

WILSON ARMISTEAD

CALUMNY REFUTED BY
FACTS FROM LIBERIA

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Calumny Refuted by Facts From Liberia With Extracts From the Inaugural Address of the Coloured President Roberts; an Eloquent Speech of Hilary Teage, a Coloured Senator; and Extracts From a Discourse by H. H. Garnett, a Fugitive Slave, on the Past and Present Condition, and Destiny of the Coloured Race. Presented to the Boston Anti-slavery Bazaar, U.S., By the Author of «A Tribute for the Negro.»:

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are printed solely with a view of refuting the calumnious charge of incapability and inferiority made against the Negro race, and not for the purpose of vindicating the American Colonization Scheme, concerning which great diversity of opinion exists.

No one can object to the Colonization of Africa, so long as it is *perfectly voluntary* on the part of those who go out as Colonists; in which case, connected with legitimate commerce and plans of civil and Christian improvement, great benefit may accrue; and which, *for the sake of Africa*, is worthy of encouragement. But, to hold up such a scheme, merely as a mode of expatriating the whole of the African race from America, merits the strongest disapprobation.

If "the aristocracy of the skin" were laid aside, and the Coloured population of America were invested with the full rights of citizenship, and every civil prize, every useful employment, and every honourable station were thrown open to their exertions, there can be little doubt, as J. J. Gurney observes, in his Remarks on a Speech of Henry Clay's, "that the mixture of colours, in the same population, would soon be found *perfectly harmless*. Every man, white or black, would rest on his own responsibility; character, like other things, would find its natural level; light and truth would spread without obstruction; and the North American Union would afford, to an admiring world, a splendid and *unsullied* evidence of the truth of that mighty principle on which her constitution is founded; viz., that, 'All men are created EQUAL, and are endowed by the Creator with

certain INALIENABLE rights, – Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

W. A.

Leeds, 10th Mo., 1848.

CALUMNY REFUTED, ETC., ETC

Amidst the numerous attempts to depreciate the character of the Negro, by exhibiting it as inferior and incapable of improvement, it is desirable to adduce evidence of an opposite nature, and to show that circumstances operate no less powerfully on the Sable inhabitants of a tropical climate, than on the natives of more northern latitudes, in which opportunities have been employed to remove the ignorance of uncivilised man, and to invest him with the glorious light of religion and science. How have they raised the brutal to the rational – the degraded to the noble – the idolatrous to the Christian character! What was once the condition of Druidical Britain, when, in the most barbarous manner, parents sacrificed their offspring to senseless deities? And to what can her present position amongst the nations be attributed, but to that expansion of knowledge, human and divine, with which she has been pre-eminently favoured?

The false philosophy which has imputed to the Negro a constitutional inferiority, is amply refuted by facts. There is not only abundant evidence, that the African is susceptible of all the finest feelings of our nature, but that his intellectual capacity, under circumstances more favourable than have generally fallen to his lot, will bear a comparison with that of any other portion

of our species.

The capabilities of this calumniated race have been remarkably exhibited within a few years, on a portion of the Western coast of Africa colonised by Free Blacks from the United States, most of them formerly Slaves, including aborigines recaptured from slave-vessels as well as Negroes from the adjoining districts. From this interesting locality, recently constituted into the Free Republic of Liberia, overwhelming evidence might be adduced of the ability, sound judgment, and Christian character of its Sable inhabitants and legislators. Probably no government exists founded more nearly on Christian principles; and the community in general is perhaps as purely moral as any in the world.

Several public schools have been established in the country, and all parents and guardians are required to send their children to them, or be subject to a pecuniary fine; so that there is scarcely a child over six years old that cannot both read and write. The state of religion and morality amongst the people is progressive. The exertion of the authorities has been directed to the exclusion of ardent spirits. A short time ago, one of the colonists assisted in procuring a barrel of rum, which was landed twelve miles distant from the colony; he was fined one hundred dollars, deprived of his license as a trader, and considered no longer eligible to any office in the colony. Such are the stringent efforts to keep down a vice, which, if once suffered to exist, would no doubt prove detrimental. Internal improvements keep pace with the increase

of commerce, and the steady revenue which arises therefrom, enables the authorities to effect various public improvements.

