

A
SERMON
On the
ABOLITION
OF THE
SLAVE TRADE:

Delivered in the African Church, New-York,

ON THE
FIRST OF JANUARY, 1810

BY THE REV. WILLIAM MILLER.
Minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

Published by request of the Committee.

New-York:

PRINTED BY JOHN C. TOTTEN.

1810

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A SERMON, &c.

*The service was opened with a prayer by Mr.
GEORGE WHITE, after which the following was
delivered by the Rev. WM. MILLER.*

**PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD THAT HATH DEALT
WONDERFULLY WITH YOU; AND MY PEOPLE SHALL NEVER BE
ASHAMED. – Joel, 2d. chapter, and latter part of the 26th verse.**

I cannot forgo the satisfaction of expressing my acknowledgements to my brethren, for having conferred on me the honour of addressing them from the pulpit, on an occasion so auspicious to Africans as the celebration of a day, the contemplation of which is sufficient to inspire the heart of every African with fervent gratitude to the throne of grace, for having directed the councils of our legislature and the parliament of Great Britain, to the consideration of the deplorable and ignominious condition of Africans and their descendants; and in opening a way for their relief, by prohibiting that abominable traffic, the SLAVE TRADE.

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My brethren, it requires no further proof than a recurrence to your own experience, to convince you of the benefits that will accrue from this act of theirs. The idea of our being acknowledged men, is competent to raise us from the foul abyss of indignity into which we have been plunged. I say of our being acknowledged men; because the conduct of our oppressors has perspicuously exhibited an opinion of our mental faculties being inferior to theirs. The kidnapping in Africa, the horrors of the middle passage, and the inhuman sale of slaves after their arrival, furnish the contemplative mind with instances of cruelty that speaks a language clearer to be understood, than the most vociferous and emphatical expression of uncouth opinions.

Ancient history, as well as holy writ, informs us of the national greatness of our progenitors. That the inhabitants of Africa are descended from the ancient inhabitants of Egypt, a people once famous for science of every description, is a truth verified by a number of writers. One has asserted, and from fundamental evidences, that the first learned nation, was a nation of blacks. "For it is incontrovertible," says he, "that by the term Ethiopians, the ancients meant to represent a people of sable complexion and curly hair." Other writers have said that the Ethiopians were

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only a colony of Egypt. We read in a number of the Psalms and Prophecies, of their being a very haughty people. Isaiah, speaking of their downfall, says, “And they shall be ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.”

Not having drunk profusely of the streams of ancient and oriental history, my abilities cannot afford you a technical elucidation of the different opinions of writers on this subject; I shall therefore confine myself to the words of the text.

Praise the name of the Lord your God that hath dealt wondrously with you, and my people shall not be ashamed.

It is a maxim deplorably true, that nations, as they grow great and prosperous, run into all manner of cupidity and idolatry. The history of every age proves, that vice and immorality will keep pace with wealth and prosperity. Our progenitors, after arriving at the plentitude of prosperity, and the pinnacle of national greatness, forgot Jehovah’s benignity, and dared to defy his wrath; which caused God to speak by his prophet Isaiah, in the twentieth chapter of his prophecies, that, “Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefooted for three years, for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead the Egyptian prisoners and Ethio-

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pian captives, young and old, naked and bare-footed, even with their bodies uncovered; to the shame of Egypt.” My brethren, you have all seen this prophecy astonishingly fulfilled, even to a very late period, upon the unhappy Africans. The mercies and loving kindness of God to his creatures, are beyond measure; but offended goodness calls for retribution, and God has dealt wondrously with us.

‘Tis thus Omnipotence his law fulfils,
And Vengeance executes what Justice wills.

When pondering over our pitiable fate, as foretold by the prophet, we are ready to exclaim as Job, “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night when it was said, a man child is conceived.” But reflecting on the goodness of God, and his wisdom in all things, we are solaced with the hope of seeing the psalmist’s prediction fulfilled, that “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand and come unto God.” This prediction, my brethren, is wonderfully fulfilling. We see Ethiopians stretching forth their hands, and coming to God, with songs and everlasting joys upon their heads. We are ready to cry out, O God, thy ways are past finding out; thy councils are unsearchable.

