

AN

ORATION

DELIVERED JULY 4, 1829,

BEFORE THE

ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

OF

WILLIAMS COLLEGE.

BY GILES B. KELLOGG.

Williamstown:

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1829.

Williams College, July 6, 1829.

DEAR SIR,—At a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society of Williams College, we were directed to present you their thanks for the oration you delivered on the 4th instant, and to request a copy for publication.

G. A. WILLIAMS,
S. H. LYMAN,
E. T. MACK.

MR. GILES B. KELLOGG.

GENTLEMEN,—Accept, for yourselves and the Society, my acknowledgments for the favorable opinion expressed of the oration delivered on the 4th instant. I comply with their request with diffidence. The oration has no claims to originality. But with all its faults I submit it to your discretion.

G. B. KELLOGG.

MESSES. G. A. WILLIAMS,
S. H. LYMAN,
E. T. MACK.

Williams College, July 7, 1829.

ORATION.

WE have come up hither to make an offering of thanksgiving to the Omnipotent, and to render a grateful tribute to the memory of our fathers. And while we rejoice in the unnumbered blessings conferred on us by Heaven, through the instrumentality of those fathers, let us not be unmindful of the claims of justice and humanity. We ought to remember that the happiness we enjoy is not universal. This will temper our exultation and render more heart-felt our tribute of gratitude. We have heard this day of the vices and crimes which pervade our land; setting at naught all laws, human, and divine; brutalizing the man, and making barbarity more barbarous. The tale is not yet finished. There are those among us who are shut out from the light of freedom, chained down in the prisonhouse of bondage,

“ where peace

And rest never dwell, hope never comes

That comes to all; but torture without end

Still urges;”

those, of common origin with ourselves, inheritors

of the same great blessings, heirs to the same immortality.

I invite your attention to the subject of negro slavery. The occasion will allow us only to glance at its introduction among us, the measures which have since been taken to remove the evil, and to suggest some motives why we should aid the Colonization Society. I am the more ready and willing to enter upon the first topic, because the English writers have made the existence of domestic slavery in this country the ground of severe abuse of the United States. They have called it "the great curse of America, the consummation of wickedness, admitting of no sort of apology from our situation;" with many other hard names to which their own compunctions of conscience would easily help them. I am willing that the Americans should be treated as they deserve for participating in this horrid traffic; further than this I cannot go. I am willing to call this institution "a curse and a damning crime," but I shall ascribe its origin to a very different people, than the British writers are fond of doing. In pursuing this subject, therefore, I hope to commit the sin of telling the truth, the whole truth, fall where it may.

Much as I deprecate the present unhappy state of feeling between Great Britain and this country, and the unwarrantable measures which some employ to keep it alive; much as I admire and venerate the splendid talents, the learning, and wisdom

which the mother isle has produced, I would be the last to exhort the Americans to a truce in this contest, provoked as they have been, and unatoned as the injustice done them still remains. I would have them cling to the great law of self-defence. If Englishmen,

“ who have travelled far and had
To purchase human flesh ; to wreath the yoke
Of vassalage on savage liberty ;
To suck large fortunes from the sweat of slaves ;
And with refined knavery to cheat,
Pollitely villainous, untutored men ;”

charge upon us their own guilt, I would indignantly repel the charge.

England first engaged in the slave-trade in 1562, in the reign of Elizabeth, and regarded it as lawful commerce until March 1808. During all this period, except the time when she was deeply involved in war, this trade was an important branch of her commerce, carried on either by chartered companies or by individuals. During this time also her American dominions were discovered and settled. As soon as the settlements were in a tolerable state of forwardness, our shores were blackened with her slave-ships. As if it were not enough to drive her sons from their homes by religious intolerance, she would make them partakers in her own eternal infamy. Her plea was to prevent emigration from the mother country and to increase her revenue. Negroes were first imported into Virginia in 1621, and into

the New England Colonies, in 1630. Slavery was from the first discouraged, especially in New England. Popular opinion, so far as it could be expressed, was decidedly against it. The colonists regarded it unjust, to bring their fellow beings into the same condition from which they had escaped. Consequently it never existed in this part of the country to a great extent. The people frequently passed resolutions against it. The General Court of Massachusetts in 1645, made a law which "prohibited the buying and selling of slaves." In 1703, the same Court imposed a heavy duty on every negro imported. This did not drive the slave-vessels from our ports, and they proceeded to take more effectual measures. No act, however, which amounted to a prohibition could obtain the sanction of the royal governors, for they had it in "express command from the British Cabinet to reject all laws of that description." The efforts of the friends of abolition were ceaseless, and as unavailing. In 1703, in 1767, and 1774, bills were introduced, unanimously passed, and successively annulled by the governor. In the latter year an act was passed, "to prevent the importation of negroes and others, as slaves into this province," and laid before Gov. Hutchinson for his approbation. The assembly immediately received a harsh and contemptuous answer, and a notice of prorogation, "for wishing him to disregard the nod of his lord and master the king." Such was the course of proceeding

