

AN
ORATION,
DELIVERED
ON JANUARY 1, 1823
IN BETHEL CHURCH:
ON THE
Abolition of Slave Trade.
BY
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PREFACE.

As this address is likely to come out to public view, I beg leave to make the following observations. And here I would solicit the exercise of candour and indulgence to the author of this feeble address. I am sensible that I ventured on no easy task, and it might well have exercised the courage and wisdom of the most aged and experienced speaker to have delivered the truths as I have done, in such a manner as not to expose himself to reproach, on one, or the other quarter.

What I have believed to be truth in my secret soul, I have avowed openly on the house top, without reserve, and without palliation. I am well aware that I have not been sufficiently careful to recommend to my hearers, by softening the severity of its aspect. Occupied wholly with the importance and dignity of the subject, I have neglected to conciliate that esteem for the speaker which is necessary, I believe, to gain the attention of his hearers, being I bent all my strength to enforce what I had to advance, and to be felt as well as heard; I may for aught I know, have been betrayed into a degree of

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asperity, but having never before used my pen in this way; I have derived no aid from those decencies of address to which he is accustomed, who is practiced in the habit of writing.

But before I take my leave, may I not submit to such as are the avowed friends of the Africans, the following enquiries; is it possible that a feeble mote like me can obscure the sun; shall the faults in this call more loudly for censure than the miseries of millions call for your pity and relief; will one truth in this be falsified because it is written by me a person of colour?—I trust not.

ORATION.

It is with no small degree of pleasure that I present myself before you this day. I think you will agree with me, that the most experienced speaker, might justly tremble in addressing you, after the display of talents you have so frequently witnessed on these occasions; together with the short notice I have had to prepare.

Among the events which frequently appear in the history of nations, to dignify, and adorn their character, and shed over them a ray of genuine greatness and glory; the abolition of the slave trade must be admitted to a conspicuous place.

What kind of act was it? I answer, it was one of the purest offerings, ever borned by lawgivers to the altar of Justice. Yes if I may be allowed the expression, the most acceptable tribute which legislative power could pay at the shrine of mercy.

Permit me for a moment to examine the origin of African slavery, together with the mighty range of mischief in a moral, and political point of view, and continually resulting from it. In the fifteenth century, the boldness of enterprise, and improving skill in navigation, among the Portuguese led by accident to the discovery of the continent of Africa. Gonzales Zarco, Tris-

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tan Vaz, two gentlemen of the house-hold of Henry the 4th were sent out, and instructed by him to endeavor by all means to double cape Bagador, and advance further towards the south. They pursued the timid mode of coasting, which then prevailed until a sudden squall of wind drove them by accident to see where they discovered an unknown Island; and afterwards returned to Portugal with the news which seemed to open the field of discovery. The next year another expedition was fitted out in which they discovered the vast continent of Africa. Instead of extending to the people of that country, the blessings of improved politics, and the comfortable and cheering light of the Christian religion; it has been giving them a monopoly of all the miseries of the world. Towards the close of the fifteenth century, the Spaniards having taken possession of the West Indies, they encouraged Portuguese traders to bring them slaves from Africa. The same policy was afterwards pursued by the English, and here began the accursed slave trade. The arts of slave merchants inflamed the hostility of the various tribes, and increased the frequency of their wars with each other, so that they could enable them to buy the captives of the victors like oxen in the market. Picture yourselves my brethren, the tender husband and wife, parent, and child, driven away by the scourge of the overseers into hopeless slavery, never to be-

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hold each other again. The cruelties that were practiced, ties that were broken, by those traffickers in blood, and panders of avarice, no tongue can paint; for they fed upon the vitals and fattened upon the miseries of this unfortunate, and degraded people.

But let us see what philosophers say on this subject. Homer says "when a man is made a slave, he loses from that day the half of his virtue." Longinus quoting the same passage affirms that "slavery however mild, may still be called the prison of the soul." Tacitus remarks "that even wild animals lose their spirit when deprived of their freedom;" and says judge Tucker of Virginia, on this very same subject, "Whilst America hath been the land of promise to Europeans, and her descendants, it hath been the vale of death to millions of the wretched sons of Africa." And says Mr. Jefferson, "I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever;" the Almighty has no attribute that takes sides in such a barbarous traffic. This philosopher, this statesman called the attention of his state to an evil, corroding as he thought every day the morals, inflaming the passions, weakening the energies, and endangering the liberties of a free, and manly people. In fact it has attracted the attention, and engaged the notice of almost every part of Christendom. America has taken laudable means to suppress it, and in consequence of the exertion which England has made, she contends for the right of example; and when Napoleon was swaying a victorious scepter in France, amidst his mad career of war, and carnage; when every call of mercy seemed

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drowned in the din of battle; and every fiber of humanity eradicated by ambition; he forbade the slave trade. Men high in office, eminent in science, fair in character, and exalted in the confidence of their fellow citizens, have arrayed themselves as champions of emancipation. Suffer me here to mention the labor of Benjamin Lay; this memorable gentleman, who was a quaker by profession, was one of the first whose name is recorded in history, that engaged in the behalf of the oppressed Africans. He commenced his career in the year 1718, on the Island of Barbadoes.

