An

ORATION

on the

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

DELIVERED

in

THE AFRICAN CHURCH

in

THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

January 2, 1809.

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By HENRY SIPKINS,
A descendant of Africa

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O R A T I O N

Delivered in the

AFRICAN CHURCH,

By HENRY SIPKINS,
A descendant of Africa
District of New York, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirteenth day of January, in the thirty-third year of the Independence of the United States of America, HENRY SIPKINS, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as Author, in the words and figure following, to wit:

"An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave trade; delivered in "the African Church in the City of New-York, January 2, 1809, by "Henry Sipkins, a descendant of Africa,"

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned," and also to an act, entitled "An Act supplementary to an Act, entitled an Act for the encouragement of learning by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof, to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

CHAR: CLINTON,

Clerk of the District of New-York
To HENRY SIPKINS

Sir,

WE, the Committee of Arrangement for celebrating the first Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, highly gratified with your performance in the African Church, on the 2d day of January, 1809; in concurrence with the wish of many of our friends, and also believing it may be useful, solicit a copy of the Oration for publication.

THOMAS MILLER, sen.

Chairman.

New-York, January 4, 1809.

ORDER OF THE DAY

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Forenoon Service

1. A Prayer by Mr. Thomas Miller, sen.
2. A hymn under the direction of Thomas W. Commeraw.
3. The Act, with an Introductory Address, by Henry Johnson.
5. The Oration, by Henry Sipkins.

Afternoon Service

1. A hymn under the direction of Thomas W. Commeraw.
This oration
is
humbly inscribed
to the
friends of humanity,
whose
assiduity, and disinterested philanthropy,
have been conspicuous
in the
propagation
of
emancipation
INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

by HENRY JOHNSON

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Fathers and Brethren,

The attentive seriousness, the respectable appearance of this crowded audience; and the grandeur that I behold in the countenance of so many in this great assembly; and the solemnity of the cause for which we are this day met together, joined to the consideration of the part that I am to take in the important business of this day, increase the sense which I have had of my unworthiness of gracing this sacred stage.

And now let us Africans and descendants of Africans, with uplifted hands and bended knees make daily prayers and expressions of gratitude to God, for the long lives of those benevolent men who have been so arduously engaged in the abolition of the slave trade. And may that Almighty being mercifully dwell in all our councils; and may he direct us to such proceedings as he himself shall approve and be pleased to bless. And may we ever be favoured of him. And may the whole world be a world of liberty, the seat of virtue, and a refuge for the oppressed. And then will the poor African no longer have to exclaim:
I long to lay this painful head,
And aching heart, beneath the soil;
To slumber in that dreamless bed,
From all my toil.

For misery stole me at my birth,
And cast me naked on the wild,
I perish, O my mother earth;
Take home thy child.
Brethren and Fellow-Citizens,

We are again assembled to tender our sincere thanks, to recount the beneficial exertions of humane men, to venerate the beneficence of the Almighty Father of the universe, and to commemorate the return of a day that has, in some degree, restored the long-lost tranquility of the once happy inhabitants of Africa.

The prohibition of the Slave-Trade, which is the momentous occasion of our convention, is perhaps equal to any inscribed in the page of history. No event therein occurs, that so conspicuously points out the magnanimity of spirit, by which the advocates of its annihilation were stimulated, whose venerable names will be perpetuated to latest posterity, and receive from them a tribute of unfeigned gratitude; while the exposed pusillanimity of their predecessors and opponents, meet its merited reproach, and indignation from all upright persons. By means of this nefarious traffic, the delectable scenes of our parent-country have been immersed in the blood of our ancestors. This flagitious infringement on human rights was not confined within the sphere of a single province; its rage was not exhausted by reducing one or two tribes to the most unparalleled miseries; but, clothed in the habiliments of destruction, it spread its unlimited cruelties over the wide-expanded realms of Africa.
The most sanguinary massacres, committed by the nations of antiquity, at the taking or subversion of Troy, Babylon, or Jerusalem, notwithstanding their enormous horrors, at which the blood of every thing, animated by rational feelings, is appalled; yet, when we revert our thoughts to the productive inseparable evils, attendant on the Slave Trade, we are compelled to attribute to it unequalled cruelty, barbarity and injustice.

