


JOHN ADAMS DIX

 JOHN ADAMS DIX, American statesman and general, was born at Boscawen, N. H., July 24, 1798, and died at New York, April 21, 1879. Entering the army at the age of fourteen, he saw some brief service but, after becoming a captain in 1825, he resigned his commission and began the study of law. In 1828, he removed to Cooperstown, N. Y., to begin the practice of his profession, where he became prominent as a Democratic politician. He was successively state adjutant-general, state superintendent of common schools, and secretary of state of New York. In 1845, he was appointed to the United States Senate, and in 1848 was the unsuccessful candidate of the Free-Soil Democrats for Governor of New York. He was Secretary of the United States Treasury in 1861, and it was at this period that he telegraphed to a naval officer at New Orleans the since famous order, "If any one attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot." In May of the latter year he was appointed major-general of volunteers, and in the following year was placed in command at Fortress Monroe. During the draft riots in New York city, in July, 1863, General Dix was in command of the district and acted promptly in restoring order. He was Minister to France, 1866-69, and in 1872 was elected by the Republicans Governor of New York. He retired to private life at the expiration of his term of office, and died at New York city, in his eighty-first year. His published writings include "Resources of the City of New York" (1827); "A Winter in Madeira, and a Summer in Spain and Florence" (1835); "Speeches and Occasional Addresses" (1864); and privately printed translations of the "Dies Iræ" (1863), and the "Stabat Mater" (1868). His eldest son is the well-known New York clergyman, Morgan Dix

ON AFRICAN COLONIZATION

FROM SPEECH DELIVERED AT ALBANY, NEW YORK, APRIL 2, 1830

THE subject of African colonization is full of powerful appeals to sympathy; but it is not my intention to advert to any topics of this description. Considered as a mere measure of political economy it has as strong a claim upon us in its tendency to hasten the extinction of slavery as any measure which can be devised for the promotion of the productive industry of the United States. It is an opinion

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as ancient as slavery itself that the labor of bondmen is gradually destructive of the soil to which it is applied; it is only where the cultivator has an actual interest in the soil that the care and attention necessary to perpetuate its productiveness will be bestowed upon it. There is an account by Columella of the condition of Roman agriculture when it had passed from the hands of the citizens into those of slaves which is applicable to every country in which slave labor has been employed for a length of time. Pliny refers the decline of the agriculture of Rome to the same cause,—to its transfer from freemen to slaves, wearing upon their very countenances the badges of servitude,—"*Vincti pedes, damnatæ manus, inscripti vultus exercent.*"¹ And Tacitus, in referring to the same causes, says that Italy could not be subsisted but for the supplies derived from the provinces. "*Nisi provinciarum copiæ et dominis, et servitiis et agris subvenerint.*"²

Yet the territories of Rome were remarkable for their fertility and productiveness as long as they were cultivated by her own citizens. When agriculture had become degraded from an honorable pursuit to a mere menial occupation; when the implements of husbandry had passed from the hands of Cato and Cincinnatus into those of the captives of Phrygia and Thrace; and when, to translate the words of a Roman author, the fields of Italy resounded with the clattering of innumerable chains, Rome became dependent for the sustenance of her own citizens upon the productions of distant provinces; and, in the language of Tacitus, the daily subsistence of the Roman people was at the mercy of winds and waves.

¹ "Their shackled feet, their fettered hands, their servile faces employ them."

² "Unless the stores of the provinces assisted both masters and slaves and fields."

The authority of antiquity is confirmed by the opinion of our own times. With a single exception, every modern writer upon political economy asserts the superior productiveness of free labor and the tendency of slave labor to waste and consume the fertility of the soil to which it is applied. It has been shown conclusively that wherever free labor can be found it is most profitable to employ it.

And it would be contrary to all the deductions of reason if it were not so. The industry which is not protected in the enjoyment of a portion of its own proceeds cannot be so productive as that which is recompensed in proportion to its exertions. In the agricultural operations of the slave, nature is the principal laborer, and her power soon becomes exhausted without the renovating care and providence of man. Whether industrious or indolent the slave must be clothed and subsisted; let him produce as much as you will, and he is entitled to nothing more at the hands of his master.

