

CALEB CUSHING

CALEB CUSHING, distinguished American jurist, diplomatist, and statesman, was born at Salisbury, Mass., Jan. 17, 1800, and died at Newburyport, Mass., Jan. 2, 1879. He was educated at Harvard University, and after studying law and being admitted to the Bar, he settled at Newburyport, and in 1825 entered the Massachusetts legislature. In 1835, he was returned to Congress by the Whigs, and served four terms in the House, but in 1841 allied himself with the Democrats. In 1843, he was appointed commissioner to China and negotiated the first treaty between China and the United States. At the time of the Mexican War, Cushing equipped a regiment at his own expense, and served in the army successively as colonel and brigadier-general. He was Attorney-General of the United States (1853-57), counsel before the Arbitration Tribunal at Geneva (1871-72), and Minister to Spain (1874-75). Cushing was an able and eloquent speaker, possessed of considerable polish of manner and adroitness in debate. As a jurist his decisions display both learning and sagacity. His writings include "Practical Principles of Political Economy" (1826), "Historical and Political Review of the late Revolution in France" (1833), "Reminiscences of Spain" (1833), "Life of William Henry Harrison" (1840), and "Growth and Territorial Progress of the United States." In 1873, he also published a narrative of "The Treaty of Washington," which among other things secured the adjustment of the "Alabama Claims" with Great Britain after the era of the Civil War.

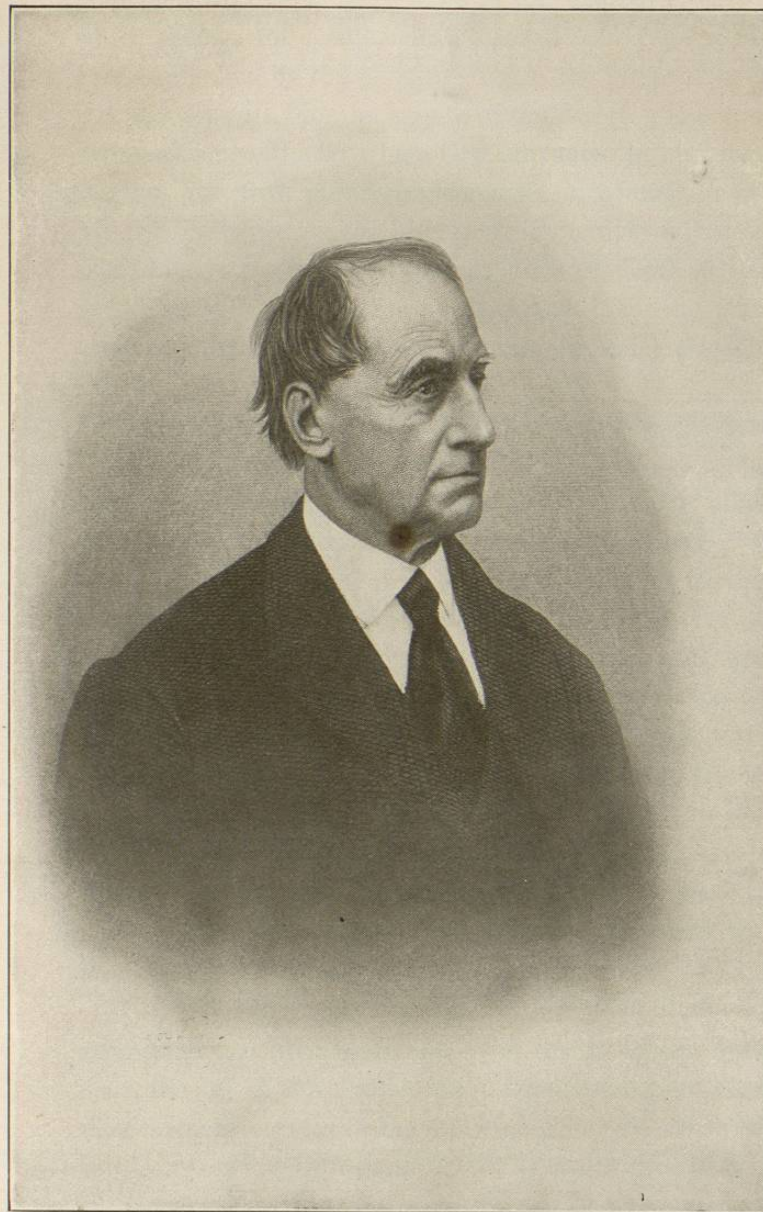
ORATION ON NEGRO COLONIZATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MASSACHUSETTS COLONIZATION SOCIETY,
JULY 4, 1833

LIBERTY,—liberty of thought, liberty of speech, liberty of action—liberty in government, liberty in person,—is the master-principle, the predominant idea, the great first motive passion, which, in all times, but most of all in our own, has impelled and agitated the world. Whether in savage or civilized existence, it is alike the cherished desire of the human heart, the potent spring of human life.