Perhaps there is none of the prophecies more

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literally fulfilled, than those on which we are now treating. But to go through a correct account of the Ethiopian debasement, would encroach upon the limits of a sermon; it would be too laborious for myself. Suffice it to say, that subsequent to the prediction, beginning with the Assyrian invasion, the trade in slaves has been spreading wider and wider, as when poison entereth a man's body, it diffuses its fatal effects through the whole of the human system; so the trade extended to all the commercial nations of the globe; and in the fifteenth century was sanctioned by most of the European governments. Since that time the shores of Africa have presented a scene of devastation and bloodshed; its unfortunate inhabitants carried as slaves through all parts of the world, agreeable to the very words of the prophet, naked and barefooted. The Moors, themselves Africans, have largely participated in the abasement of Africa. Says God, "I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians; they fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbor: city against city, and kingdom against kingdom."

But, my brethren, we cannot reasonably murmur against Deity for this heavy judgment; forsooth his chosen people, yea, his chosen servants, felt the severity of his chastisement. We

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find Moses deprived of the happiness of entering the promised land, for disobedience; and Aaron likewise for making a golden calf in Horab; without reciting many of the like examples, we find David, a man after God's own heart, abased for having committed a crime that was abominable in the sight of God. The Jewish nation, God's chosen people, were, by Jehovah's mandate, led captive into a strange land for their iniquity, which they attempted to cover with oblations and long prayers. Isaiah gives the reason of God's permitting their captivity, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated you and your God." But, my brethren, notwithstanding God permitted these things to come to pass, it does not follow that the oppressors of Africa are less culpable for their savage treatment to the unoffending Africans. When it pleased God to suffer the Israelites to be led captives by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, he did not connive at the austerity and untoward haughtiness of this proud king; but administered to him in his turn such physical evils as brought him to a recollection of his dependence upon Divine Providence. Elated by the success he had obtained over the Jews, and many other nations he made tributary to him; and not consider-

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ing that his power was from above. Notwithstanding the forewarning given him by a dream, and the interpretation thereof by Daniel, we find that twelve months from the epocha of his dreams, as he walked in the palace of his kingdom, he spake as if infatuated with pride, and said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" That moment, yea, while he yet was speaking, a voice was heard from heaven, pronouncing his sad doom: among the beasts of the field he was driven, and eat grass as an ox, till seven times passed over his head, at the end of which time he acknowledged the supremacy of the great Jehovah, and was restored to his kingdom.

The examples I have delineated, my brethren, will shew you how God deals with perverse men. In like manner nations are dealt with. But when we come to reflect upon the high character of Europeans as civilized people and christians, we are astonished to find among them men similar in disposition to the ravenous tyger of the desert, and the nations at large losing sight of the laws of God and of nature, sanctioning a trade so disgraceful to the human species, and so foul a blot on the

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christian character. How just this question put to the European nations by the poet,

Canst thou, and honored with a christian name,
Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame?
Trade in the blood of innocence and plead
Expedience as warrant for the deed?

Some of these men, besides pleading necessity for their detestable conduct, have had the effrontery to attempt to palliate their crimes with quotations from scripture. But, my brethren, it does not require any genius to confute the base assertion. Sacred writ enjoins righteousness; and is it right to enslave a fellow-creature? And worst of all, to chain him and task him, and exact his service with stripes, that mercy with a bleeding heart weeps when she sees inflicted on a beast.

Happy it is for us, my brethren, that we inhabit a part of the globe where these things are not immediately before our eyes. But meditate on the accounts you may have received from the West-Indies, which some of you may have been eye-witnesses to, when, at the blowing of the horn, the slaves, young and old, men and women, naked and barefoot, running as it were for life, lest they should be beaten for being one moment behind their fellow-laborers. Picture to your ima-

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ginations the women enduring all the inclemency of the torrid zone, their bodies uncovered, and their young and tender offspring tied to their backs, digging two or three feet with a hoe in a soil that almost resists the powers of the pick-ax; and if there is the least cessation in their most servile labourers,—O sad communication! They are laid down and receive corporeal punishment with the cart-whip, the sight of which is sufficient to produce a despondency in the unhappy slaves.