His impulses are all derived from physical causes and these of the weakest class; he is not even stimulated by physical necessity or suffering, for these it is the interest and care of the master to relieve. So much has the mind to do with the operations of human industry that even in countries where by oppressive taxation all the proceeds of man's labor, excepting a bare subsistence, are absorbed by his government, the labor of the freeman is far more productive than that of the slave. His condition may be no better; his supplies of clothing and subsistence may not be more abundant; he may be equally restricted in his comforts: but he ministers to his own wants; he does not receive his daily subsistence at the hands of a taskmaster; his little surplus, whatever it be, is his own; and he is not controlled in the application of it to his own uses.

The results of our own experience on this subject concur

with the united testimony of ancient and modern times. It is impossible to pass from a State in which slavery exists to one in which it is prohibited without perceiving a marked difference in the condition of the soil and in the structures which human art has reared upon its surface. But it is not by ocular observation alone that the fact of the difference is attested. In contiguous sections lands of the same quality bear a different price, and the disparity is constantly increasing with the duration of the cause. It seems to be a law of slavery that it gradually consumes and dissipates the resources of those to whom it is tributary. There are exceptions to the observations, but not in sufficient number to affect its accuracy as a general principle.

If the place of every slave in the United States could be supplied by a free laborer the augmentation of our productive industry would be immense, and it would totally renovate the face of the country in which the exchange should take place. At the lowest calculation there is a difference of one third in the productiveness of free and slave labor in favor of the former, independently of the gradual destruction of the powers of the soil by the latter.

Free and slave labor move in opposite directions from the same point of departure; and while one is regularly diminishing the capacity of the earth for production, the other is constantly nourishing and invigorating its powers. It is one of the consequences of this tendency of slave labor to deteriorate the properties of the earth, that it cannot reclaim what it has once exhausted. There are lands in the Northern and Middle States now exceedingly productive which were formerly exhausted by slave labor; and so they would have continued to this day if they had not been reclaimed by free labor.

Some of the most beautiful sections of Virginia, under the

operation of injudicious systems of husbandry by slaves, wear the aspect of wastes and barrens; and so they will remain until they shall be renovated by the hands of freemen. That this result is not a distant one may readily be shown. The influence of great moral causes which are working far more momentous changes than this would alone be sufficient to produce it. But it is destined to attend upon particular causes now in operation within our own limits,—causes peculiar to the condition of the country and the state of society. Slave labor, from its inferior productiveness, cannot compete with free labor; wherever the latter appears the former must give place to it.

This principle is visible throughout the North in the abolition of slavery: the progress of emancipation has been regular toward the South; peculiarities of soil and climate have retarded its progress, but it is retarded only. In several sections of Maryland and Virginia emigration from the Middle States has introduced a laboring class of whites; and wherever they have appeared slaves have given place to them. The masters find it more profitable to sell their slaves and hire free laborers. It is in this manner that freedom is constantly encroaching upon the dominion of servitude.

But there are other and mightier causes in operation which are rapidly approaching this result. Recent examinations have shown that, with the exception of the States of Missouri and Louisiana, we have only sufficient territory beyond the Mississippi river for four more States of the dimensions of Missouri. Farther on lies a barren waste extending to the base of the Rocky Mountains, without wood, water, or stone, and therefore unfit for the habitation of an agricultural people. This fact is not, perhaps, understood, but it has been satisfactorily ascertained by philosophical observers.

The region referred to is as distinctive in its character as the desert of Siberia, to the descriptions of which it is said to bear a general resemblance; and it is probably destined at a future day to constitute a boundary between us and our dependencies, or between us and another people as flourishing and powerful as ourselves.

At our past rate of increase settlement will soon press upon these limits: the vacant places within them will be filled up; and the current of emigration which has so long been flowing across the Alleghanies will be poured back upon the region in which it has its source. The surplus population of the Northern and Middle States will find its way to the vacant spots in Virginia which slavery has exhausted and abandoned; it will penetrate to the very seat of its strength, and it will gradually uproot and destroy it.

In every contest the inferior must yield to the superior power; and who can doubt the issue, sir, when the contest shall be between brute force and the moral force of opinion—between a class whose impulses are all derived from physical causes and another class whose incentives to exertion are derived from the mind itself? Slavery will cease to be profitable; and when this shall happen slaves will cease to be cherished by their possessors. They may be emancipated; but emancipation cannot elevate their condition or augment their capacity for self-preservation. Want and suffering will gradually diminish their numbers and they will disappear, as the inferior has always disappeared before the superior race.

