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A

# Discourse,

DELIVERED ON

THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1825,

IN THE

CITY OF WASHINGTON.

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By **RALPH RANDOLPH GURLEY.**

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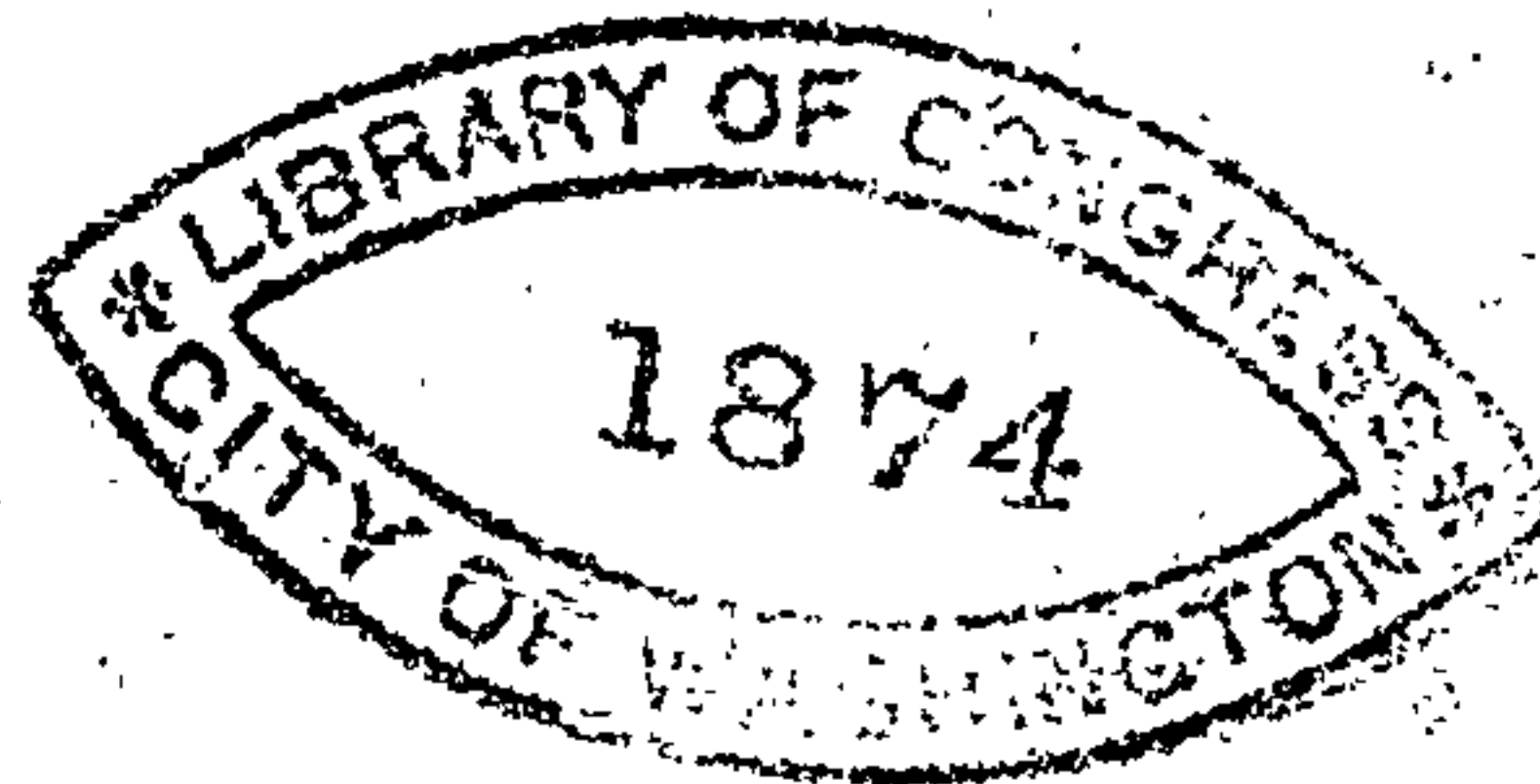
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**TO A MOST HONORED AND VALUED FRIEND,**

**Whose Name, though concealed by MODESTY,**

**Is SPLENDID with the**

**GLORY of all the VIRTUES,**

**Is this Discourse,**

**With profound respect,**

**Inscribed by**

**THE AUTHOR.**

## A DISCOURSE.

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“But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.” 1st Cor. xii. 31.