Behold this philanthropic advocate engaged in public, and private admonition with every person who was in the least implicated in this traffic; and after he had spent 13 years pleading the cause of the oppressed without any apparent success, the opposition grew so strong against him for his truly pious labours that he resolved to seek an asylum in another part of the world least he should be contaminated with the accused evil. In the year 1731, he arrived in this city; he soon beheld that which induced him to show his abhorrence to the abominable evil which every where prevailed. It may be easily supposed this his independent opinion, rendered him a less welcome emigrant, than those that could quietly approve the habit of the times. This champion of justice and of human rights, stood as a solitary combatant in the field, with pride and avarice marshaled against him. He used every method that human ingenuity could invent, to convince the society of friends, as well as others, how wicked it was to hold slaves

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at this time, he became intimately attached to the truly honourable Anthony Benezet, and Ralph Sandiford; who likewise done all in their power to convince the world that such a practice was inconsistent to the law of God, and repugnant to the rights of man. Thanks be to kind heaven, this pious man, together with many more of the society of friends did not labour in vain in our behalf; for we learn from history as early as 1767, the legislature of Massachusetts, brought in a bill for prohibiting the importation of Africans into their province; however it did not pass; it was brought forward again in 1774 when unhappily it shared the same fate; but it finally passed for Virginia, abolished the slave trade in the year 1778, Pennsylvania 1780, Massachusetts 1787, Connecticut and Rhode Island in 1788. It was finally interdicted by the general Congress in 1794, and made punishable as a crime 7 years before that measure was adopted in England, which took place January 1st, 1801; which we are assembled this day to offer our mutual gratulations and pious gratitude for such a glorious act. Yes, after America lifted up the pole of liberty and unfurled the banner and swayed the scepter of Independence, and uttered this noble sentiment, "all men are created equal, endowed by the creator of the universe with certain unalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Then it was that the African lifted up his bleeding fettered hands, and cried with a voice that reiterated am I not a man and a brother! at which humanity sprang forth and espoused his cause, drawing from his vitals the deadly arrow of injustice, and held up a shield to defend him from

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a fresh attack. Ever since the Africans have been striving to unloose every fetter that bind her; yes, a part of her sons, and daughters have effectually broke their chain on the Island of St. Domingo, and have proclaimed the imprescribable rights of man, sealing the covenant made with liberty, by their blood; their own happiness we trust was not alone the effect of their glorious efforts, their views no doubt extended to all that were bleeding under the yoke of bondage; they said their interest blended with their own. Ages to come will read with astonishment the history of their brilliant exploits! yes, liberty which they have been the invincible defenders of, has found an asylum in the bosom of a regularly organized independent government. Fellow citizens, notwithstanding all that has been done, and th' we are surrounded by a host of friends; yet there are thousands of our brethren of colour suffering under the tyrannical yoke of bondage in the south, and on the West India islands. In the state of Maryland, in the year 1810, there were 111,502 slaves; in Virginia 392,518; in Kentucky 80,501; in North Carolina, 202,243; in South Carolina, 196,365; and in Georgia, 105,218; amounting altogether to 1,088,247: what the increase has been since, or how many in the rest of the states I have not been enabled to ascertain. But from this calculation (which comes far short of the number;) you see that slavery still exists. Now I would ask every slave holder, if they were within the walls of this house, if they meant to teach us republicanism is a mere name! And the liberty that their fore fathers split their blood for, is but a mere fantom? I appeal to the hearts of all true republicans,

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if it is not a sin in the sight of heaven, to hold in cruel slavery a part of the human family, for no other crime than they are not of the same colour? we love this country, but we do detest the principle of holding slaves, because it tolls the death bell of this republic. God will not pass by with impunity such a horrid crime. When we behold the mountain of misery in the south, that has been raised by those who professes to vindicate injured innocence, and advocate the rights of man; we tremble for such a government that acts inconsistent.

But my brethren they would tell us that they had a right to hold their slaves in bondage; that they were willed to them by their ancestors. But where did their ancestors obtain their right? I answer from the devil, whose work they do. It is a reproach to this country to hold the declaration of independence in one hand, and the lash of despotism in the other. But it is said we are not of the same flesh and blood; but I would ask if it is not said in the scripture that God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth? Now where is the individual that can object to this, on rational grounds, till he has first proved from authentic records, or from the nature of things, that this passage is not true? and what records can be found that is more authentic than the Bible? Where is the table of genealogy whereby it can be made appear that the Africans have not descended from Adam, and Eve? Is there any thing in the nature of the African, in his soul, or body, that may not easily be accounted for, on the supposition that he and the whites are the same family? I challenge every