Let us for a moment take a retrospective view of Africa in its primitive state.

It exhibits the most blissful regions, productive of all the necessaries and even luxuries of life, almost independent of the arm of husbandry. Its innocent inhabitants regardless of, or unacquainted with the concerns of busy life, enjoyed with uninterrupted pleasure the state in which, by the beneficent hand of nature, they were placed.

But, ah! sad reverse. By this abominable trade they have been forced to bid adieu to their serenity and happiness.

When this envenomed monster of misery explored the passage to their fertile shore, when it reared its hideous head on their luxuriant plains; when with all its dismal concomitants it approached their peaceful abodes, all was consternation and woe.

It owes its being to the Portuguese, who, in the year 1508, by basely kidnapping numbers of the inhabitants, made the first import into the island of Hispaniola, for the purpose of cultivating the possessions of the Spaniards.
It owes its rise to the fostering hand of other nations, who, as they acquired settlements in America, adopted the execrable practice, which the Spaniards had tolerated. And it owes its maturity to the increasing avarice of all Europeans, who conceived it the most conducive to the enlarging of their fortunes out of the inexhaustible treasures which the new world unfolded.

Although conscious of the turpitude of destroying the liberties of the Africans, which they knew to be as inherent in them, as in the Europeans, length of time lead them to view it as a matter of right; and no sooner was it so conceived, than it was prosecuted to the greatest possible extent.

It was not until the year 1551, that the English commenced trading to Africa for gold, ivory, etc. And in 1556, Sir John Hawkins sent on shore a number of men to take and enslave the inhabitants.

But, being defeated in the attack, dropt down the river, where he recommenced the enforcing of his inhuman plan; and the better to effect it, burnt the towns.

After repeated efforts, he procured his number and proceeded to the West Indies, where he exposed them for sale. After this, his first adventure, he was pleased with the success of this base employ, from the sight of which human nature revolts with terror. But alas, such was his depravity, as with the utmost composure, to see them linger out a miserable existence.
Hearing that the Africans were a valuable commodity in Hispaniola, he readily expressed his sentiments to his most intimate friends, who promised him their utmost endeavours to facilitate his design.

But finding the slaves purchased at too dear a price, being often at the expense of many lives, he thought it advisable to resort to other means of obtaining them; and conceived it the most effectual by instilling into them a spirit of avarice, and love of luxury. The gratification of which soon became the most powerful incentives to a speedy dissolution. Fatal, indeed, to the peace of Africa was this divided plan.

The harmless Africans, who had ever been strangers to the arts of deception, and unsuspicious of treachery in the bosoms of others, gratefully received the proffers of friendship from their cruel invaders, and consequently became an easy prey to European wiles.

Stimulated by the promised rewards of the Europeans, and in some cases intoxicated by the excessive use of spirituous liquors, joined them in their cruel deprivations against their unhappy countrymen.

Once disunited, and the same stimulus ever remaining, eminently conduced to the waging of perpetual war.

Hence, no sooner than a slave ship presented itself to the view of the inhabitants bordering on the coast, than they beat to arms, and regardless of age, or sex, with unequalled violence, attacked their neighbouring friends, to
whom but a few minutes before they evinced the most amicable disposition.

In some of their hostilities, when they have been obstinately opposed, have been so heated with revenge, as to become insensible of the dictates of avarice, and indiscriminately murder men, women and children.

Notwithstanding the depredations of these intestine broils, the horrid desolation and ravages which are their constant attendants, yet far is their misery from being at its summit.

Augmented much are their sorrows on board the slave ship, almost inconceptionable must be their sufferings.

Confined in these caverns of despair, their tender limbs in weighty shackles bound, without the most distant hope of release, is truly miserable.

Torn from their native land, the endearing bonds of society are broken by the remorseless hearts of their assailants, whose insatiate thirst for sordid treasure dooms them victims to the most abject slavery.

But here their miseries do not cease. Still are they advancing toward maturity. Once brought into port a new and unbounded field of oppression presents itself to their view.

Here the most relentless tyranny on them is inflicted.

