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An Address

Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky, at Frankfort, December 17, 1839, by the Hon. Henry Clay, at the request of the Board of Managers.

Gentlemen of the Col. Society of Kentucky:

I most sincerely wish that the task of addressing you, on this occasion, had been assigned, by the Board of Managers, to some individual more competent than I am to explain and illustrate and enforce the claims of the Society to the friendly and favorable consideration of the public. I yield to none in a thorough persuasion of the utility of the scheme of the Society, in a profound conviction of its practicability, and in an ardent desire for its complete success. But I am sensible that there are many others who could more happily than I can, throw around the subject those embellishments which are best calculated to secure attention, and engage the cordial and energetic co-operation of the community. When the application was first made to me to deliver this address, I hesitated to comply with it, because I apprehended that my motives would be misconceived, and my language be misrepresented. Subsequent reflection determined me to adhere to the maxim of my whole life, to endeavour to render all the good in my power, without being restrained by the misconceptions to which I might expose myself. In entering upon the duty which has devolved upon me, I ask only the exercise of ordinary liberality in judging the imperfections which will doubtless mark its performance.

In surveying the United States of North America and their territories, the beholder perceives, among their inhabitants, three separate and distinct races of men, originally appertaining to three different continents of the globe, each race varying from the others in colour, physical properties, and moral and intellectual endowments. The European is the most numerous; and, as well from that fact, as from its far greater advance in civilization and in the arts, has the decided ascendancy over the other two, giving the law to them, controlling their condition, and responsible for their fate to the Great Father of all, and to the enlightened world. The next most numerous and intelligent race, is that which sprung from Africa, the largest portion of which is held in bondage by their brethren, descendants of the European. The aborigines, or Indian race, are the least numerous, and, with the exception of some tribes, have but partially emerged from the state of barbarism in which they were found on the first discovery of America. Whence, or how they came hither, are speculations for the research of the curious, on which authentic history affords no certain light.

Their future fortunes or condition, form no part of the subject of this address. I shall, I hope, nevertheless, be excused for the digression of dedicating a few passing observations to the interesting remnant of these primitive possessors of the New World. I have never been able to agree in the expediency of employing any extraordinary exertions to blend the white and copper coloured races together, by the ceremony of marriage.—There would be a motive for it if the Indians were equal or superior to their white brethren in physical or intellectual powers. But the fact is believed to be otherwise. The mixture improves the Indian, but deteriorates the European element. Invariably it is remarked, that those of the mixed blood among the Indians, are their superiors in war, in council, and in the progress of the useful arts, whilst they remain in the rear of the pure white race still farther than they are in advance of the pure Indian. In those instances (chiefly among the French) during the progress of the settlement of this continent, in which the settlers have had most intercourse with the Indians, they have rather sunk to the level of their state, than contributed essentially to their civilization.

But if there be no adequate recommendation to the white race of an union, by intermarriage, with the Indian, we are enjoined, by every duty of religion, humanity, and magnanimity, to treat them with kindness and justice, and to recall them, if we can, from their savage to a better condition. The United States stand charged with the fate of these poor children of the woods in the face of their common Maker, and in the presence of the world. And, as certain as the guardian is answerable for the education of his infant ward, and the management of his estate, will they be responsible here and hereafter for the manner in which they shall perform the duties of the high trust which is committed to their hands, by the force of circumstances. Hitherto, since the United States became an independent power among the nations of the earth, they have generally treated the Indians with justice, and performed towards them all the offices of humanity. Their policy, in this respect, was vindicated during the negotiations at Ghent, and the principles which guided them in their relations with the Indians, were then promulgated to all Christendom. On that occasion, their representatives holding up their conduct in advantageous contrast with that of Great Britain and the other powers of Europe, said: 'From the rigor of this system, however, as practised by Great Britain and all the European powers in America, the humane and liberal policy of the United States has voluntarily relaxed.' A celebrated writer on the laws of nations, to whose authority British jurists have taken particular satisfaction in appealing, after stating, in the most explicit manner, the legitimacy of colonial settlement in America, to the exclusion of all rights of uncivilized Indian tribes, has taken occasion to praise the first settlers of New England, and the founder of Pennsylvania, in having purchased of the Indians the lands they resolved to cultivate, notwithstanding their being provided with a charter from their sovereign. It is this example which the United States, since they became, by their independence, the sovereigns of the territory, have adopted and organized into a political system. Under that system, the Indians residing with the United States are so far independent, that they live under their own customs and not under the laws of the United States; that their rights upon the lands where they inhabit or hunt, are secured to them by boundaries defined in amicable treaties between the United States and themselves; and whenever

those boundaries are varied, it is also by amicable and voluntary treaties, by which they receive from the United States ample compensation for every right they have to the land ceded by them. They are so far dependent as not to have the right to dispose of their lands to any private person, nor to any power other than the United States, and to be under their protection alone, and not under that of any other power. Whether called subjects, or by whatever name designated, such is the relation between them and the United States. That relation is neither asserted now for the first time, nor did it originate with the treaty of Greenville.—These principles have been uniformly recognized by the Indians themselves, not only by that treaty but in all the other previous as well as subsequent treaties between them and the United States.—Such was the solemn annunciation to the whole world of the principles and of the system regulating our relations with the Indians, as admitted by us and recognized by them. There can be no violation of either, to the disadvantage of the weaker party, which will not subject us, as a nation, to the just reproaches of all good men, and which may not bring down upon us the maledictions of a more exalted and powerful tribunal.

