

AN ORATION
ON THE
ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE,
BY RUSSEL PARROTT.

DELIVERED ON THE FIRST OF JANUARY, 1812

AT THE
AFRICAN CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS.

Philadelphia
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TO RUSSELL PARROTT.

Sir,

WE, the Committee of arrangement for celebrating the Anniversary of the abolition of the Slave Trade, highly gratified with your performance in the African Church, on the first of January 1812, in concurrence with the wish of many of our friends, and also believing it may be useful, solisit a copy of the Oration.

CYRUS PORTER, *Chairman.*

ORDER OF THE SERVICE.

1. A hymn by the Choir
2. Prayers by the Rev. Absalom Jones
3. A Hymn by the Choir
4. Oration by Russel Parrott, (*a descendant from Africa*)
5. A Hymn by the Choir
6. A Prayer by the Rev. Absalom Jones.

Philadelphia, January 12, 1812.

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AN ORATION
ON THE
ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

BELOVED BRETHREN AND RESPECTED HEARERS,

THOUGH inadequate to the task assigned me, in the commemoration of a great and important event, yet it is with a heart filled with gratitude and joy that I address you on this day—a day that should be ever dear to the generous bosom, for the successful effort which has been made to effect a total abolition of that shameful traffic in the bones and sinews of man; a traffic that has desolated a fair portion of this great globe of earth, with war, rapine, and dismay. The friends of religion must rejoice at the discontinuance of an evil, that demoralized those who were engaged in it; unfitted them for any employment, but that of the private assassin, or the destroyer of the liberty of his country, and that eradicated every sentiment of generous feeling from the breast of them that participated in it. The abolition of the slave trade should be hailed by every lover of genuine liberty, as

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the commencement of that happy era, in which Freedom shall reign to the “furthest verge of the green earth.”

Bear with me a while, until I recount some of the evils that accompany the merchandize in man. The merciless adventurer, when arrived on the shores of Africa, uses every art that vice and devise, or savages can execute, to accomplish his horrid purpose: hell itself seems loosed to aid him in his shameful design on the happiness and liberty of his fellow men. The sly, insidious promise, the professions of friendship, are all made, to lull him into a fatal security, to impress on his mind, that the object of his visit is consistent with the strictest rules of justice; the unhappy people thus marked for destruction, are instigated by these mercenary wretches to war against their unoffending neighbours, not for dominion, but for slavery; whilst they, like vultures, hover over the fight, ready to prey on the conquered. If they fail in an attempt to excite intestine commotion (which, unfortunately, is seldom the case) the house, that has sheltered them from the storm, is ravaged; the host, that has spread his choicest viands before them for their refreshment, sees perhaps an only son, the prop of his declining age, torn from his enfeebled arms, by these cruel marauders. In vain he supplicates for his child—in vain he pleads the rights of hospitality violated; the unhappy object is forced from his home, his family, and his native land, confined in the pestilential dungeon of

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their ship, is chained, if he evinces the smallest disposition to escape; they torture him, they fetter him, if he dares to complain; till, sinking under the weight of his affliction, he either dies by their cruelty, or else frantic with distress, at the recollection of joys, never to return, he buries in the waves, that which would have gratified wo, the hopes of the avaricious, and filled up the measure of his own grief.

These are not the effusions of a romantic brain, but mournful facts, peculiar to the habitation called a slave-ship.

The rest of the unfortunate crew, who are thus immured, either by force or more disgraceful fraud; those who have escaped the diseases incidental to those vessels, in which hundreds of unfortunate beings are confined, are compelled to feed on the coarsest food that can be obtained: in short, every torment, that the mind of sanguinary man can devise, is put in execution to bend the minds to the wretched doom that awaits them, and to fit them for the ignominious condition of a slave.

When arrived at the place of destination, the emaciated inhabitants of the slave-ship, have now to undergo another scene of distress; they are now, oh! indelible shame, to be sold! to be separated from the partners of their wo! They had fondly hoped that their past sufferings would have proved a claim to the mercy of their oppressors; that they would have been permitted to suf-

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fer and die together—can mercy be found in the heart of the tiger, or compassion in the breast of the miser? their hopes are vain! They are dragged asunder, never to meet on earth again!

Arrived at the plantation, a new field of sorrow is opened to their view: unused to a laborious life, (for in the native land of our fathers, nature seems to have scattered plenty with a luxuriant hand,) they are now compelled to labour for the support of his guilty pleasures, who withholds from them their dearest rights; to manure the soil with their sweat, that the voluptuary may riot in dissipation; and if one poor wretch should sink with fatigue, under his burden, the task-master is a hand, not to cheer his drooping spirit, but with the disgraceful lash, to exact his labour, with stripes “that Mercy, with a bleeding heart, weeps to see inflicted on a brute.”