The fate of the African is as certain as that of the original possessors of the soil upon which we stand; but there will be no heroism or dignity in his fall; his struggles will be with the arts, not the arms, of his oppressors; he will leave nothing behind him but the history of his sufferings and his degrada-

tion to challenge the remembrance or the sympathy of after-times.

Colonization is the only expedient by which these evils can even be mitigated. We may prevent the increase of the African race within our limits; we may provide for them a refuge to which they may flee when their presence shall be useless to us and their condition here intolerable to themselves; we may substitute removal for extinction; and by our own providence we may enable many, perhaps the mass, to escape what would otherwise be their inevitable fate.

But it is not merely because slavery is an impediment to the development of our national resources that its presence among us is to be deplored. It is an impediment also to an assertion of the rank which we claim to hold among the advocates of the rights of man.

It may not put at hazard the success of the great experiment which we are carrying on of the competency of mankind to self-government; for it is not inconsistent with its success that he who is fitted for freedom should hold in bondage his fellow man. But it involves, unquestionably, a denial of the fundamental doctrine of our political institutions, that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are natural and inalienable rights.

It is a degradation of the tenure of freedom from a principle above all human law to the principle of brute force—the principle from which despotism itself derives its title. It may not impair the stability of our free institutions; but it impairs our influence in promoting the diffusion of their principles. For who shall be bound to attend to the assertion of rights by us which we refuse to recognize in others? With what effect can we pronounce the eulogium of free institutions when our utterance is mingled and confounded with the accents of oppression

and servitude? We have, unquestionably, a justification in the fact that slavery was imposed upon us against our wishes during our dependence upon a foreign state; but this circumstance will cease to be a justification the moment we falter in our exertions to redress the injury.

In speaking these sentiments I say nothing to which the sentiments of every liberal gentleman in the South will not respond. Nor do I fear, sir, that their utterance here will be misapprehended. I believe the universal feeling of this assembly will bear me out in saying that the slaveholding States themselves would not be more ready than we to resist any attempt to exterminate the unquestionable evil of slavery by measures not warranted by the constitution under which we live. That it has been abolished with us is the happiness of our accidental position; that it still exists in other sections of the Union is the misfortune of theirs. When and in what manner it shall be abolished within the limits of individual States must be left to their own voluntary deliberations.

The federal government has no control over this subject: it concerns rights of property secured by the federal compact, upon which our civil liberties mainly depend; it is a part of the same collection of political rights, and any invasion of it would impair the tenure by which every other is held. For this reason alone, if for no other, we would discountenance and oppose any attempt to control it by unconstitutional interference. We can only hope, in advocating the plan of colonization, that the theatre of its operations may be extended at a future day in subordination to the wishes and arrangements of the slaveholding States.

There is a higher object in the contemplation, and I trust within the compass of this institution,—the civilization of the African continent by means of our colonial establishments

along the coast. With the exception of a few points along the Mediterranean, hardly extending into the interior sufficiently to indent it, this continent has been buried throughout all the changes of human society in perpetual darkness. Whatever civilization may have done for other portions of the earth, it has done nothing for Africa. Ignorance and barbarism, opposing an impenetrable cloud to the lights of religion and science, which have at different eras risen upon the world, have spread a vast, unbroken shadow over the whole face of that continent.

Civilization has indeed visited Africa—not to elevate and enlighten, but to corrupt and debase—to convert simplicity into error and darkness into depravity. Sir, we are accustomed to shrink with horror and indignation from a recital of the cruelties inflicted upon modern Greece by her barbarous oppressors.

But all the miseries which that classical region has endured during century after century of Ottoman domination would not fill up the measure of suffering which Africa is every year sustaining through the seductions of her Christian spoilers. The massacre of Scio may present a sublimity of suffering, an acuteness of distress, a fulness of desolation, which carry their appeals to the sympathies with greater boldness and intensity, like that which a single slave-ship presents in the history of its miserable tenants, if we follow them out from the forcible separation to the prolonged, the boundless career of servitude which opens on them at the hour of their captivity.