These are remarkable facts. Here we behold a community of Blacks, in almost a defenceless state, located on the border of a vast country, the swarming inhabitants of which are enshrouded in ignorance; – a regularly organised government, which, though still in comparative embryo, is the germ of what may become a great and powerful nation, the nucleus of a vast political and religious empire, from which may radiate, far into the interior of this land of moral and intellectual degradation, the elevating and ennobling principles of civilization, and the benign and heavenly influences of Christianity. – Liberia, amidst the gloom of midnight darkness which envelops the minds of the millions of Africa's benighted children, stands as a beacon-light to direct them to the port of freedom and the haven of everlasting rest.

The present governor of Liberia, J. J. Roberts, under discouraging circumstances, left Virginia some ten or twelve years ago, and, unaided by any culture beyond that attainable on the spot, has placed himself among the most prominent of the citizens of the new Republic. His correspondence with the commanders of British cruisers on the coast of Africa, and his state papers, exhibit a superior force of character and diplomatic ability. The inaugural address, annual messages, and speeches of this Coloured statesman, before a Coloured Legislature, are highly interesting and satisfactory.

I was much gratified in reading, a short time ago, a speech

delivered in 1846, at Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, by Hilary Teage, a Coloured senator of the infant Republic. Independent of its embracing a beautiful exposition of the history, trials, exertions, and aspirations of the Coloured colonists, it is a continued flow of eloquence, whilst it breathes throughout a truly Christian spirit. When I read it, I concluded the speaker must be a "classical scholar," probably a "graduate in some eastern college." To my surprise, I afterwards ascertained, he had never even *seen* a college, his father having been a Slave in Virginia, which place Hilary Teage left when very young, and went to Liberia, where he received his education. Here he made rapid advances in learning, soon overcoming the difficulties of several languages, both ancient and modern.

The following are extracts from the Inaugural Address of President Roberts, delivered at the first Meeting of the Legislature of the Republic, January 3rd, 1848, followed by the speech of Hilary Teage; which afford striking evidence of the capacity and attainments of Negroes, whose education and life from early boyhood are thoroughly African: —

"It is with great pleasure I avail myself of the occasion, now presented, to express the profound impressions made on me by the call of my fellow-citizens to the station, and the duties, to which I am now about to pledge myself. So distinguished a mark of confidence, proceeding from the deliberate suffrage of my fellow-citizens, would, under any circumstances, have commanded my gratitude, as well as filled me with an awful sense of the trust to be

assumed. But I feel particularly gratified at this evidence of the confidence of my fellow-citizens, inasmuch as it strengthens the impression on me, that my endeavours to discharge faithfully the duties which devolved on me as chief Executive officer of the Commonwealth, during the last six years of our political connection with the American Colonization Society, have been favourably estimated. I, nevertheless, meet the responsibilities of this day with feelings of the deepest solicitude. I feel that the present is a momentous period in the history of Liberia; and I assure you, under the various circumstances which give peculiar solemnity to the crisis, I am sensible that both the honour and the responsibility allotted to me, are inexpressibly enhanced.

"We have just entered upon a new and important career. To give effect to all the measures and powers of the government, we have found it necessary to remodel our Constitution and to erect ourselves into an independent State; which, in its infancy, is exposed to numberless hazards and perils, and which can never attain to maturity, or ripen into firmness, unless it is managed with affectionate assiduity, and guarded by great abilities; – I therefore deeply deplore my want of talents, and feel my mind filled with anxiety and uneasiness, to find myself so unequal to the duties of the important station to which I am called. – When I reflect upon the weight and magnitude now belonging to the station, and the many difficulties which, in the nature of things, must necessarily attend it, I feel more like retreating from the responsible position, than attempting to go forward

in the discharge of the duties of my office.