in all the New England provinces. The governor of a neighboring state received the following instruction: "You are not to give your assent to, or pass any law imposing duties on negroes imported into New Hampshire." Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia, treading in the footsteps of the New England colonies, met with as little success. No less than twenty-three attempts are recorded in the Legislative proceedings of Virginia, to effect abolition during her colonial vassalage, besides numerous petitions to parliament and the king. In short, no conduct of America before her independence, which in the least degree discountenanced the British traffic in human flesh met with any approbation in the mother country. That long introductory chapter of America's history, is crowded with tales of barbarous oppression. It is written in blood, in the blood alike of the innocent and guilty.

Before we open the volume of our independence to proceedings, the praise or blame of which falls on ourselves, let us pause and review the period over which we have slightly passed. We have seen that the crime of instituting slavery in this country lies entirely at the door of Great Britain. "We," said Pitt, on the floor of parliament, when the question of abolition was agitated, "we stopped the natural progress of civilization in Africa. We cut her off from the opportunity of improvement. We kept her down in a state of darkness, bondage, ignorance and bloodshed." "The

broad mantle of this one infamy," said Mr. Beaufoy at the same time, "will cover with substantial blackness the radiance of your glory, and change to feelings of abhorrence the present admiration of the world."

Perhaps the admirers of England will say, slavery never would have existed here if the colonists had not encouraged it. Slaves would not have been brought here, if there had not been a ready market for them. Without stopping to urge in vindication of the colonists the example of the mother country, their ignorance of the manner in which the slaves were obtained, and the vindication constantly urged that the species was inferior, it is recorded in history, "they durst not reject them." Great Britain sent them here to supply the place of emigrants from home, with the authoritative tone, "receive them, or abide by the fate to which the savage native may doom you." It is well-known too, that many of the New-Englanders bought slaves that they might save the public from the nuisance of a vagabond race, and that they might give them religious instruction. If the Southern planter, inhabiting a climate notoriously destructive to the European constitution, and constantly liable to incursions from the savage, reduced to a state of subjection a part of our race who could safely endure labor in that climate, and at the same time give the owner leisure to defend his possessions and attend to affairs of state, if he brought into bondage a race of men whom

he was taught to regard as formed by nature for servants to the white man, a race in short which was forced upon him, it would not seem beyond the bounds of reason and duty to defend him from the charge of inconsistency, cruelty and murder. If these considerations are not sufficient to justify the conduct of our fathers, we have their defence written in capitals on the scroll of our independence. In the draft of the Declaration which Mr. Jefferson drew up, among the charges preferred against the king as the representative of the nation, we find the following : “ Determined to keep open a market where *Men* should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us and to purchase that liberty of which *he* has deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom *he* also obtruded them : thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.” This, with other sentences, was struck out before the declaration was adopted by Congress ; not because it was untrue, but because it was deemed inexpedient to add to the black catalogue of charges. That it was true may be gathered from the fact that the same is recorded in the constitutions of several of the states ; and that it was

stated, uncontradicted, in parliament by Burke as a reason why the colonies rebelled.

During the revolutionary struggle it was not to be expected much could be done to eradicate the evil of slavery. Nor from the character and conduct of the colonists, would any one suppose them so carried away by the enthusiasm of the times as to declare all free and independent. It would have been well for their enemies, had they sent forth an act of universal emancipation. England would have thanked them for their folly. The case of the degraded African however was not forgotten. The Legislature of Virginia, at the very first session held under the republican government, passed a law for the perpetual prohibition of the importation of slaves. In 1780, a gradual emancipation was decreed by Massachusetts. The same was also done near the same time, by all that part of the Union north of the state of Delaware.