**WE** might, on this day, so interesting and so joyful, with propriety recur to the origin and history of our nation, and, from the first colonial settlement in this land, trace up that line of events which, whether produced by human effort, or more strikingly by Providence, have given us our moral and political elevation, and rendered our government and institutions objects of astonishment and admiration to mankind. We might speak of the rights of conscience; of the daring and resistless spirit of Christian liberty; of the perils and warfare of the adventurers and pilgrims who first trod our shores; of savages stained with blood, and putting their torches to the dwellings of our fathers; of England's oppression; of the wisdom, the courage, the devotion of our Revolutionary patriots; of their immortal Chief; of the battles; of the victory; of the principles of our confederation, and its sublime effects; and of the remarkable, unparalleled progress made by these States, during the past fifty years, in population, wealth, power, literature, science, and religion. Either of these topics would suggest thoughts both agreeable and useful, adapted to deepen and enrich the gratitude



which the occasion excites. The consideration of either would strengthen our love to our ancestors, and to their example ; would add to the delight of our recollections, and to the complacency with which we view their works, and inspire us with fresh resolution to defend and perpetuate the privileges they purchased by suffering ; that holy Temple of Freedom, which they consecrated by prayer, for which they fought till they died, and whose foundations were laid in the best blood of the world. The taste for our pleasures might become more acute, while we remembered the price they cost ; we should value more highly our privileges when regarding them as a patrimony from the virtuous and the brave ; and, in the light of their illustrious deeds, feel a glowing zeal to show ourselves worthy of such sires ; and, in the excitement of the hour, be generously determined to rear enduring monuments which might identify our gratitude with their honors and fame.

But, beneficial as considerations like these might be, it is upon others, not inferior in interest or utility, that we would fix your attention.

We profess to be Christians. We look for instruction in moral principles and practice, not to the maxims and examples of the world, but to the doctrines and precepts of the word of God. And does it not corroborate the other evidences of our Faith, to know that conscience, properly styled "the God within the man," when not rendered insensible by the lethargic influences of sin, when not darkened in its perceptions of things moral and spiritual, by the delusive glare of things temporal, is ever accordant in its judgments concerning human character and actions, with the decisions of Christianity ? The man whose life is in entire opposition to the system of Christian ethics, has frequently been compelled, by the sincerest conviction, to acknowledge that this is the only pure, consistent, and



perfect system: that it, alone, develops and inculcates the principle by which the highest order and felicity can be produced among men, and throughout the universe of intelligent minds. Every such man can perceive that, amid all the rich, splendid, exhaustless stores of the Creator's bounty in the kingdoms of matter and of mind, there is *necessity* for that principle which an Apostle has elevated to the throne of virtue—the principle of charity; that without this to preside and give law, the Divine empire would, like the physical universe, deprived of the power of attraction, be thrown into disorder, warfare, and ruin; its light be extinguished, its glory destroyed.

Let us attend for a moment to the circumstances in which the sentiment of the text was expressed. St. Paul has just enumerated the various gifts and powers which God had bestowed upon the church. In a manner the most beautiful and touching, he discloses the *motive* for this divine beneficence, and, by a figure the most appropriate and expressive, illustrates the *principle*, in unity with the divine *motive*, which ought mutually to unite, animate, and govern, all the members of this holy community. The *principle* upon which the gift or the power was conferred, is the same with the *principle* by which the gift or the power should be used. The favor was not given to foster self-complacency and pride, but for the common good and improvement of the church, and he who received it was bound, discarding all reference to his personal aggrandisement, to act in the spirit and to the purpose of Him by whom it was bestowed. A unity of principle must live and rule in all the members of the one body of Christ. The most distinguished and the least honorable, must be controlled by the same sacred influence. It is not what station we may occupy, which is to be the object of principal concern, but the disposition with which its duties are to be discharged; not whether we are to enjoy