Chasing his prey in the pathless depths of his western wilderness, over savannahs or through forests coeval with creation,—although science, and art, and religion, and whatever else refines and blesses humanity, be unknown to him,—yet

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man feels that he is free,—free as the luxuriant vegetation which springs up spontaneously around him from a virgin earth unbroken by the plough—free as the untamed courser, who divides with him the empire of the desert. It is the one overruling sentiment which God implanted in his breast: it inspires him with untutored eloquence in council, it nerves his arm in battle. Tear him from his native solitudes and place him in the midst of all that civilization can gather together of splendid, alluring, or wonderful, and he pines to exchange the luxuries of art for the congenial freedom of nature.

Nor is the inextinguishable love of liberty less characteristic of man as a cultivated and intellectual being, as a constituent part of the complex fabric of political society to which we belong. To retain it when possessed, to recover it when lost, has been the object of those mighty efforts of the human race, which have rescued from oblivion, one after the other, successive ages in history, and held up the actors in them to the admiration of posterity. They are epochs familiar to the memory, they are men whose image is ever present to the mind; and whether they honored the mountains of Greece or Switzerland, the plains of Poland or Lombardy, why should I pause to recount them, when here, amid the scenes of our fathers' sacrifices and our fathers' glory, and on this day, the anniversary of our national independence, we ourselves are assembled in the name and in the holy cause of liberty?

It is, I repeat, in her name and in her cause, that we have assembled, and fitly, therefore, upon this proud anniversary, since the day of our emancipation from bondage as a people should be consecrated to the one high principle which singles it out from its undistinguished fellows in the lapse of time,—the conservation of the genuine theory of universal justice,

the spreading abroad of the great truth that all men are born to equal participation in the blessings of life, the rights and the wrongs of the slave, wherever he may be and of whatever clime or complexion,—the cause, in a word, of constitutional liberty.

We, indeed, in the land of the Pilgrim Fathers, the chosen refuge of the oppressed, inhale the pure atmosphere of freedom; we imbue its doctrines with the very being we draw from the maternal breast; they come to be the first elements of our moral constitution in manhood; and for us, it is only the abuses of liberty from within, that we have room to apprehend in our New England. And would to heaven that it were so in our whole country; that the curse of involuntary servitude did not still cling to so large a portion of our countrymen, destroying their peace, filling their dwellings with the agonies of perpetual domestic suspicion, subjecting their families to massacre, and hanging its dead weight upon their public welfare; that the chains of the negro were at length and forever struck from his limbs; that liberty, knowledge, and Christianity were made equally the unpurchased birth-right of the European and the African throughout the New World!

Glorious, in truth, and auspicious will be the day,—glorious for our country, auspicious for the human race,—when man shall cease to be the bond-slave of man. It matters not what name of sect we of New England may bear,—in what form of association, what combination of party, we may be ranked,—on this point we are of universal accord; and we are so, not merely from that intimate conviction, that prejudice of education, if you will, which has grown with our growth; but on considerations of eternal truth, of justice, of humanity, of religion, of expediency, of everything which should inform

the heart and control the actions of a rational and accountable man, of a patriot, a philosopher, and a Christian.

We maintain, and the letter of our constitution is to us a truth, that men are born to equal political rights, however the accidents of fortune may interpose to prevent the enjoyment of those rights; and that personal servitude, therefore, is contrary to fundamental principles of political justice.

We believe that, although the Bible inculcates legal obedience of the subject to the ruler, and of the servant to the master, yet political equality, civil freedom, and personal freedom, and of course the doctrines of emancipation, are among the peculiar and characteristic lessons of the religion of Jesus Christ.