Whether the Indian portion of the inhabitants of the United States will survive or become extinct, in the progress of population, which the European race is rapidly making from the shores of the Atlantic to those of the Pacific ocean, provided they are treated with justice and humanity, is a problem of less importance. The two races are not promiscuously mingled together, but are generally separate and distinct communities. There is no danger to the whites or to their purity, from the power or from the vices of the Indians. The case is widely different with those who form the immediate object of this address.

The African part of our population, or their ancestors, were brought hither forcibly and by violence, in the prosecution of the most abominable traffic that ever disgraced the annals of the human race. They were chiefly procured, in their native country, as captives in war, taken, and subsequently sold by the conqueror as slaves to the slave-trader. Sometimes the most atrocious practices of kidnapping were employed to obtain possession of the victims. Wars were frequent, between numerous and barbarous neighboring tribes scattered along the coast or stretched upon the margin of large rivers of Africa. These wars were often enkindled and prosecuted for no other object than to obtain a supply of subjects for this most shocking commerce. In these modes, husbands were torn from their wives, parents from their children, brethren from each other, and every tie cherished and respected among men, was violated. Upon the arrival, at the African coast, of the unfortunate beings thus reduced to slavery, they were embarked on board of ships carefully constructed and arranged to contain the greatest amount of human beings. Here they are ironed and fastened in parallel rows, and crowded together so closely, in loathsome holes, as not to have room for action or for breathing wholesome air. The great aim was to transport the largest possible number, at the least possible charge, from their native land to the markets for which they were destined. The greediness of cupidity was frequently disappointed and punished in its purposes, by the loss of moities of whole cargoes of the subjects of this infamous commerce, from want and suffering and disease on the voyage. How much happier were they who thus expired, than their miserable survivors!

These African slaves were brought to the continent of America, and the islands adjacent to it, and formed the parent stock of the race now amongst us. They were brought to the colonies, now constituting the United States, under the sanction and by the authority of British laws, which, at an early period of our colonial existence, admitted and tolerated the trade. It is due to our colonial ancestors to say, that they frequently and earnestly, but unsuccessfully, remonstrated to the British crown against the continuance of the practice. The introduction of slavery into this country is not, therefore, chargeable to them, but to a government in which they had no voice, and over which they had no control. It is equally due to our parent State to advert to the honourable fact, that, in the midst of the Revolutionary war, when contending for her own independence and liberty, she evinced the sincerity of the spirit in which those remonstrances had been addressed to the British throne, by denouncing under the severest penalties, the further prosecution of the slave trade, within her jurisdiction. And I add, with great satisfaction, that the Congress of the United States passed an act, abolishing the trade as early as by their constitution it was authorized to do. On the second day of March, 1807, the act was passed, for which it was my happy lot to vote, the first section of which enacts, 'That from and after the first day of January, 1808, it shall not be lawful to import or bring into the United States, or the territories thereof, from any foreign kingdom, place, or country, any negro, mulatto, or person of colour, with intent to hold, sell or dispose of such negro, mulatto or person of colour, as a slave, or to be held to service or labour.' Thus terminated, we may hope forever, in the United States, a disgraceful traffic, which drew after it a train of enormities surpassing in magnitude, darkness and duration, any that ever sprang from any trade pushed by the enterprise or cupidity of man.

The United States, as a nation, are not responsible for the original introduction, or the subsequent continuance of the slave trade. Whenever, as has often happened, their character has been assailed in foreign countries, and by foreign writers, on account of the institution of slavery among us, the justness of that vindication has been admitted by the candid, which transfers to a foreign government the origin of the evil. Nor are the United States, as a sovereign power, responsible for the continuance of slavery within their limits, posterior to the establishment of their independence; because by neither the articles of confederation, nor by the present constitution, had they power to put an end to it by the adoption of any system of emancipation. But from that epoch, the responsibility of the several states in which slavery was tolerated commenced, and on them devolved the momentous duty of considering whether the evil of African slavery is incurable,