distinction of membership, but whether our life and energy are sustained by the heart of love, which, from the centre of the system, sends its quickening and sympathising tide into every part, and constitutes the common and pervading spirit of the whole : not that endowments, talents, knowledge, gifts, official eminence, are to be despised ; they are from God, and regulated and directed by the charity which seeketh not her own ; their honors may be consecrated by the nobleness of their application. When regarded as means of usefulness to others, as well as to ourselves, they become legitimate objects of earnest desire. Viewed alone, they possess neither honor nor virtue ; subservient to Christian love, they are invaluable. But charity has inherent value. Its worth is unchanged by circumstances, place, or time. It is the harmony of the spiritual world ; God is its centre ; in its bosom the universe reposes ; its habitation is Eternity. “ Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.”

My friends, were a human being to be created amongst us this day, in the full vigor, beauty, and enjoyment of the most healthy and manly frame, with a matured and active intellect, and with moral feelings unperverted, were he to be informed of his position in time and in place, of the scenes and events by which he was surrounded, and of the causes which produced them, would not the warmest expressions of gratitude to the Almighty burst from his lips ? But, with his admiration of departed greatness, and his sensibility to living excellence, with his delightful reflections upon our government and institutions, our resources and power, our love of country, researches in science, our industry, liberality, and respect for religion, our example and promise, would there be mingled no darkness, and sadness, and grief ? Here, indeed, he would exclaim, dwell light, frec-



dom, christianity ; but is not the iron rod of despotism stretched out over a hundred nations? Bleed not a hundred nations under superstition's scourge? Boasted advocates of the rights of man, would he not say, are there in your own land, none upon whom the sun of this day shines with no peculiar brightness ; none who can find for themselves, in all the joyful remembrances of this anniversary, no enlivening and cheering thought ; none to whom the feasts and music of this season, are like mirth and revelry to the darkly-clad dwellers in the house of mourning? How, rejoicing people, will ye celebrate your independence : how most appropriately and honorably evince your gratitude for those benefits, those inestimable privileges, the origin of which you at this time commemorate with singular and rapturous delight? Will ye resign yourselves to the gratifications of merely selfish emotion? Like a mariner rescued by the hand of God from the fury of the waves and the tempest, who should calmly seat himself upon the rocky shore, and behold the wretches on the shattered bark, dashed one after another into destruction, and thank God that their condition was not his, but that he could refresh himself and quietly repose—shall we congratulate each other upon our distinguished blessings, without one effort to save thousands perishing before our eyes? Shall we learn this day to estimate more highly our government, laws, and religious freedom? Pledge ourselves to support and defend them until death? Aspire to still higher improvements in national wealth, education, literature, courage, magnanimity? “ Covet earnestly we may the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.”

*First.* The celebration of this anniversary by appropriate deeds of charity is the best method of observing it, because it is most conducive to our individual and national happiness. All in this assembly, I trust, are familiar with



the history of that venerable saint to whose grace we are indebted for the words of the text. In his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, that most pathetic appeal ever made to the human heart, after reminding those over whom the Holy Ghost had made him overseer, of his fidelity, laboriousness, and tenderness in the ministry of Christ, he concludes with this affecting declaration : “ I have showed you all things : how that, so labouring, ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.” Memorable aphorism of the son of God ! not extracted from the books of this world’s philosophy, but from the moral laws of Heaven. This, blessed Saviour, was the maxim of thy life, grant that it may be of ours ! When we receive good, we yield to the propensities of nature ; when we impart, we exhibit virtue in her freedom victorious over nature. The receiver voluntarily contributes, unless by an expression of gratitude, to the happiness of one only. He who gives enjoys both the happiness of another and his own benevolence. In the reception of good, active virtue can scarcely exist : the selfishness of natural feelings almost excludes it from the mind, we are but passive subjects of enjoyment ; in communicating it to others, we exhibit the principle which is the glory of God, and that essential virtue which guards and sustains the happiness of the universe. Who can doubt whether the pleasures of virtue are superior to the pleasures of sense ? Whether to imitate God be the sublimity of virtue ? Whether that character is most enviable which finds its felicity in doing good ; in contributing to the common interest and prosperity of mankind ; which is bound by the indissoluble ties of benevolence to human nature, nor regards with any sentiments but those of kindness, the whole intelligent and sensitive creation, or that which receives pleasure solely from its own per-