We know that, however the interest of the master may consult the physical well-being of the slaves in whom his wealth consists, yet that for them the moral benefits of life are imperfectly, when at all, enjoyed. They are not educated, lest through education they should learn to appreciate the value of that liberty which they have not and should acquire the temper, the will, and the means to escape from their involuntary thralldom. That exquisite sentiment, which ennobles and sanctifies the relation of the sexes, is not theirs; for how shall the ties of domestic life, when subject to the caprice, and dependent on the interests and improvidence of a master, possess the highest and holiest of sanctions? The pursuit of riches, rank, or distinction, the desire of public usefulness, the sense of conscious capability to augment the sum of human knowledge, virtue, and happiness, and the will to exert that capability for noble ends; the divine unction of religious ardor and apostolic zeal, the noble passion of disinterested well-doing for the good of our fellows, ambition of power or fame, in short, all the strong moral inducements of human

action, be they for time or be they for eternity, belong to man as the agent of his own volition: they are the magnificent heritage of the free. We are the creatures of motive, and it is the influence of circumstance upon the springs of action within us, which gives to the soul its energy, and to existence all its beauty and worth. I know it is the ordinary commonplace of rhetoric and poetry to dwell on this fact; but it is not the less a truth for its triteness; and while it has been true of slavery under all its modifications, it is more especially true of slavery as it is here, where the color of the slave creates a visible and permanent distinction between him and his master, and prevents the enslaved race from being gradually absorbed in and assimilated with the mass of the free population.

We are deeply sensible of the pernicious influence of slavery upon the condition of that portion of our country where it exists and the character of its free inhabitants. We see that it tends to weaken the spirit of enterprise and to banish industry by rendering labor disreputable; that it corrupts the morals by promoting idleness and affording facilities for vicious indulgence; and that, striking as these evils are, they are poorly compensated by the livelier sense of the value of freedom and higher tone of honor which may prevail in a slaveholding community. We see among the States of the Union some which nature has most bounteously favored comparatively impoverished by the system of slave labor,—rendered tributary to the industrious population of the free States, or of foreign countries, for all the comforts and conveniences of life,—unblessed by the signs of universal competency, happiness, and welfare, the commodious habitations the thrifty and well-ordered farms, the flourishing manufactories, the ships, the churches, the schools, which are the result of the

honor of free labor in the Eastern and Middle States; we see all this, the retribution which slavery works out upon itself, we see that monstrous disloyalty toward the Union, in certain regions of the South, of which, whatever may be the pretexts, this undoubtedly is not the least fruitful source; and in those considerations, even if the right of the slave did not cry to heaven for his ransom, we should find incentives enough to plead, and labor, and pray for the purification of this plague-spot from our land, for the end of this great drawback in the palmy prosperity of the Union.

If any sentiments differing from these have obtained among us it is unknown to me:—I avow these to be the sentiments which I entertain, I believe them to have universal currency throughout New England. Standing here on this occasion, by the invitation of the Colonization Society of Massachusetts, to advocate its cause and justify its purposes, and aware of the extraordinary violence of language employed in certain quarters to impugn the motives and abstract doctrine of prominent members and friends of that society, I have felt bound to put on record, in the outset, a distinct declaration of creed on this point, at the risk of seeming to argue that which none disputes, and of illustrating positions too plain to admit of denial;—and I have done this, not so much in respect of my own opinion as in justice to the good name of the society.

For the true questions to be considered are: What is the object of the Colonization Society? Is that object laudable? Is it pursued by honorable means? The private motives or personal opinions of any individual who embarks in the cause, whether they be good, or bad, or indifferent, these are a matter concerning him alone, his conscience, or his reputation, and for which the society is nowise responsible.

What, then, is the object of the Colonization Society? Is it laudable? Is it honorably pursued?

This object is simple, direct, visible,—there is no concealment of real design, there is no profession of a simulated one,—it is to establish colonies on the western coast of Africa, by means of such free colored persons or emancipated slaves in the United States as may voluntarily emigrate under the auspices of the society.

Whether this object be a laudable one depends upon the consideration of two facts, namely, the operation of the society in the United States and its operation in Africa.

Within the United States the friends of the Colonization Society conscientiously believe that the association is a useful instrument of beneficence, indirectly to the whites, but more directly to the blacks themselves, whether enslaved or free.

