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Address on American Slavery - 1836

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A D D R E S S

BY THE

Committee of the Glasgow Emancipation Society,

TO THE

MINISTERS OF RELIGION IN PARTICULAR,

AND THE

FRIENDS OF NEGRO EMANCIPATION IN GENERAL,

ON AMERICAN SLAVERY.

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A D D R E S S .

ESTEEMED CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—It is in no spirit of hostility to America, that we now solicit your co-operation in striving to expedite the extinction of its Slavery. There may be those who denounce the guilt of its oppressions, in hatred and terror of its liberal institutions; but with these we have no sympathy, nor is it to these we now principally address ourselves,—for it will be found, if we mistake not, that they took little part in attaining emancipation for the Slaves of our own Colonies, and are no way disposed to exert themselves for the suppression of those evils in America, through which alone they can, with any hope of success, assail its disrelished virtues.

Perhaps it may be thought by some, that we should rather veil than expose the errors of our Trans-Atlantic brethren, with which their exalted principles are practically associated, lest we involve good and bad in the same common obloquy. But such temporising expediency, such dereliction of duty, in apprehension of consequences, is the very prop and stay of that hateful and hated system which we desire to overthrow; and, for ourselves, we fear nothing in vindicating the cause of Him who was anointed to proclaim liberty to the captives.

But why, it may be asked, were not such representations and remonstrances employed sooner? American Slavery is of long standing; why then are we only now bestirring ourselves for its abolition? This sort of objection might be reasonably urged, were we defending the immaculacy of our past conduct; but if we have been reprehensibly negligent hitherto, that is no reason for neglecting duty still: on the contrary, we are the more bound to improve, promptly and indefatigably, what opportunities remain for its vigorous performance. If additional obligations, however,

were necessary, they are not wanting. The emancipation of all Slaves in the British Empire, precludes other nations from now meeting us with the reproach, "Physician, heal thyself;" and arms us with a moral influence, for the use of which we are solemnly responsible. It is true our Colonial Negroes are not wholly free, but wherein our example is here deficient, our experience is the more admonitory; and we can assure all whom the assurance may reach, that our Emancipation Act has wrought well in all but its qualifications—that in Antigua and the Bermudas, where the boon of freedom was bestowed unmodified, all is contentment and comparative prosperity; and that, as the result of the whole, we desire all expatriated Africans to be as ours now are, excepting their Apprenticeship.

The ample and accurate intelligence now possessed, as to the state of American Society, likewise augments the obligation to exert ourselves for its amendment. We knew there were Slaves in the United States; but we did not know till lately that nearly Two Millions and a half of the inhabitants are in a state of Slavery. We knew that people of colour, even though free, were regarded with prejudice; but we did not know that they are subjected to a ceaseless and systematized ignominy, from which the sanctuary itself, and even the table of the Lord, afford them no retreat or protection. It was matter of notoriety, that Abolitionists in America shared the jealousy of all magnanimous philanthropists; but the threatenings and slaughters breathed out against them by the periodical press, by Ministers and Magistrates, Presbyteries and States, have incalculably exceeded our darkest suspicions, and filled us not less with astonishment than abhorrence.

But what have you to do with us, our American brethren may ask? Why, being foreigners, intermeddle with our domestic institutions? And what have you to do, we reply, with the heathen nations, to whom, on a scale so magnificent, you are sending devoted, undaunted Missionaries? Why molest their household economy, by aspersing their household gods? Is it alleged that the cases are different? Our reply is—the same word which condemns idols, condemns instruments of cruelty, and furnishes the maxim alike applicable to both:—Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. The cavil, however, is so weak, as to be unworthy of refutation. Were we reasoning

with idolaters, who say "Keep your gods and we shall keep ours," we might patiently expound our conviction that there is but one true God, and one true religion; and plead the consequent necessity laid upon us, to press the universal adoption of that faith, and fulfilment of that law, which alone we account divine, and acceptable, and saving. But how can we composedly dilate on these first principles of the oracles of God, to American Christians, who are at the very moment prosecuting efforts of gloriously-aggressive benevolence? Such works are to us more expressive than words; and adopting the former as our model, in preference to the latter, we shall extend the same fidelity to America, as America to other nations.

Will you not, esteemed Christian friends, aid us in this work and labour of love? Think what is due to the gospel of Jesus, which Slavery in all its forms obstructs, outrages, and defies. Consider what we owe to the subjugated, and, even when liberated, still abused Negro. Suppose him all that malevolence would pronounce him, are we not equally with an apostle, made debtors to the Barbarians as well as to the Greeks, by that holy religion, which proclaims God to have made of one blood all nations that dwell on the face of the earth; which enjoins to loose the bands of wickedness—to undo the heavy burdens—to let the oppressed go free—to break every yoke; and whose comprehensive commission, as delivered by a once crucified, but then risen Redeemer, is—"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature?" But many of these stolen, enslaved, insulted strangers, are accredited followers of the Lamb of God. They are not merely bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, but members of that one whole family, that is named in Christ, bought with the same blood as ourselves, sanctified by the same Spirit, crying on the same footing of adoption, "Abba Father." How, then, shall we behold unmoved, the anguish of their souls, and not be verily guilty concerning our brethren? How shall we hear of their cruel bondage, and imagine, while acting as if we knew it not, that we are remembering those who are in bonds as bound with them; and them that suffer adversity, as being ourselves also in the body?