sonal prosperity, and whose affection reaches only to objects which minister gratification to itself? If, then, charity adds to individual happiness, it adds also to national happiness, for what is national felicity but the collected enjoyment of the individuals which constitute the nation.

We refer not, however, to that happiness, only which ever attends the cultivation and practice of this grace of charity, as its natural and necessary associate, but to the favour of Heaven, manifested towards those, whether individuals or nations, by whom it is exemplified. To the exercise and display of this grace, the essence, and perhaps the sum of christian excellence, has God promised a temporal as well as eternal reward. Injunctions to remember and relieve the poor, afflicted, and friendless, are numerous in the divine instructions to the Jews, generally accompanied with assurances that obedience would secure prosperity. Blessed, said the man whose songs were inspired, blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord shall reward him in time of trouble. The Lord shall preserve him and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness. He that deviseth liberal things, by liberal things shall he stand. Nor, is this less true of nations than of individuals, since the virtues of individuals make up national glory; that true glory which shines in beauty to the eye of God and attracts his richest benefactions.

*Second.* We celebrate this day in the best manner by appropriate acts of charity; because this mode may be of the highest benefit to others. I will not attempt (what if it were judicious, would perhaps be impossible,) to enumerate all those moral, political, physical evils, which, every where, meet the eye, and appeal to the heart of the



**Christian.** I do not wish to darken this bright day, by a description of miseries which you cannot relieve. I will only hint at the sufferings of poverty and sickness, the agonies of self-accused and hopeless minds, at the friendless, and the mourners' brokenness of heart, at war's desolations, the distress of scattered and dejected bands who contend for right and freedom, compelled to leave their banners drenched in rich blood upon the battle ground; at the darkness and terrors of superstition, and the inconceivable horrors of the slave trade.

It is a duty far more agreeable, to remind you that this age is distinguished by its systematic charity, by institutions for the relief of human misery, and for the improvement of the human condition, and character, almost as various as that misery or the defects and errors of mankind. What we give, will be directly applied to effect our purpose. If it is much, there are objects enough selected, which require it; if it is little, it cannot be lost. Should our contributions prove like seed sown by the wayside, it must be imputed to our own inconsideration, since humanity or religion can scarcely find a field which is not already fenced in for protection and culture, or to which any donation may not be applied through those who guard its interests. And, are not the benefits which these **Christian Associations** confer upon their objects immense?

Do they alleviate the distresses of the unfortunate, heal the lacerations of remorse, open to the simple the gates of wisdom, teach barbarians the lessons of Christianity, fill their dark and desolate souls with the light and beauty of immortal truth? Do they arrest the piratical ship and bring forth the victims from its dungeons of death, manumit their bodies, and enfranchise their spirits with the liberty of the sons of God? Do they raise even from a valley of bones, from the dust and ruins of the sepulchre an army for the God of Hosts; and are these to be



regarded as despicable or insignificant effects? Knowledge, liberty, civilization, christianity, are not worthless. This day proclaims their value. Their importance is not less to others than to ourselves.

*Third.* This mode of celebration will conduce most to the honor of our religion.

Then will our religion appear most honorable, when those who adopt its principles, exemplify its precepts, and prove, by benevolent deeds, that its utility, as a rule of life, is equal to its beauty as a system of faith. We must hold up in striking, glorious display, those excellencies which eclipse whatever is attractive and admirable in an erroneous philosophy, or in pagan creeds. We must study and imitate the life of Christ. We must show his disinterested and boundless benevolence. That charity which the sorrows of the Cross could not extinguish, must be ours. It should speak from our lips, glow mildly in our eyes, open our hand, and spread its grace over our whole deportment. It should wake up all our energies, and bring them to act in eternal suberviency to truth, virtue, the happiness of the world, and the glory of God. Thus shall we show the badge of true religious discipleship, and give a noble distinction to the Christian faith.