In this scene of their torture is summoned the aggregate distresses of both the former.
The day of sale at length arrives, they are now driven from this abode of distress, the ties of relation and friendship are now dissolved, which were the more strongly cemented by being fellow-sufferers for several months.

Severed from their native shore, and after enduring the pain of a long voyage, they are now the victims of a second parting. The sale now over, perhaps without taking the last tender embraces of an eternal separation, they are precipitantly hurried to the estates of their various purchasers. They now become witnesses of scenes the most direful. They are now the subjects of miseries the most replete.

The plantation bell summons them to the incessant fatigue of the day.

One moment's delay subjects them to the malevolence of their revengeful overseers.

The scorching sun now rising to its high noon meridian, and pouring its intolerable radiance on them, and they languishing under the labour of the field, if they chance to fall a little behind their fellow-sufferers, they are reminded of their indolence by the stripes of their brutal drivers.

Nor are these the duties and punishments of the men only; but even femininity, weakness and juvenile years are not exempted.
Behold a mother with her helpless infant on her shoulders, a sufferer in these toilsome scenes, or, in despite of the overbearing impulse of maternal affection, forced to lay it on the ground.

Night now approaches, but instead of retiring to habitations to enjoy a frugal repast, to support almost exhausted nature, or to recline their wearied frames on even their sheaf of straw, they are obliged to appropriate part of this cessation from the labour of the field, to the gathering of grass for the cattle.

But why attempt to pourtray, in their true colours, scenes of oppression, which language the most descriptive is inadequate to delineate; or why any longer expatiate on a subject of such complicated misery.

Suffice it to say, that to this deplorable situation, my brethren, descendants of Africans, have millions of our forefathers, and brother men fell victims. In this state of hopeless servitude, do many yet remain, who look forward with pleasing expectation to the termination of their lives, as the only possible means of emancipating them from servile despotism.

At the bare thought of such unexampled debasement of part of mankind, humanity shudders. The slave trade, in its every stage, unfolds to the view of every beholder, in whose heart glows the most latent particle of sympathy, scenes of woe and detestation. For the destruction of
this almost inexhaustible magazine of cruelty, much
thanks, my brethren, from us are due. In producing
which, America boasts the unrivalled exertions of
Woolman and Benezet, whose boundless services in the
cause of emancipation have been viewed with admiration
by a surrounding world. Wheresoever they turned their
eyes, discouraging obstacles presented their withering
frowns; but emboldened by a consciousness of rectitude,
they resolved to persevere. Also the venerable names
of Dillwyn, Sharp, and many others, will ever resplend-
ently embellish the historic page — will ever receive
from us the most grateful homage, and will by posterity
be heard of with peculiar satisfaction. We can pleasant-
ly anticipate the gratulation with which their virtues
will be received. *Oh, our most worthy advocates! we
humbly beg you to accept our grateful thanks for your
disinterested, indefatigable exertions to ameliorate our
state. When we were under the iron hand of oppression,
you did generously step forward to ease our burthen.
When we trembled at the haughty mandates of imperious
tyrants, your consoling whispers offered some shelter.
When sinking under the weighty shackles of slavery to the
most consummate despondency, with unremitting zeal you
flew to our relief.— These, my brethren, are but a few
of innumerable instances in which they have proved our
strenuous beneficial advocates. It was their ineffable

*Addressed to the Friends.
delight to see mankind restored to primitive parity.
And for it the voice of justice and humanity were heard
in the Congress of those United States and the British
Parliament. At this despair seemed to erect her appalling
brow; but, by their dauntless spirits, she was quickly
repelled. Their prayers, though often discarded, did
not intimidate them. Still was their ardour invigorated—
still they remained the firm champions of our cause.

To these philanthropic exertions, my African brethren,
we are indebted for our present happiness and prosperity.
To these we owe our preservation from a second bondage;
and on these depend the prospect of future felicity. Their
ever-memorable acts were such as the paternal hand rearing
its tender offspring to mature years, and planning for it
the edifice of virtue and happiness. By their unabating
energy they accomplished the long sought conquest; at
which the votaries of liberty shouted their congratulations;
she waved in ecstasies her tallest standards; and calling
to the drooping captives of slavery, bade them behold and
admire! They disdained the stimulus of pecuniary gains,
and felt themselves amply compensated by the smiles of an
approving conscience.