For many important reasons, the power to regulate the condition and disposition of slaves in the United States never was given to the national government. It is an internal affair of the individual states, a trust too sacred to be deposited in the hands of Congress, where the better judgment might be swayed by mistaken feelings, to the material injury to parts of the country. As a nation therefore we are not answerable for the present existence of slavery or the treatment of slaves. The views of the general government, however,

so far as it was allowed to act, may be learnt from its proceedings. When Massachusetts, Connecticut, New-York, and Virginia, ceded to the United States their respective claims to the territory lying north-west of the river Ohio, Congress immediately enacted an ordinance for the government of said territory; in which it is declared, that there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, otherwise than in punishment for crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted. This ordinance was unanimously voted for by Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, without whom it could not have been passed. The law by which Congress prohibited the slave-trade, took effect in January, 1808. Various acts were afterwards passed to carry the law into more effectual operation. In 1819 provision was made for the residence of agents on the coast of Africa, to further the views of the government. In 1820 it was enacted that "every person proved to be engaged in the slave-trade is guilty of *piracy* and shall be punished with death."

The plan of colonising the free people of colour in some place remote from the United States, and educating those in bondage with a view to colonise them, originated in the legislature of Virginia, in a committee of which Mr. Jefferson was the head, in 1777. Owing to the peculiar circumstances in which the country was then placed, the plan was not at once carried into effect; but

it was never relinquished. In December 1816, the legislature adopted a resolution requesting the executive to correspond with the president of the United States for the purpose of obtaining a territory on the coast of Africa, or some other convenient place, to be settled by coloured emigrants. Similar resolutions were also passed by Maryland, Tennessee, and Georgia. And in December of the same year, the American Colonisation Society was formed.

I have been thus minute in noting whatever has transpired in the slave holding states, in ridding our country of this evil, that their sentiments may be justly appreciated. They regard it as an institution to be abolished as soon as the safety of the public and the good of its victims will permit. It may be well to add, that the design of the Colonisation Society has met with approbation and support at the south; and that its original members were principally southern gentlemen.

We have hitherto, in tracing the abolition of slavery from our country, been able to console ourselves with the reflection that the evil was entailed upon us by another nation; that all individual and legislative means have been used to arrest it; and that its continuance was unavoidable. We can plead that excuse no longer. It would have been well for our national character and the hopes of freemen, had nothing been recorded to blacken this page in our history. But to the disgrace of American legislation it must be

said, Congress gave its consent to the extension of this deadly, damning disease; the very year too in which it declared the trade piratical and punishable with death. The deed was a terrible falling-off from feeling and humanity. It gave an awful pause to the progress of freedom. It cast a blighting-mildew upon our young strength; a sickness, a rottenness of heart which years cannot remedy, which time itself, it may be, cannot repair. I refer to the passing of the Missouri Bill. We all remember with what indignant feelings we received the news. We would not defend the defenders of this measure. We would uncover them to the combined outpouring of every free voice in Christendom. We cannot now think of the great men who spoke in opposition to the restriction of this Bill, while we allow their arguments some degree of plausibility, without sorrow mingled with contempt; sorrow at the wound inflicted on the cause of justice, contempt at the prostitution of influence and talents. We can give no countenance to this proceeding. We can look with complacency, nay we can rejoice at the admission of new states into the family of the Union. When such new states are formed out of others, they cannot be admitted without the consent of the parent ones; and the latter, if they tolerate slavery, undoubtedly have a right to insist on its toleration also in the new ones. Congress in this case must take other things into the account; but its refusal to admit such states

without the prohibition of slavery, would not aid the cause of free institutions, inasmuch as necessity requires the toleration of an evil already existing and unavoidable. The rejection of the Missouri bill, without the restriction, would have been no invasion of state-rights. Congress was obligated to no one. It possessed the territory, and had an opportunity to benefit the cause of freedom. It neglected it. We would have saved that soil from contamination. We would have made the Mississippi impassable to the manacled victim. We would have confined the curse to its eastern shores. Whoever passed its waters, like those who forded the fabled river of purgatory, should have been washed and purified.

Such, Gentlemen of the Anti-Slavery Society, is a general view of the introduction of domestic servitude into our country, and the measures which have been taken to eradicate it. In speaking of this subject, I have endeavored to do justice to all parties concerned. I would screen no American from the contempt which he deserves for engaging in the slave-trade. I know that some of our countrymen participated in its profits before we took our stand among the nations, and I would throw upon them a merited portion of its guilt. But that nation which, by monopolising, sought to exclude all others from the trade, I would represent as covered with crimes of no ordinary die. I know that there were men in this country, as there have been in all others, of

broken fortunes and ruined characters, who sacrificed all interest and feeling at the shrine of gain. I know there have been cases since of this wickedness, which have escaped the vigilance of government. Its deeds are evil, and it has worked in darkness. I know that unnecessary cruelty has been inflicted, and still is inflicted, by us. I have heard of the hardness of heart which this practice brings, and the iron foldings with which it shuts up its avenues. And I could exclaim with Jefferson, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep for ever." But I cannot consent, out of love to the native land of our forefathers, to turn traitor, and set in more miserable relief than truth warrants, American cruelties and American guilt.