And, first, as to the enslaved blacks. It is perfectly well understood that in the slave-holding States many obstacles, arising from the tenor of the laws respecting free negroes, stand in the way of emancipating slaves, and deter the master from doing this, where otherwise his convictions of duty would outweigh the consideration of his personal interest. The Colonization Society presents to such persons a ready method of accomplishing their benevolent purpose. It has actually conveyed to Africa nearly one thousand manumitted slaves, and needs only augmented means to extend its usefulness in this respect. Here is a definite, practical good, beyond the reach, it would seem, of controversy or cavil, and sufficient of itself alone to entitle the society to unqualified commendation. The society is also of manifest utility in respect of enslaved blacks, because, in addition to its direct agency in conveying them to Africa when emancipated, it tends to promote and encourage the spirit of emancipation,

and, by the information it diffuses, the discussion it elicits, the cultivated and influential individuals in the South, who engage in its cause, gradually to bring to a right conclusion the minds of the slave-holders themselves, through whom alone the abolition of the system of slavery can be peacefully accomplished. Here also is definite, practical good. I am aware that much has been urged as to the incapacity of the society to transport to Africa all the slave population of the United States, and comparisons are instituted between the periodical increase of the slaves in a given time and the number of slaves thus far colonized under the auspices of the society. Whether this conclusion be sustained by the premises alleged in its support, I do not now stop to inquire; it does not in any event constitute a sound objection to the Colonization Society, inasmuch as, be the good, which it is capable of accomplishing in this respect, great, or be it small, here is, I repeat, at any rate a good, a definite practical good, actually accomplished by the society, and a wide field of future usefulness opened to it in the slave-holding States.

Secondly, as to the free blacks. It is impossible to deny that the free blacks in the United States labor under disadvantages arising from color which no system of laws, however just and equal,—no plans of benevolence, however comprehensive,—can remove. God forbid that I should speak of this as matter of reproach: I refer to it only as an existing fact which it would be idle and absurd to keep out of sight in discussing the means of serving the colored population of the United States. Nor does it need that I should enter into the details or extent of the fact; since it is enough to be aware of its existence. I do not mean to say that the possession of high intellectual and moral qualities by a colored person would not be duly honored among us; on the contrary,

I believe it would be; and, from a sentiment of compassion toward the race, more honored even than the same degree of merit in the dominant class. Still the fact remains that, whether in political or in social relations, full equality does not now exist between the races and is not to be anticipated in any probable future contingency. Proceeding upon this incontestable fact, the Colonization Society says to the free colored inhabitants of the United States: "We offer to you a secure asylum in a land congenial to your physical constitution, where you will be the dominant race,—where the avenues to wealth, distinction, and usefulness will be yours indisputably; the land of your fathers; that Africa from which you or your progenitors were forcibly severed and whither you may return to be the missionaries of civilization and of religion; we freely offer to you a participation in the advantages now enjoyed in Liberia by those of your color who have already emigrated; if you accept them, it is well; if you prefer to remain here, the inferior class, it is well; it is not our benefit that we have primarily in view, but that of you and your race; and in proposing to you what we conceive to be a valuable object we have discharged some portion of that great debt to Africa which we acknowledge to be due from Europeans and from their descendants in America." Such is the language which the Colonization Society addresses to the free colored inhabitants of the country; and I profess that I cannot see in it either cause of reproach on the part of colored persons or ground of excited feelings, or least of all justification for the hostility of caste which has been industriously propagated in certain quarters in consequence of the establishment and signal success of the Colonization Society.

Lastly, as to the whites. While the Colonization Society has not, either in the causes which originally induced its for-

mation, or in the management of its affairs, proposed any advantage to the whites as to the main object of its exertions, yet the friends of the Society perceive that it promotes harmonious action upon the subject of slavery in the different sections of the Union; and they look to it as the instrument of ultimate good to themselves, in so far as it may tend, by peaceable means, to produce the final abolition of the slave-system in the southern States.

Within the United States, therefore, I hold it to be demonstrable, that the operation of the Colonization Society is beneficial to every class of its inhabitants; how much so, is not now the question, but at all events beneficial; and I think it can be shown also to be beneficial in Africa.