Civilization alone can heal the wounds and assuage the sufferings of western Africa. Wherever her influence is felt, the slave-trade has ceased; and it is in the most benighted regions of that continent that she can most effectually plant those beacons of intelligence from which her lights are to be re-

flected to the interior. Egypt and Barbary are shut out from the approaches of civilization in the direction of the European continent by an intervening sea: they lie over against portions of Europe in which knowledge and truth have made the least progress; and these barriers between the two continents are rendered almost insurmountable by false systems of religion and government which hold in bondage the African states. Colonization, on the other hand, has fixed her very seat in the empire of ignorance; she is surrounded on all sides by a surface of extended, unbroken, unmitigated darkness.

The mind of western and central Africa is a vast blank, upon which no inscription of falsehood or bigotry has ever been traced: civilization, in asserting her dominion over it, has no error to eradicate or prejudice to subdue; there is no obstacle to stay the progress of knowledge; Nigritia, Ethiopia and Abyssinia are all open to its approaches; and the time may not be far distant when the lights of civilization, issuing from the beacons of Montserrat, shall be diffused over the whole face of the African continent—to change it, as they have changed every region which their influence has overspread.

These anticipations may seem sanguine, and they are, doubtless, to be contemplated rather in a spirit of distant hope than of present expectation. They look however to changes inferior, if possible, to those which the same causes have wrought upon this continent. If any one had ventured a century ago to extend his view to the present moment and had foretold what this age has accomplished, he would have incurred the reproach of visionary speculation.

Nay, sir, what credit would he have obtained who had ventured to foretell, twenty years ago, the changes that have been wrought within our own limits?—who had predicted that in this short period the western wilderness would be

penetrated and subdued; that the boundaries of the republic would be borne onward to extremities which were not even explored; and that a line of civilization would be extended around us which can never be broken by a hostile force?

Sir, the opinion of mankind has always followed the march of improvement; and it is rarely even that individual opinion has preceded it. The civilization of Africa may be frustrated by unforeseen contingencies; but a moral power is in operation there which no obstacle has ever yet been able to resist. The stores of knowledge, unlike all others, can neither be wasted nor consumed; no further deluge of vandalism can overwhelm the places of her dominion to destroy her treasures or extinguish her lights. The physical annihilation of three quarters of the globe would be necessary to blot out the evidences of her moral conquests and arrest their extension to the other.

Since the invention of the press, the movement of society has been uniformly a forward movement, and there is not an instance of retrogression with any people to whom the influence of knowledge has extended. Her empire is fixed in Africa, and it will soon be beyond the reach of human force. Our anticipations may not all be realized; our hopes may not all be fulfilled; but if we err, we shall err with the spirit of the age, not in opposition to it. If the objects in view of the plan of colonization were to be attempted by a public sacrifice, we should not perhaps be justifiable in seeking to accomplish them. But every step we take is in coincidence with the public interest and the public reputation. Every liberated African who is withdrawn from us diminishes the general mass of ignorance, vice, and degradation by which our social operations are embarrassed and oppressed. We are fulfilling also a duty which we owe to the unfortunate race for whose benefit

this institution was originally designed. Whatever we have done, whatever we may do, to ameliorate their condition among us, they are destined to be forever proscribed and debased by our prejudices.

Emancipation cannot liberate us from the responsibility which rests upon us. The free black, whom prejudice consigns to a moral debasement in the North, is as deeply injured as the slave who in the South is held by physical bondage. We cannot insist on the plea of necessity to mitigate the odium which attaches to us as the authors of his degradation until we shall have employed every expedient to relieve him from it. The hopelessness in which his crimes and his depravation have their origin is in its turn a fruit of our prejudices; and we shall not have done what is incumbent on us unless our cooperation is lent to remove him from the theatre of their influence. We are bound by every principle of justice and humanity to provide the means of removal for all who ask a removal at our hands.

We are bound by every motive of patriotism to promote the emigration of a caste whose presence among us is an impediment to the development of our national resources, to the progress of our social improvements, and to the fulfilment of our destinies as a great people. And we are bound by our devotion to the cause of liberal government to unite in the execution of a plan of which the most distant result may be the extinction of an institution which stands alone and isolated among the other institutions of society—a solitary monument of a barbarous age.