"Indeed, gentlemen of the Legislature, if I had less reliance upon your co-operation and the indulgence and support of a reflecting people, and felt less deeply a consciousness of the duty I owe my country and a conviction of the guidance of an all-wise Providence in the management of our political affairs, I should be compelled to shrink from the task. I enter, however, upon the duties assigned me, relying upon your wisdom and virtue to supply my defects; and under the full conviction that my fellow-citizens at large, who, on the most trying occasions, have always manifested a degree of patriotism, perseverance, and fidelity, that would reflect credit upon the citizens of any country, will support the government established by their voluntary consent, and appointed by their own free choice.

"While I congratulate my fellow-citizens on the dawn of a new and more perfect government, I would also remind them of the increased responsibility they too have assumed. Indeed, if there ever was a period in the annals of Liberia, for popular jealousy to be awakened, and popular virtue to exert itself, it is the present. Other eras, I know, have been marked by dangers and difficulties which 'tried men's souls,' but whatever was their measure, disappointment and overthrow have generally been their fate. The patriotism and virtue which distinguish men, of every age, clime, and colour, who are determined to be free, never forsook that little band of patriots, the pioneers in this noble enterprise, in the hour of important trial. At a time when they were almost without arms, ammunition, discipline,

or government – a mere handful of insulated Christian pilgrims, in pursuit of civil and religious liberty, surrounded by savage and warlike tribes bent upon their ruin and total annihilation – with 'a staff and a sling' only, as it were, they determined, in the name of the 'Lord of Hosts,' to stand their ground and defend themselves to the last extremity against their powerful adversary. And need I remind you, fellow-citizens, how signally Almighty God delivered them, and how he has hitherto prospered and crowned all our efforts with success.

"These first adventurers, inspired by the love of liberty and equal rights, supported by industry, and protected by Heaven, became inured to toil, to hardships, and to war. In spite, however, of every obstacle, they obtained a settlement, and happily, under God, succeeded in laying here the foundation of a free government. Their attention, of course, was then turned to the security of those rights for which they had encountered so many perils and inconveniences. For this purpose, a constitution or form of Government, anomalous, it is true, was adopted."

After giving some explanation of the motives which actuated the Colonists in assuming the whole responsibilities of the government of Liberia themselves, President Roberts observes:

"While we exceedingly lament the want of greater intelligence and more experience to fit us for the proper, or more perfect management of our public affairs, – we flatter ourselves that the adverse circumstances under which

we so long laboured in the land of our birth,¹ and the integrity of our motives, will plead excuse for our want of abilities; and that in the candour and charity of an impartial world, our well-meant, however feeble efforts, will find an apology. I am also persuaded, that no magnanimous nation will seek to abridge our rights, or withhold from the Republic those civilities, and 'that comity which marks the friendly intercourse between civilised and independent communities' – in consequence of our weakness and present poverty."

The enlightened Negro legislator, after entering into a consideration and refutation of the charge made against the Colonists, of having acted prematurely in proclaiming their independence, continues: —

"The time has been, I admit, when men – without being chargeable with timidity, or with a disposition to undervalue the capacities of the African race, might have doubted the feasibility of establishing an independent Christian state on this coast, composed of, and conducted wholly by Coloured men, – but, fellow-citizens, that time has passed, and I believe in my soul, that the permanency of the government of the Republic of Liberia is now fixed upon as firm a basis as human wisdom is capable of devising. Nor is there any reason to apprehend that the Divine Disposer of human events, after having separated us from the house of bondage, and led us safely through so many dangers, towards the

¹ America.

land of liberty and promise, will leave the work of our political redemption, and consequent happiness, unfinished; and either permit us to perish in a wilderness of difficulties, or suffer us to be carried back in chains to that country of prejudices, from whose oppression He has mercifully delivered us with his out-stretched arm.