My beloved Africans, let us by an upright and steady
deportment merit a continuance of former favours, and
evince to the world our high sense of gratitude. Eminent
respect should, perhaps, be engraven on our hearts for
the distinguished lustre with which our advocates, in these
United States, have shone. /These to their honour have it in their power to boast the first seminary for the cultivation of our understanding, and advancing us in morals. And they have had the gratification to see some make considerable attainments in literature, and become worthy members of civil society.

The benevolent exertions of the persons, who are the subjects of the foregoing thanks, although worthy the highest eulogiums of terrestrial praise, can only be considered a secondary cause in the completion of this incomparable epoch. If these merit the greatest encomiums; how infinitely small must be our means of fixing the properties of respect, which infallibly belong to a primary cause. Stunned with astonishment we stand when contemplating the goodness of the divine majesty of heaven, who of his wonderful providence summoned our votaries by a voice of humanity to espouse the cause of the injured African race. In the moments of deliberate reflection on the causes, tending to produce this memorable era, we are ingulped in the amazing labyrinth of his unfathomable condescension. Our hearts are lost in the maze of his incalculable benignity. Let us however endeavour to offer our indispensable obligations of unfeigned gratitude to eternal goodness--let us pay our greatest veneration to his matchless beneficence, and impel it loudly to re-echo through the regions of eternity.
By his august decree the grossest debasement of mortals was abjured. He saw with piteous eyes our wretched state, and sent his guardian angels to rescue us from our distressed condition. Oh our heavenly Father! deign we beseech thee to accept the thanks of thy humble supplicants. In commiseration to our state thou didst inspire, by the dictates of humanity, men who became the vigilant exterminators of that commerce, which has much depopulated the land of our nativity. And which has reduced its inhabitants with all their progeny under the sentence of perpetual bondage.

But rejoice, my brethren, through the efficiency of the friends of humanity this fell sentence has now subsided. It is absorbed in the refulgence of that memorable day, which announced the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the return of which we now celebrate. That day which caused our hearts to dilate with the ideal hope of future bliss.

This day completes the first anniversary of the suspension of that facinerious traffic, which has made the most indelible blot in the history of nations. May it ever be held as a monument of contempt by rising generations. Rejoice that its baneful effects shall no longer be seen in these United States, nor the British colonies. No longer shall the shores of Africa be drenched with human gore. No longer shall its inhabitants be torn from their native soil; no longer shall
they be brought on cruel shipboard, weighed down in chains; nor shall we any longer hear the dreadful recital of their mutilated, fettered limbs; nor shall the dismal groans of dying captives intercept our ears. No longer shall we witness the woeful prospect of an unnatural separation of a loving husband, an affectionate wife; nor a darling child cling to its fond parents, imploring their protection from the impending fury of their merciless owners. Rejoice, that no longer shall the sons of Africa become the subjects of such inhuman drudgery. Rejoice, my brethren; descendants of Africans, that the exiles of our race are emerging from the depths of forlorn slavery, in which they have been environed. The thick fogs of ignorance, that have ever encompassed their gloomy mansions, are gradually vanishing, they have been dissipated by the superior radiance of increasing knowledge.

But let not our expressions of joy suppress the inestimable obligations of gratitude due to our patrons. For on the most transient survey of our past condition, you must manifestly discover the unshaken constancy with which they have persevered to have established us in our present improved state. Beset with the most insuperable difficulties, arising from the strong imbibed opinion of our inferiority, they nevertheless, with that fortitude which characterises true worth, stemmed the torrent of popular prejudice. May it no longer shed on the mind its wizard darkness; nor the false tongue of envy envenom it by its beguiling insinuations.
But may the long wished for time soon arrive when slavery of every species shall be destroyed—when despotism and oppression shall forever cease—when the Africans shall be reinstated in their former joys—when the exulting shouts of Princes, embracing their long lost oppressed subjects, shall reverberate on our ears—when the bursting acclamations of approbation shall resound from the tombs of our worthy departed ancestors; and all find protection under the fostering wing of LIBERTY.