It remains to consider some of the motives which address themselves to us as scholars, as American scholars, to lend our aid to the Colonisation Society. I say to the Colonisation Society, for the plan of that society is the best and the only successful one which has yet been proposed. It is the only plan which is likely to succeed. Every other has been thoroughly examined and found defective. This also has undergone equal scrutiny, and been put to the test of experience. Thus far the experiment has proved successful. It has met with the approval of all those who have interested themselves in this subject, of all, I may justly say, who have at heart the good of

their country and the happiness of their race. The object and interests of this society, its importance and success, have been too-often presented, and are too well-known, to need from me particular mention. It is enough for us to know that the highest hopes of its founders have been fully realised. It is enough for us to know that this is the only way in which we can serve the degraded, insulted, enslaved African, and avert the fearful doom that hangs over our land. It is enough for us to know that the field is white and ready for the harvest, and that we are called upon as Christians, as patriots, as Americans, as scholars who are going forth to act on the mass of society, to administer the cup of consolation and hope, or infuse into it the poison of despair, to exert a protecting and healing influence in the world, or plunge the dagger to its vitals, to lay hold of this work heart and hand.

If we consider the series of events that led to the discovery of this country, the time and manner of its settlement; if we consider the American revolution, its actors, the principles and rights that hung upon the issue of the contest; if we consider the result of that contest, the important experiment which was commenced before the face of the whole world; if we consider a government like ours merely in the abstract, the various, comprehensive, and complicated interests that enter into its formation, the regular distribution of power into distinct departments, the intro-

duction of legislative checks and balances, the necessity of creating no distinction other than merit confers, the whole panorama, in short, of the science of legislation; they will all be found intimately connected with our subject, and to hold out powerful motives to active exertion in this cause. They will be found to call loudly upon us, as those who are appointed in the order of Providence to guide the nations to political and religious independence; as those who are intrusted with an inheritance rich and invaluable, but as those who may dash man's bright hopes, poison the very air he breathes, blot out his very sun from heaven.

We are to shed about us an important influence. It may not be that human affairs are to receive a new turn from us, or that the happiness or existence of any community depends upon any exertions of ours. But great results have not always proportionate causes. Our influence, combined with that of others, may go to the perpetuation or entire subversion of the political systems intrusted to us. The road to ruin is easy of descent; and if once the watchfulness of the influential slumbers; if their talent and opinions are enlisted against the interests of society; if the nation is rocked into security while the giant evil of slavery, or any other, is growing up, wo to the freedom and independence of our institutions; wo to the folly that nourishes the viper in its bosom. Let us see to it that our influence be

felt ; that it be not deadly to the interests of our common parent. Let us see to it that the story of our country, through neglect of its preservation, be not added to the few faint beacon-lights that glare upon us from the page of history. Let us see to it that we have no part in calling down upon our memory the bitter curses of coming generations.

But it is not the responsibility pressing upon us as the inheritors of a free and happy form of government, as the almoners of a goodly heritage, only, that ought to regulate our conduct. There are other motives higher and nobler, because more extensive and lasting in their effects ; holier, because more disinterested. They are the appeals of two millions of fellow creatures to our benevolence ; they are the claims of despised, deserted Africa. If there is a man on earth who deserves to be called *great* and *good*, it is he whose love embraces all men and whose heart is touched at the sight of human wo. It is he who, through greatness of principle, breasts, with invincible courage the storms of opposition, and sacrifices life and honor to the relief of humanity. It is he who goes, like Scott's hero, to search out the graves of martyrs to freedom and benevolence, to re-etch inscriptions to their worth upon their tomb-stones, and to point them out as eminent examples for imitation. It is he, who goes forth, (as was said of the great English philanthropist,) to dive into the depths of dungeons, to plunge into the infec-

tion of hospitals, to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain, to take the gage and dimensions of misery, depression, and contempt.