Charity never faileth. To this grace belongs the attribute of eternity. Faith is adapted to the perplexities, adversity, and warfare, of our present existence. Hope smiles upon the labors and discouragements of our earthly pilgrimage; and the other graces of Christianity are suited to form our habits for Heaven, amid the pleasures, pains, and temptations, of life: but these shall perish; they constitute the armour which is to be laid aside. But Charity is imperishable as the divine nature; it is the light and life of Heaven, the glory which shines forth from the Everlasting Throne over all the habitations of the City of God.



I cannot suppose those to whom I would present the Colonization Society as an appropriate object for this day's charity, altogether ignorant of its principles, origin, history, or success. In this City was this Institution organized; with some of its most distinguished founders and advocates you have been familiarly acquainted; all its operations have been open to your inspection; you have seen its hopes clouded by misfortunes, and again rekindling by favorable events. Of the object and probable utility of this society permit me, however, to remind you. This Institution proposes to transfer the free colored people of our country, with their own consent, to the soil of their ancestors, and assist them there in founding the institutions of freedom, civilization, and Christianity. The objects for our patronage every where surround us; their degradation and misery none will question. A physical distinction; public sentiment; their sense of degradation; their real debasement, constitute a necessity which excludes every hope of elevation; which binds down their bodies and souls to the dust. For there are no literary pleasures or distinctions; theirs are not the fascinations and treasures of science; they are sustained by no feelings of independence; stirred up by no spirit of enterprize; prompted by no view of honors; excited by no prospect of splendid rewards. Even religion, their sole benefactress, seldom rouses them from their insensibility to her motives, and rescues them from their captivity to the lowest indulgencies of sense. Her light shines around, but penetrates not the darkness of their minds. They know not the worth of her favors; they are destitute of the instruction, they feel not the influence which generally conducts to this knowledge. The vicious propensities of our nature, unrestrained by the love of reputation and the fear of disgrace, bear them



away from the means of religion, and set the heart upon gratifications that live but long enough to ruin the soul.

But this class are formed, like ourselves, for immortality; equally with us are they capable of intellectual cultivation, moral worth, of that faith which conquers the world, that hope which lives in death, and the charity which reigns eternal throughout the kingdom of God. To elevate their character we must change their state. No legal enactments shut them up from the ministrations of our kindness; our beneficence may flow forth unobstructed upon them; and shall we make no effort to sunder the bonds of their wretched and hopeless condition, and raise them up to the dignity and happiness of an enlightened, free, and Christian people?

By the system of Colonization on the African coast, we place these human beings in circumstances better adapted than any others which we can imagine, to improve and regenerate their characters; to break in upon the oblivion of their death-like existence, and inspire them with the noble sentiments which create the privileges, honors, and virtues of nations.

We have spoken of their present miseries and vices as a class; exceptions, bright and honorable, however, there are to the general character, and from these must be derived the materials for the infant colony. And what zeal and enthusiasm must wake into life every dormant or latent power of their souls? Do they contrast their own partial improvements and illumination, their system of faith and practice, with the barbarism, weakness, and the unholy and appalling creeds and rites of the African tribes, and feel no stronger attachment to the principles which give them their superiority, no aspirations after higher worth, and a loftier eminence of felicity and influence?

Millions of our countrymen, the philanthropists of all nations, look upon them with interest, and wish them



success. Will no gratitude to their benefactors, nor love of the world's applause, nor concern for their brethren nor enmity to an atrocious traffic nor joyous hopes of spreading christian beauty and peace over the desert, kindle zeal which nothing shall quench, and confirm purposes which nothing shall resist? Even the necessities of their condition cannot fail to excite industry and render invention active. And shall we accomplish a good undeserving notice, by conferring on three hundred thousand of our fellow men and upon their posterity blessings like those the origin of which is this day commemorated throughout our land, with such splendid and exhilarating demonstrations of joy!