When the philanthropic mind contemplates scenes like these, the sympathetic tear finds vent, and the soul, alive to sorrow, exclaims, ye peaceful people, what have ye done, to merit this?

It is folly for the advocates of slavery to tell us, that Egypt, Greece, Rome, or Carthage, sanctioned the custom—The antiquity of a crime does not constitute its justification. It is folly for them to say, the slave whose service, nay, whose very life depends on the caprice of his master: is happy as the peasantry of Europe, who are

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free, to who the laws are open for redress. No, let them disguise thee as they will, “still, slavery, still thou art a bitter draught:” and though millions have been compelled to drink of thee, thou art still bitter.—Could the wisdom and learning of Egypt and Greece, the patriotism and valour of Rome and Carthage save them from the indignation of the Most High? No, they are blotted from the face of the earth, and scarce a vestige left to tell where once flourished those proud nations.—And Portugal, who was first to revive this shameful trade, under aggravated circumstances, what is she now? Her princes forced to fly from the throne of their ancestors—her fields stained with the blood of her sons—her daughters violated by a savage soldiery—her altars profaned, and her cities leveled with the dust. She presents an awful example to the world. The abodes of slavery are often visited by the dreadful tornado and the destructive hurricane, which, on the most trivial alarm, creates, in the slave-holder’s bosom, all the horrors of an insurrection.

Thanks to that Omnipotent Being, who comprehends all space, many and powerful friends have risen in Europe and America, who, amid a storm of persecution and prejudice, have (with a zeal that does honour to the cause which they have espoused) accomplished the abolition of the slave trade. It is to their generous exertions, we are indebted for the innumerable privileges we enjoy.

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Had not a Benezet, a Sharp, a Wolman, a Delwin, a Clarkson, a Rush, a Wilberforce, and many other worthies, been zealous in vindicating the rights of the injured Africans, we still should have to lament the existence of a trade, the bare mention of which, fills the soul with horror. The preeminence which these men hold in society is a sufficient test of their virtue and the justice of the cause. What though their names are not recorded on the historic page, in letters of blood; what though their fame is not borne down to distant times, on the groans and sighs of oppressed millions, yet a grateful people, truly sensible of the great blessings resulting from their disinterested exertions, will transmit to the latest posterity their virtuous deeds, engraved in indelible characters.

It must be a matter of great satisfaction to the friends of African emancipation in this state, to see the happy consequences flowing from their efforts—consequences that bear with them the incontrovertible truth, that the freeman is the best citizen. Under the mild influence of the laws of Pennsylvania, *we* are rapidly advancing in every useful improvement: we can boast of three elegant places of worship, several seminaries of learning, the first of which we owe to the pious Benezet, many charitable institutions; our youths are improving in the different branches of useful knowledge; our brethren, by an industrious frugality, becoming proprietors of

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the soil on which they live; in short, our present situation, contrasted with what it was but a few years ago, presents a picture highly animating to the humane mind.

For our friends to know that they have acted right, must be a source of pleasure; but, to know that their exertions have made others happy, must be a joy indeed.—Much, my brethren, has been done for us; but unless there is a reciprocal exertion on our part, by a peaceful demeanor, a respectful observance of the laws, and due reverence to the constituted authority, we can never expect to see those privileges, which we enjoy in this, and some of the neighbouring states, extended over the union. Be good citizens, that the enemies of justice may see that slavery, not only enervates the mind, but corrodes the tender feelings of the heart; renders it insusceptible of those manly virtues that dignify human nature. It is folly to suppose that the lash can implant any other principle in the enslaved African's bosom, than aversion: whereas a different line of conduct (which I humbly conceive would not only be humane but politic) would attach him to that government, which, under other circumstances, he must curse.

The generous policy of this state has been such, that even amid the contention of party, the government has invariably been the friends of the unfortunate: and the present Chief Magistrate, in his late communication to the legislature, has feelingly depicted the inconsistency

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of suffering the free air of Pennsylvania to be tainted by the breath of slaves.

If the grateful thanks of so poor a people is acceptable, for the many favours conferred on us, our patrons have our warmest thanks; and if this country, environed as she is, with difficulties, should need our services, I am convinced that this state would find among the people of colour, some of its most zealous defenders.

Already my friends, has Africa experienced the benefits of the abolition law. Religion has unfolded her sacred page; and while she holds the heavenly volume to the eye, by her enlivening presence she dispels the clouds of paganism and error, which had so long overshadowed her.

O! may she continue to enlighten mankind with her holy precepts, until she, with her divine associates, Knowledge and Liberty, shall pervade and humanize the whole habitable portion of the world!