But Africa has claims to urge; claims upon our justice and humanity; claims upon the justice and humanity of the whole civilised world. They are founded upon the cruelties, the atrocities which all have inflicted upon her. They come attested by her groans. They fall upon the ear in accents of thunder, demanding the payment of her due, and pointing to the fearful consequences of neglect. They demand the return of her children. They show the advantages to be derived as well to the land that holds her sons in bondage as to herself. "Every emigrant to Africa," they insist in the language of Mr. Clay, "is a missionary, carrying with him credentials in the holy cause of civilization, religion, and free institutions." And they hold forth the duty and necessity of contributing our substance and influence to aid in obtaining her long lost blessings and rights.

I might present other motives. I might come nearer home and appeal to your self-love. I might tell of the honour of standing side by side in the sacred cause, with the Wilberforces, the Pitts, and Burkes of other days; and with the Cannings, the Broughams, and the Clays, of our own. But I forbear. If it is not fame enough to be instrumental in preserving, increasing, and transmitting the rich inheritance we have received in trust from our fathers; if the gratification

of the purest, the holiest feelings of the human heart is not reward enough; if it is not glory enough to be the assertors and stern defenders of the claims of oppressed and injured Africa; I will press the matter no farther. I should be ashamed of the American who asked for higher excitements, if higher could be found. Upon that man, who shuts himself up in the narrow chamber of self, in this age of extended and benevolent exertion, who looks not out upon the march of improvement, who opens not his heart to the pleas of misery, who puts not forth his hand to forward the well-being of society, I would not waste words to gain his co-operation. I would not break in upon his happiness. I would not knock at the door of his heaven. I would leave him to go down to his grave unwept, and repose in lasting and merited oblivion. But I am not addressing such. I am addressing men of more compassion, of more liberal views. The very existence of your association proves the importance which you attach to the African's claims and wrongs.

Permit me then, in behalf of two millions of that race, in behalf of the whole of that race, to suggest the manner in which you can best serve the cause. Gold and silver I ask not. There is a mightier agency. It is by sowing plentifully the seminal principles of a virtuous education; it is by multiplying intellect through the medium of the press; it is by cleansing the fountain-head of public opinion, by guiding the stream and open-

ing new channels of pure, healthful waters to feed it; it is by teaching just moral sentiments, imparting kindling truths to kindred minds; it is by forming intellectual conspiracies and storming the enemy's works that man's deliverance from slavery is to be accomplished. Public opinion is omnipotent; and it only needs a master spirit to direct it and mines of wealth will be opened. Fear not the censure of men. There will be those whose slumbers you will break, who would have slept to eternity for all exerting themselves in the cause of human freedom and improvement, and who will mutter curses. Better to be too anxious than repose in too confident a security. Better to be despised for too zealous and benevolent activity, than fall in with the views of the idle and selfish. Far better to seek the approbation of God and conscience, than to lead the life of a brute, a worm, an ephemeron.

The field of your labor is open, and you have entered it in the youth and vigour and spring-time of your being. May you not act unworthily; unworthy of your high descent, unworthy of your country, unworthy of your great destination. May you faint not, nor falter in this holy war; a war waged against ignorance and cruelty, the war of the philanthropist, the war of the age. Go on, for the fight has already commenced and the enemy is rousing and bringing up his reserve to the onset. Go on fearlessly and manfully. The expiring sighs of those, who have labored

and suffered in the cause, invite, the spirit of the times, invites.

“ A world breaking from its iron chains,
And like a giant struggling to be free,”

invites.

“ Ye seek the wreath of fame ;—toil on, toil on ;
When ye are sepulchred, others will bring its flowers
And strew them plentifully upon your graves.”

NOTE.—The author wishes to state that in the hurry of composition he neglected to preserve references to the book where each fact above quoted may be found ; and such is now the nature of his engagements that he is not able to note the authorities on the margins of the respective pages where they are referred to. He therefore by request mentions them in this note.—

Authorities referred to in the preceding discourse.—Clarkson's History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, by the British Parliament—Walsh's Appeal—Edward's History of the West Indies—Marshall's History of the Colonies—Davenant's Works, vol. 5—Robertson—Stith—Belknap—Massachusetts Historical Collection, vol. 4—Gordon's History of the American Revolution, vol. 5—Virginia Laws—Judge Tucker's Blackstone—Jefferson's Notes—Brougham's Colonial Policy—North American Review, vols. 10, 13, 18—Burke on Conciliation with America—Pickering's Review—American Quarterly Review, vol. 1, 4—King's Speeches on the Missouri Bill—Rees's Cyclopaedia, Article, Virginia—Cooper's Travelling Bachelor, vol. 2.