"It must afford the most heartfelt pleasure and satisfaction to every friend of Liberia, and real lover of liberty, to observe by what a fortunate train of circumstances and incidents the people of these colonies have arrived at absolute freedom and independence. When we look abroad and see by what slow and painful steps, marked with blood and ills of every kind, other states of the world have advanced to liberty and independence; we cannot but admire and praise that all-gracious Providence, who, by His unerring ways, has, with so few sufferings on our part, compared with other states, led us to this happy stage in our progress towards those great and important objects. That it is the will of Heaven that mankind should be free, is clearly evidenced by the wealth, vigour, virtue, and consequent happiness of all free states. But the idea that Providence will establish such governments as he shall deem most fit for his creatures, and will give them wealth, influence, and happiness, without their efforts, is palpably absurd. God's moral government of the earth is always performed by the intervention of second causes. Therefore, fellow-citizens, while with pious gratitude we survey the frequent interpositions of Heaven in our behalf, we ought to remember, that as the disbelief of an overruling

Providence is Atheism, so, an absolute confidence of having our government relieved from every embarrassment, and its citizens made respectable and happy by the immediate hand of God, without our own exertions, is the most culpable presumption. Nor have we any reason to expect, that He will miraculously make Liberia a paradise, and deliver us, in a moment of time, from all the ills and inconveniences consequent upon the peculiar circumstances under which we are placed, merely to convince us that He favours our cause and government.

"Sufficient indications of His will are always given, and those who will not then believe, neither would they believe though one should rise from the dead to inform them. Who can trace the progress of these colonies, and mark the incidents of the wars in which they have been engaged, without seeing evident tokens of Providential favour. Let us, therefore, inflexibly persevere in exerting our most strenuous efforts, in an humble and rational dependence on the great Governor of all the world, and we have the fairest prospects of surmounting all the difficulties which may be thrown in our way. That we may expect, and that we shall have difficulties, sore difficulties yet to contend against, in our progress to maturity, is certain: and, as the political happiness or wretchedness of ourselves and our children, and of generations yet unborn, is in our hands, nay more, the redemption of Africa from the deep degradation, superstition, and idolatry in which she has so long been involved, it becomes us to lay our shoulders to the wheel, and manfully resist every obstacle which may oppose our

progress in the great work which lies before us. The Gospel is yet to be preached to vast numbers inhabiting this dark continent, and I have the highest reason to believe, that it was one of the great objects of the Almighty, in establishing these colonies, that they might be the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country; and to what work more noble could our powers be applied, than that of bringing up from darkness, debasement, and misery, our fellow-men, and shedding abroad over them the light of science and Christianity. The means of doing so, fellow-citizens, are within our reach, and if we neglect, or do not make use of them, what excuse shall we make to our Creator and final Judge? This is a question of the deepest concern to us all, and which, in my opinion, will materially affect our happiness in the world to come. And surely, if ever it has been incumbent on the people of Liberia to know truth and to follow it, it is now. Rouse, therefore, fellow-citizens, and do your duty like men: and be persuaded, that Divine Providence, as heretofore, will continue to bless all your virtuous efforts.

"But if there be any among us, dead to all sense of honour and love of their country; deaf to all the calls of liberty, virtue, and religion; forgetful of the benevolence and magnanimity of those who have procured this asylum for them, and the future happiness of their children; if neither the examples nor the success of other nations, the dictates of reason and of nature, nor the great duties they owe to their God, themselves, and their posterity, have no effect upon them; – if neither the injuries they received in

the land whence they came, the prize they are contending for, the future blessings or curses of their children, the applause or reproach of all mankind, the approbation or displeasure of the great Judge, nor the happiness or misery consequent upon their conduct, in this and a future state, can move them; then, let them be assured, that they deserve to be Slaves, and are entitled to nothing but anguish and tribulation. Let them banish, for ever, from their minds, the hope of obtaining that freedom, reputation, and happiness, which, as men, they are entitled to. Let them forget every duty, human and divine, remember not that they have children, and beware how they call to mind the justice of the Supreme Being: let them return into Slavery, and hug their chains, and be a reproach and a by-word among all nations.

"But I am persuaded, that we have none such among us; – that every citizen will do his duty, and exert himself to the utmost of his abilities to sustain the honour of his country, promote her interests, and the interests of his fellow-citizens, and to hand down unimpaired to future generations, the freedom and independence we this day enjoy.

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