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metaphysical reasoner to summon up all their strength, and solve these problems, if they can; I care not how you may attempt to do it, however there is but two ways that the difference can be proved; if there is any difference between the two. Now if you cannot prove that the Africans, and the whites are different beings, then the inference that Dr. Beatty draws is a just one, viz. "That slavery is inconsistent with the dearest rights of man's nature, it is utterly repugnant to every principle of reason, religion, humanity, and conscience," and says an eminent author, "He that can seriously argue in vindication of slavery, deserves no other answer than a stab of a Poniard." Suppose this country was invaded, and the rights of the whites, violated by Africans, just as cruelly as our rights are now violated; would not the whites say of us with truth, that we are such barbarians as to deserve at their hands no other return than final extermination? Yes, they would arm themselves with the rights of nature, and sweep us from the face of the earth, if it were possible. We do not stand in need of proof, to substantiate this fact; let one of those kidnappers steal a white child, and paint him black, and what do we hear, every one is crying out O! inhumanity! Every one could shed a tear for the bereaved parent; but how few tears are shed when an African is kidnapped. Ah! My brethren, if it was not for the society of Friends, together with a few others, you would not be able to let your children leave your sides. Nay, you would not be safe in your own house.

My brethren, I am highly gratified to see so many of you united together in those different so-

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cieties, celebrating the anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade; I need not tell you, that the free people of colour are increasing with such rapidity that great exertions are made by the colonization society, to get the free people of colour out of these United States. We are opposed to this plan in its present form. If the slave holders could get all the free people of colour out of this country, they know it would be easy for them to hold their slaves in peace; are we not justifiable in making this objection? if they wished slavery entirely abolished, why would they have opened a new avenue in Missouri, for the admission of slaves? why did they not admit her into the union on the grounds that they should not admit slaves in to their territory? We can never coincide with such a plan, until I can see what is become of our brethren, who are in bondage. But we are opposed to the plan on another ground, and that is sending illiterate persons to settle, and civilize that heathen country. Now out of the whole number, that has gone to Africa, can there be two scientific characters produced? Can there be one found among that number? What do they know about a monarchal, or a republican form of government, do they even understand the principles of morality which is vastly important for them to know? Is it not obvious that the inhabitants of Africa notwithstanding they are heathens, can teach the greater part of those that have gone to Africa in a great many respects? We know from what we have read respecting that country, especially the spot the colonization society has procured, that every one that goes to Africa will find that they have formed entirely a false estimate; they promise

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themselves that happiness which this generation will never experience there. Now we would be more pleased with the plan, if the very respectful gentlemen of this society, would first establish in this country a college, or seminary of colour, where all the arts and sciences should be taught, for it is learning that constitutes a good government, it is the life of any country. Is it not by sending teachers among the Indians that they are becoming civilized? So in like manner education persons of colour completely; when I say completely, I mean to teach them every thing that can be taught, and then send them to Africa, to set up schools, and instruct people. However I expect this is not very palatable to the friends of the colonization plan; but believe me my friends, the reason why I offer these remarks, is from the conviction that the plan is not a good one; it militates against the liberation of my brethren who are in bondage. I therefore adjure you as the members of the Angolian society, and not only as members of the Angolian, but as the sons of Africa, and not only as the sons of Africa, but as the benevolent association, but as the Rush Beneficial, and not as the Rush Beneficial, but as the Granville, Harmony, Benezet Philanthropic, Wilberforce, Farmers, Mechanics, Warner Mifflin, and as the Union sons of Africa, and not only as members of the different societies, but as fathers, as men—As you value the peace, and happiness of one another, as you value the rights, and liberties, which you enjoy in this city; if you are not lost to every sense of feeling for your own consequences, and importance as men; this day do I call upon you to

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take your stand, as men; and let your virtuous conduct hereafter afford examples worth of imitation to all that surround you. My brethren, the present aspect of the times before us, should at the present moment, strength the bond of your affinity; it is impossible to look forward without seeing, or rather feeling, that there is a greater and more momentuous event, about to be ushered in, than the present one, yea, than ever before agitated human society. We have not the foolish presumption to predict the ultimate result, or the cause of events that are to lead to it; all these things are in the hands of Providence, and the womb of time. Can we doubt for a moment that the cause of the Africans will be ultimately triumphant. Nay, the blissful period is just at hand, when we shall be elevated to an equal stand! when regulated liberty shall spread her wings over all the human race equally; when all the inhabitants of the globe from pole to pole, shall be freemen; and Patriotism itself be lost in universal philanthropy. Then will man forget his fellow man to enslave, the eye of pity shall be pained no more.

Hail glorious era come! Hail blessed time, when the golden age returns, to bless Ethiopia's sons and daughters! When full orb'd freedom shall unclouded shine.

Finally my brethren, if you have any firmness left, avoid every thing that will be a disgrace to us as a people; form no connexion with the profligate, when enticed, consent thou not; and take care of wine; I do not mean that you never touch it, but take care that it does not bite any of you, like a serpent, and sting like an adder, and God

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grant that your glory and felicity may increase with each revolving year, till the last loud trump shall announce the catastrophe of nature and time emerge in the ocean of eternity.

THE END.