According to the basis of the christian religion, we are bound to love God with all our soul, and our neighbor as ourselves: but this sacred injunction does not reach the heart of the oppressors of Africans: there is no flesh in their obdurate hearts—it does not feel for man. They disregard the opinion of Job, that pity should be shewn to those who are afflicted; but the weakness attending a state of procreation, in the weaker sex, forms no barrier to their inhuman scourging. My brethren, to go through the fiftieth part of the afflictions of Africans and their descendants, would be trespassing on your patience. Enough it is that the hydra from which issued all our sufferings, has received its death wound: the nations possessing the most commerce, have been the first to assail and halt it. We see that God

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has not cast us away: as a step to raising the Africans, we find that in the year 1789, or thereabouts, a settlement was made on the sea-coast of Africa, under the sanction of the British government. This place is perhaps well known to a number of you by the name of Sereleon. Great encouragement has been given to it as a colony of Great-Britain, which promises a numerous population; and besides the migration of a number of Missionaries there, a society has been lately established in England, consisting of the leading characters of that kingdom, for the identical purpose of civilizing and improving the continent of Africa. “Then shall the wilderness and the solitary places be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing: instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree. The Lord shall make her wilderness like Edon, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody; they shall tread upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon shall they trample under foot.”

We also find in our own country, and particularly in this state, laws favorable to Africans,

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are yearly enacted, and a number of us enjoying the benefit thereof. Although we cannot, consistent with our feelings, thank the oppressors of our forefathers for bringing them to the civilized world, yet when we compare our improved state in the arts to the state of improvement and civilization in Africa, we are ready to cry to God, individually, like David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn thy statutes, the law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of pure gold and silver. With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure, and with the forward thou wilt shew thyself unsavory; for thou wilt save the afflicted people, but will bring down high looks. O satisfy us early with thy mercies, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days; make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy works appear to thy servants, and thy glory to their children."

It is reasonable, my brethren, that we should praise God with our souls humbled, as in the dust, for having changed the hearts of men towards us. We find not only our state improve, but science has begun to bud among us. We see God raising up from among this despised people, thousands of witnesses to his gospel—many hun-

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dreds of ambassadors for him, many of whom, I trust, will visit the land of their forefathers, propagating the word of salvation, transported to behold his African kinsmen enjoying all the religious blessings that we are partakers of. My hopes on this head are very sanguine, for the Lord is dealing wondrously with us.

I come now to make a few remarks upon the latter part of the text:—"And my people shall never be ashamed."

The general acceptation of the phrase, my people, in scripture, is commonly understood as being applied to the jewish nation, but now to the servants of God, or christians in every nation, comprising the church militant. Peter, in the Acts of the Apostles, says, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." We then perceiving by this, my brethren, the words my people is as applicable to those of us that fear God, as it was to the children of Israel in their most favorable standing with God. But in order to be numbered among the people of God, it behoves you to be implicit to his commands. You are bound to keep the decalogue, or moral law, in its strictest construction; to undeviatingly keep the law of

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love, which is the new commandment given by Christ; you must have a firm faith in Christ Jesus and him crucified; your loins must be girded about with truth; you must put on the breast-plate of righteousness; having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: above all, taking the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. You must experience an internal evidence of the operation of the Holy Ghost, working in you by faith: you must become as new-born babes in simplicity, and in all manner of godliness; you must be prepared to be scoffed at by the world, and be buffeted for the name of Christ: yea, you must be ready as Paul to go and suffer death at Jerusalem for Christ's sake. You must be unwearied in well doing; keeping your deportment unimpeachable, your garments unspotted with corruption, and continually praise the name of the Lord your God that hath dealt wonderously with you. Prayer being one of the essential parts of worship, when you address the throne of grace, you should be fervent in your devotion in all holy zeal; this is what brings man in audience with the Deity.

The day we celebrate, being a conspicuous manifestation of the goodness of Divine Provi-

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dence to us, it becomes us to set it apart as consecrated, for a day of prayer, and praises, and thanksgivings to God; and of singing of psalms to his honor. “For the Lord he is God, and there is none other like unto him. Holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. Behold, the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land and shadow of death, to them has the light shined. With righteousness will he judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth are his.” **AMEN.**