Is there not, however, a far greater good to be accomplished by the indirect influence of the institution which I have this day the honor to represent? Let its plans be shown to be practicable, and the barriers which now, in a thousand instances, obstruct the flow of generous feeling and prevent the open and manly recognition of sacred rights, and the claims of misery, will be cleared away; and those to whom are entrusted human interests, temporal, I had almost said eternal, will exchange the name of masters for that of benefactors, and, by deeds more illustrious because more disinterested than those which achieved our own national independence and advancement, proclaim the power of those immortal truths upon which rest all our political happiness and whose universal dominion will reduce the distracted elements of the world to order.

Such beneficence will repay itself. We contribute, by the execution of this design, no less to our own moral interests and political strength, than to the benefit of others. The evil we would remove has been justly denominated by one of the ablest advocates of this great cause. "A cancer upon the body politic, eating into the vitals of the state;"



It is, indeed, a flaw in the iron pillar of our constitution; it can only injure our morals and weaken our power. And will the spirit of this age and country sustain a system, for which can be offered no plea but necessity, when that necessity no longer exists? At this subject, however, we have merely ventured to glance, though none can be more full of interest to every patriot and christian in this Republick.

But, AFRICA appeals to us this day ! She stretches out her hands, and implores us, in the name of justice as well as of mercy and religion, to remember the unparalleled wrongs which, for centuries, she has endured from Christian nations. Her coast depopulated, her villages burnt, her children murdered, or consigned to afflictions worse than death, bear testimony to the validity of her claims. Upon her shores have stood, and now stand, like demons of darkness, the traffickers in human blood, regarding nothing as sacred in the ties or affections of our nature ; nothing as venerable in human rights. No ensigns of authority or valor, no maternal tenderness, no story of friendship or of love, no personal weaknesses, can rescue the victims from the rapaciousness of these inexorable pirates. How many despairing wretches have crossed the Atlantic waves as upon the billows of death ! How many have fled for refuge from suffering into the awful shades of eternity !

By the establishment of a colony on the coast of Africa, we may introduce into that continent both civilization and christianity. In time, we expect their blessings will be scattered over that whole land, where now roam sixty millions of barbarians. Christian villages and cities may adorn the whole line of coast: intervene, as with an impassable rampart, the parties in the slave trade, and dispel, by their blessed illuminations, the deep gloom of the interior. From these may go forth



the holy missionaries, to announce the grace of the Son of God, and to teach the lessons of his Gospel. And is there in the whole civilized world, a field for missionary exertions more easy for cultivation, or rich in promise, than that which presents itself in Africa? Here are no formidable systems of superstition consecrated by age and authority, no imposing ceremonies, no awful rites to terrify, impress, fascinate, or subdue the soul, and to render it inaccessible to truth. Some vague notions the natives have of an Eternal Power; some faint imaginations of the invisible world; but these shadowy conceptions cannot fortify their minds against the arguments and appeals of the word of God. There prevails, extensively, among the African chiefs, a conviction of the superior intelligence and felicity of Christian people, and, in some instances, have they earnestly solicited, as a particular favor, instructors to reside in their towns. One poor native has already received christian baptism; another, revered for his rank and age, listened to the admonitions of a minister of God with tears. And shall we remain indolent at this auspicious season for enterprise and action? Africa may be civilized, regenerated, saved; and is this truth one, to us, of insignificant import? Is it nothing to terminate the worst system of fraud and crime which has ever existed; to construct, out of the broken and despised materials of a ruined race, social and political institutions, based upon truth and right; nothing to promulgate throughout Africa, our heavenly religion, and thus to erect to our national honor, a monument more durable than granite, inscribed to **CHARITY, THE QUEEN OF THE VIRTUES?**

Spirits of the mighty dead! martyrs to my country's cause! thought ye freedom and christianity nothing when ye poured out life in the bloody contest, that we, this day, might enjoy their noblest privileges!