or admits of a safe and practical remedy. In performing it, they ought to reflect, that, if when a given remedy is presented to their acceptance, instead of a due examination and deliberate consideration of it, they promptly reject it, and manifest an impatience whenever a suggestion is made of any plan to remove the evil, they will expose themselves to the reproach of yielding to the illusions of self-interest, and of insincerity in the professions which they so often make of a desire to get rid of slavery. It is a great misfortune, growing out of the actual condition of the several states, some being exempt, and others liable to this evil, that they are too prone to misinterpret the views and wishes of each other in respect to it. The North and the South and the West, when they understand each other well must be each convinced, that no other desire is entertained towards the others by any one of them, than for their welfare and prosperity. If the question were submitted, whether there should be either immediate or gradual emancipation of all the slaves in the United States, without their removal or colonization, painful as it is to express the opinion, I have no doubt that it would be unwise to emancipate them. For I believe, that the aggregate of the evils which would be engendered in society, upon the supposition of such general emancipation, and of the liberated slaves remaining promiscuously among us, would be greater than all the evils of slavery, great as they unquestionably are.

The several States of the Union were sensible of the responsibility which accrued to them, on the establishment of the independence of the United States, in regard to the subject of slavery. And many of them, beginning at a period prior to the termination of the revolutionary war, by successive but distinct acts of legislation, have effectively provided for the abolition of slavery, within their respective jurisdictions. More than thirty years ago an attempt was made in this commonwealth to adopt a system of gradual emancipation, similar to that which the illustrious Franklin had mainly contributed to introduce, in the year 1779, in the State founded by the benevolent Penna.—And, among the acts of my life, which I look back to with most satisfaction, is that of my having co-operated with other zealous and intelligent friends, to procure the establishment of that system in this state. We believed that the sum of good which would have been attained by the state of Kentucky, in a gradual emancipation of her slaves, at that period, would have far transcended the aggregate of mischief which might have resulted to herself and the Union together, from the gradual liberation of them, and their dispersion and residence in the United States. We were overpowered by numbers, but submitted to the decision of the majority with the grace which the minority, in a republic, should ever yield to such a decision. I have, nevertheless, never ceased, and never shall cease, to regret a decision, the effects of which have been to place us in the rear of our neighbours, who are exempt from slavery in the state of agriculture, the progress of manufactures, the advance of improvement, and the general prosperity of society.

Other states, in which slavery exists, have not been un mindful of its evils, nor indifferent to an adequate remedy for their removal. But most of them have hitherto reluctantly acquiesced in the continuance of these evils, because they thought they saw no practical scheme for their removal, which was free from insuperable objection and difficulty. Is there then really no such remedy? Must we endure, perpetually, all the undoubted mischiefs of the state of slavery, as it affects both the free and bond portions of the population of these States? Already the slaves may be estimated at two millions, and the free population at ten, the former being in the proportion of one to five of the latter. Their respective numbers will probably duplicate in periods of thirty-three years. In the year '63 the number of the whites will probably be twenty, and of the blacks four millions: in ninety-six, forty and eight, and, in the year 1929, about a century, eighty and sixteen millions. What mind is sufficiently extensive in its reach, what nerves sufficiently strong, to contemplate this vast and progressive augmentation, without an awful foreboding of the tremendous consequences? If the two descriptions of population were equally spread and intermingled over the whole surface of the United States, their diffusion might diminish the danger of their action and corrupting influence upon each other. But this is not the state of the fact. The slaves of the United States are chiefly restricted to one quarter of the Union, which may be described with sufficient general accuracy, by a boundary, beginning with the mouth of the Potomac river, extending to its head, thence to the Ohio river, and down it and the Mississippi, to the Gulf of Mexico, and with that and the Atlantic ocean, and the Bay of Chesapeake to the beginning. Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, a part of Louisiana and Arkansas, compose the whole of the residue of the slave district of the United States. Within those limits all our slaves are concentrated; and within a portion of them, irresistible causes tend inevitably to their further concentration. In one of the states, comprised within these limits, the slave stock had, at the last census, the superiority in numbers, whilst in several others, the enumeration exhibits the two races in nearly equal proportions.

Time alone, which unveils every thing, permitted men to see, can disclose the consequences, now wrapt in futurity, of the state of things which I have slightly touched. But, without violating his prerogative, we may venture to catch, in anticipation, a glimpse of some of them.