Think what claims the Emancipationists of America have on our resolute co-agency. Among these are to be found some of the noblest spirits of the age—the brightest examples of humanity and

religion. In naming some, we may be wronging others; but these will the most readily excuse us for instancing Landy, Garrison, Tappan, Birney, Cox, and Jay—men who have not only engaged their superior powers, and not only sacrificed their time and their property, but braved a hurricane of obloquy and danger, placing life itself in jeopardy, to effect the liberation of the oppressed African. Our efficient interposition would strengthen the hands and gladden the hearts of such men; would enhance the credit of the undertaking, with their countrymen, increase the number of its supporters, enfeeble the hostility of its opponents, and every-way hasten their ultimate victory. What, then, are all our lauded principles—what our high-sounding professions, if we deny to such benefactors a fraternal alliance, at once so easy to us and precious to them? At the same time, to be precious it must be immediate. One year hence, these regenerators of their country may less need our assistance. In a few years hence, their names will certainly be honoured by the very classes who now execrate them. But if they live to see the effect of their exertions, in this transformation of public opinion, they will look back from amid the admiring mid-day throng, to remember and acknowledge those earliest allies who first joined their imperiled standard; helping them when they needed help; approving and supporting them while yet vilified and assailed.

In a word, reflect what is duty to the Slave-holders themselves. Are they not objects of Christian philanthropy; the victims of a bondage so much worse than that which they inflict; as voluntary sin is more dreadful than involuntary suffering? It is true they may disrelish our expostulation, but the more it is disliked the more it is needed, and to wink at the offence is to contract its guilt.

In whatever light, then, we contemplate the subject, it imperatively requires us to be up and doing. There is no escape from the responsibility. The opinion of this country will be estimated by its expression, and wherever it is not expressed, silence will be construed into consent. Such a construction would be, indeed, utterly groundless. There are some who deplore, and others who deride, and a few it may be who palliate, but who are they of our population that defend the Slavery of America? If any speak of gradual cure, it is not so much as being necessary to the Negro—a

dogma which the recent history of our colonies has signally exploded—but to the masters, who cannot be expected, it seems, to act righteously all on a sudden, after being so long habituated to extreme unrighteousness, and must needs themselves go through an apprenticeship to prepare them for doing justly, and loving mercy! This is the highest pleading proffered in our country to Trans-Atlantic Slavery. And will high-minded America accept of this vindication? It cannot be, and next, therefore, to earnest remonstrance, we desire nothing more earnestly than a publication of this defence from our neutrals, of their non-interference; for if such be the vindication of America, what is its condemnation? If any, however, be speechless, their taciturnity will be misconstrued, and all, therefore, who do not interpose to dis sever, are powerfully, though indirectly, confirming the delusions of the oppressor, and the calamities of the oppressed. The question, then, is not, whether we shall be actionless, but whether we shall do good or evil; not whether we shall take a side, but which side we shall take; for, whosoever in this cause is not with Christ, is against him, and he who gathereth not with him, scattereth. Surely Christians cannot waver between these alternatives. They came to a decision in relation to our own Colonies, and how glorious is the result! As a political question, the Abolition of Slavery had been agitated for half a century in vain, the strongest arguments from expediency achieving no perceptible advancement; but, no sooner was it discussed as a religious question, than the mountains were levelled and the valleys filled, before the resistless march of Christian principle. How animating is the encouragement afforded by this success! And let it not be said that the influence so availing here, is insusceptible of extension to foreign shores. Were we reasoning on merely civil grounds, we might be told of the difference of civil condition: but we argue on spiritual grounds, and derive our arguments from that Word which owns no distinction of kindred or of clime.

Already our Christian influence with America has been tested and established. What good has been already effected by Mr George Thompson, our eloquent and devoted deputy! * Once we sent thousands to subjugate America; and, with all the prowess of

* The services of Captain Stuart deserve also to be acknowledged, as most arduous and valuable.

British arms, and courage, and tactics, they failed in the enterprise. More recently we sent one combatant, and him unarmed, to liberate America's oppressed millions, by speaking the truth. And what has been the result? He has fled. Yes, as Paul fled from Iconium and Lystra, to escape the jealousy and hatred consequent upon conquest. He has retreated, leaving behind him nearly* 300 Immediate Abolition Societies, in great part the fruit of his benevolent mission. Were Britain then to exert fully its moral power; or rather, by undivided fidelity to call down the full blessing from on high, American Slavery, we are free to anticipate, could not withstand the onset. Let Ministers, and Elders, and Deacons, exert their appropriate influence with the flocks of which they are the responsible overseers. Let the several Churches, and Ecclesiastical Courts, and Congregational Unions, proclaim in affectionate but faithful accents, their deep, and painful, and universal impression of America's blameworthiness. These means, though simple, are invincible—they must prevail.

Before the first shock of weapons, not carnal, wielded by a mighty and united people, the surest stronghold of oppression will rend, and shake, and fall. And when Slavery expires in America, where shall it survive? With such desertion from its ranks, and accession to its assailants, where and by what resources shall it maintain its ground? We are bold to reply nowhere, and nohow. The battle now fought in Columbia decides for the world. All nations accounting it final, look on with generous hope, or interested fear; and when victory declares—as it shall declare, so surely as God is true—for the friends of injured humanity, all the ends of the earth must speedily participate in the joyful consummation. Transcendent Jubilee, inferior only to that which it shall accompany and promote—the admission of all the families of the earth, into the glorious liberty of the children of God!

* There are now above 400.





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