Frequently, in the dispensations of Providence, confusion is succeeded by order, and light bursts forth from the depths of darkness. The manifestations of wrath toward Africa, are, we trust, soon to give place to the revelations of mercy, and those calamities, the like to which are recorded not in this world's history, turn to the production of benefits which cannot be estimated by temporal good. Amid her monuments of industry and civilization, in her temples of justice and science, and in the churches of the living God, the population of Africa may become adorned with holiness and acquire the habits of that kingdom which shall never be moved.

But, the scheme of the Colonization Society is pronounced impracticable. Why impracticable? The character of the soil, productions, climate, inhabitants of Africa, furnish no reasons for the assertion. Does not history authorize our hopes and predictions? The mightiest empires of the world, even proud Carthage, and Herculean Rome, once struggled with difficulties in the infancy of a colonial state. Have we not before our eyes the astonishingly beneficial and sublime results of colonization? Ten millions of people, the freest and happiest on earth, sprung from a few hardy adventurers, who, two centuries ago, planted themselves in the wilderness, and, amid the savages of our borders, daily rising in intelligence, wealth, and power, and extending improvements to the western ocean! these constitute the argument and demonstration we offer to the incredulous.

But are we told of the superior knowledge and virtue of the American colonists? We doubt their *moral* superiority to the present emigrants to Liberia; and, though certainly better educated, there could possibly act upon them no stronger motives for industrious and energetic conduct, and for improvement. The materials for the African colony have been selected with peculiar care.



The foundations of this colony are good : they sustain the government. But it is said that the misfortunes with which it has been visited, prove that it cannot succeed. And were the early settlements of our own country visited by no misfortunes ?

The first two attempts to plant a colony in Virginia were entirely defeated ; when such a colony was finally established, in one season of distress were its numbers reduced from five hundred to sixty ; and, at the period when it could reckon eighteen hundred souls, more than three hundred in the same hour fell murdered by the vindictive natives. Of those who landed at Plymouth in 1620, one half perished before Spring. Upon the African settlement such calamities have never fallen. The impracticableness of the plan then, we cannot perceive. Still, there is urged another objection—the means to effect the end cannot be obtained. What ought to be done can be done. If, as we trust in God, the Liberian colony shall prosper, an enthusiastic desire to become members of it will excite the free colored people to secure, by their own industry, the means of transportation. The sum demanded for this purpose will, by the increase of trade, be reduced to a trifling amount. Every town may contribute, from regard to interest as well as duty:—Each State, not merely in kindness to the emigrants, or for Africa's improvement, but for its own advantage.

And what is the work to the execution of which, when its propriety and necessity are clear, the wealth and power of this NATION are inadequate ? Let the moral sense of our countrymen be rendered alive on this subject, and never again will be heard the plea of inability. We have money to gratify every pleasure ; to fulfil every purpose of ambition ; to minister to vanity, and purchase crowns for pride ; money to build magnificent cities, and enrich them with the finest productions of art ; mo-



ney to erect palaces ; to open canals to the Pacific, and highways to Mexico ; to rear monuments ; to build navies ; to maintain wars: we have money to waste—and want we the means to effect an object, for neglect of which we are marked delinquent in the High Court of Eternal Justice, which brings its suit to all the charities and sympathies of nature!

We are often warned to beware of enthusiasm : It may end in fanaticism. Put restraint upon feeling ; be cautious, cool, dispassionate : such is the language of many a reputed sage, generally directed to what, but to palsy the arm of charity, to extinguish the fire of God's own kindling in the soul during some moments of high inspiration, when the spiritual life is invigorated by heavenly influences, and the heart beats quick and full in love to God and man. Religious enthusiasm I admire, when a presiding Divinity sits above it ; when reason rules its movements, and applies its strength. And surely this is not an occasion when our kindness, our generosity, requires a check. We are surrounded by the demonstrations of joyfulness: even dumb Nature seems alive with the spirit of the hour, mingling her sympathies with our own glad emotions. May our deeds be approved by conscience and by God !