The humanity of the slave states of the Union has prompted them greatly to meliorate the condition of slaves. They are protected, in all instances, by just laws, from injury extending to their lives, and in many from cruelty applied to their persons. Public opinion has done even more than the laws in elevating their condition in the scale of human existence. In this State, as well as in others, they are treated with much kindness, and abundantly supplied with substantial food of meat and bread and vegetables, and comfortable clothing, whilst they are moderately tasked in labour. But still they are subject to many civil disabilities, and there is a vast space between them and the race of freemen. Our laws continue to regard them as property, and, consequently, as instruments of labour, bound to obey the mandate of others. As a

mere labourer, the slave feels that he toils for his master and not for himself; that the laws do not recognize his capacity to acquire and hold property, which depends altogether upon the pleasure of his proprietor; and that all the fruits of his exertions are reaped by others. He knows that, whether sick or well, in times of scarcity or abundance, his master is bound to provide for him, by the all-powerful influence of the motives of self-interest. He is generally, therefore, indifferent to the adverse or prosperous fortunes of his master, being contented, if he can escape his displeasure or chastisement, by a careless and slovenly performance of his duties.

This is the state of the relation of master and slave, prescribed by the law of its nature, and founded in the reason of things. There are undoubtedly many exceptions, in which the slave dedicates himself to his master with a zealous and generous devotion, and the master to the slave with a parental and affectionate attachment. But it is not my purpose to speak of those particular though endearing instances of mutual regard, but of the general state of the unfortunate relation.

That labour is best, if it can be commanded, in which the labourer knows that he will derive the profits of his industry; that his employment depends upon his diligence, and his reward upon his assiduity. He has then every motive to excite him to exertion, and to animate him in perseverance. He knows that if he is treated badly he can exchange his employer for one who will better estimate his service; that he does not entirely depend upon another's beck and nod, and that whatever he earns is his, to be distributed by himself, as he pleases, among his wife and children and friends, or enjoyed by himself. He feels, in a word, that he is a free agent, with rights and privileges and sensibilities.

Wherever the option exists to employ, an at equal hire, free or slave labour, the former will be decidedly preferred, for the reasons already assigned. It is more capable, more diligent, more faithful, and, in every respect, worthy of more confidence. In the first settlement of some countries, or communities, capital may be unable to command the free labour which it wants, and it may, therefore, purchase that of slaves. Such was and yet is the condition of many parts of the United States. But there are others, and they are annually increasing in extent, in which the labour of freemen can be commanded at a rate quite as cheap as that of slaves, in states which tolerate slavery.

Although in particular states, or parts of states, the increase of the African portion of population would seem to be greater than that of the European stock, this fact is believed to be susceptible of an explanation, from the operation of causes of emigration, which would not assign to it greater prolific powers. On the contrary, all the enumerations of the people of the United States sustain clearly the position, that, contrasting the whole European race throughout the Union with the whole of the African race, bond and free, also throughout the Union the former multiplies faster than the latter. As time elapses our numbers will augment, our deserts become peopled, and our country will become as densely populated as its agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial facilities will admit. In proportion to the density of population are the supply and the wages of labour. The demand for labour also increases with the augmentation of numbers though probably not in the same proportion. Assuming our present population at twelve millions, when it shall be increased, as in about thirty years it will be, to twenty-four millions, we shall have double the amount of available labour that we can command at present. And there will consequently be a great, though probably not proportionate, reduction in the wages of labour, as the supply of labourers increases, a competition will arise between, not only individuals, but classes for employment. The superior qualities which have been attributed to free labour will insure for that the preference, wherever the alternative is presented of engaging free or slave labour, at an equal price. This competition, and the preference for white labour, are believed to be already discernible in parts of Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky, and probably existed in Pennsylvania and other states north of Maryland, prior to the disappearance of slaves from among them. The march of the ascendancy of free labour over slave, will proceed from the North to the South, gradually entering first the states nearest the free region. Its progress would be more rapid, if it were not impeded by the check resulting from the repugnance of the white man to work among slaves, or where slavery is tolerated.

In proportion to the multiplication of the descendants of the European stock, and the consequent diminution of the value of slave labour, by the general diminution of wages, will there be an abatement in the force of motives to rear slaves. The master will not find an adequate indemnity in the price of the adult for the charges of maintaining and bringing up the offspring. His care and attention will relax; and he will be indifferent about incurring expenses when they are sick, and in providing for their general comfort, when he knows that he will not be ultimately compensated. There may not be numerous instances of positive violation of the duties of humanity, but every one knows the difference between a negligence, which is not criminal, and a watchful vigilance stimulated by interest, which allows no want to be unsupplied. The effect of this relaxed attention to the offspring will be to reduce the rates of general increase of the slave portion of our population, whilst that of the other race, not subject to the same neglect, will increase and fill up the void. A still greater effect, from the diminution of the value of labour, will be that of voluntary emancipations; the master being now anxious to relieve himself from a burthen, without profit, by renouncing his right of property. One or two facts will illustrate some of these principles. Prior to the annexation of Louisiana to the United States the supply of slaves from Africa was abundant. The price of adults was generally about \$100, a price less than the cost of raising an infant. Then it was believed that the climate of that province was unfavourable to the rearing of negro children, and comparatively few were raised. After the United States abolished the slave trade, the price of adults rose very considerably, greater attention