty of this institution to pay the sums specified by its Constitution to its sick members, and the widows, and orphans of deceased members who have stood as such the limited time. So long as the principles of this society remain unchanged, so long shall its limbs remain unwithered and its trunk uncorrupted, its boughs shall never refuse to bear fruit for want of nutriment in the tree; never can you, my brethren, be so infatuated as to shake off this institution, except by the over persuasion of some foul daemon. Guard against the enemy, for enemies we have that would make merry at our overthrow; but above all things let our meetings be conducted with order and propriety, let order be our guide and peace our way mark; let friendship and good will
be our atmosphere; be attentive to the sick members, never let it justly be said that we assumed the name of Mutual Relief for nought.

To you, my Brethren, the Standing Committee, let me address myself. Your's is truly an exalted station in which there is much confidence and trust reposed; with you rests the credit of this society, her fame shall spread through your vigilance, it is for you to immortalize her name by your active attention to the duties imposed on you; be then attentive to the sick members, and the widows and orphans of deceased members. -- If there should be found any one among you who should refuse to do his duty, let him be set aside as an unfit character, to have such high trust reposed in him; but surely, my Brethren, there is not one of you who would be so forgetful of his honor and the solemn pledge he has given of the strict performance of the duties assigned him.

The other Officers are no less bounden and no less responsible, and in them is reposed equal trust, and from them is expected an equal attention to their duty.

Let us all be united, my Brethren, in rearing this edifice - steady to our several departments - and soon shall be raised a wide spreading dome that shall stand the admiration and praise of succeeding generations, and on its front shall be eternally engraven

Mutual Interest,
Mutual Benefit,
And Mutual Relief.