There was a time when the utility of the society, as respected Africa, was contingent, was matter of speculation; but it is so no longer. A flourishing colony of emigrant colored persons from the United States, having borne with them the means of education,—the civilization and the religion of the land they left,—now exists in Liberia, to utter its testimony in behalf of the society and to constitute the fulcrum, whereby, under the blessing of God, the natives of Africa may be raised to the condition of civilized men and of Christians. When I reflect upon the rapid growth of the colony of Liberia and call to mind the painful progress of the first colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts, out of which this great republic has been permitted to spring, I feel that the prospect which is thus opened to Africa is brilliant enough to justify the most ardent enthusiasm in the cause of the Colonization Society. And familiar as this part of my subject may be to many of my hearers, I am unwilling to dismiss it without some brief remarks on the practicability and effects of civilizing the Africans.

In all ages the continent of Africa has constituted a great geographical problem, the debatable ground of science, the fruitful field of doubt, prejudice, and misapprehension. Once opinion was that its tropical regions were given up to the dominion of burning heat, intolerant of human life, imperious to the footsteps of conquest or commerce. The voyages of the early Portuguese navigators effectually dispelled this false idea and displayed to us a coast, obnoxious, of course, to the heats which prevail in other tropical regions of the globe, but thronged at the same time with a robust and vigorous native population, and as later experience has proved, no more deleterious to Europeans than similar latitudes of Asia and America. But the vast interior of the continent still continued to be the region of mystery, pictured to the imagination as a wide, sandy desert, and known to us only by a few scattered particulars derived from the ancients, by the meagre and unsatisfactory accounts of Arabian geographers, by here and there a solitary fact gleaned from the Barbary traders and the slave-merchants of Nubia or Guinea. But what difficulties could withstand, what dangers could deter, the ardor of European thirst of knowledge, European cupidity of gain, European benevolence? One after another of the adventurous pioneers of improvement fell a victim to his zeal in the cause of knowledge and humanity; Park, Ledyard, Burekhardt, Clapperton, had imparted a melancholy fame to the history of African discovery; until at last, when the best organized attempts of public bodies had utterly failed of success, it was reserved for obscure individuals, a French mariner and an English domestic servant, to reveal the hidden secrets, the great navigable rivers, the rich soil, the exuberant vegetation, the numerous population, of the heart of Africa. And the discoveries of Caillié and Lander seem to have provi-

dentially chanced at that period of time when the establishment of the American colony of Liberia, the conquest of Algiers by France, the regeneration of Egypt under the auspices of Mohammed-Ali, and the assured possession of southern Africa by the English, conspire together at length to promise the redemption of this great continent from the degradation of ages.

There yet remains one last, lingering prejudice regarding Africa, to be dispelled by the clear light of truth, to be rebuked by the irresistible voice of experience. Asia has run her long career of glory; Europe has plucked from her hand the torch of science, the sceptre of empire; three centuries have sufficed to render America the competitor of the Old World in the march of improvement; and wherefore shall not Africa thrust in her sickle to the harvest, wherefore not Africa stand up "redeemed, regenerated, disenthralled," under the vivifying influences of Christianity?

It is the common idea, I believe, that Europeans, by engaging in the slave-trade, are in chief part accountable for the barbarism of Africa; but detestable as that traffic has been and is, and heavy as the load of guilt is which rests upon those who have pursued it, the slave-trade is the effect, rather than the cause, of the moral abasement of Africa. There is a conquering race in the interior of the continent, the Arabs, who, like other Mahometans, pursue the slave-trade as well in Africa as in Asia, and who, on both continents, serve to aggravate, rather than counteract, the debasing influences of paganism. Civilization, of Arabs and Africans alike, is the powerful engine by which the slave-trade is to be eradicated from the earth; and it is from the agency of Christians, or of them primarily, that any rational hope of the civilization of Africa can be derived. And who so proper to communicate

the boon of Christianity, and of civilization along with it, to western Africa, as men of African birth or extraction, themselves prepared for the noble undertaking by residence among the people of Christendom?

To deny that the civilization of Africa is practicable, is to forget all that history tells us of the greatness and glory of ancient Egypt, whither Herodotus, Pythagoras, and Plato, the fathers of Grecian learning and philosophy, repaired for intellectual improvement, as the Romans afterwards did, to Athens; it is to forget the conquests of Sesostris; it is to forget the stupendous works of art still remaining, and capable forever to remain, upon the banks of the Nile, indestructible monuments of the wealth and refinement of the Ethiopians and Egyptians, themselves, in the marked physical peculiarities which meet the eye at the present day, of the indigenous races of Africa.